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Article Summary: The upcoming state centennial increased the tempo of historical activity and interest throughout Nebraska as early as 1960. The Society would need increased staff to meet rising demand for its services.

Scroll down for complete article.

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Photographs / Images: Herbert Thomas preparing diorama of Red Cloud Agency; Omaha Cub Scouts visiting the museum; Fort Atkinson open house: Senator Roman L. Hruska addressing the crowd, visitors viewing excavations; Annual Meeting: Dr. White speaking at afternoon session, Dr. Billington speaking; Annual Dinner: audience being dismissed, guests greeting Dr. Billington

THE NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN 1960

BY W. D. AESCHBACHER

LAST year I remarked upon the increasing historical interest in the state. The tempo of historical activity and interest continues to increase, and we will see more interest in our history through the next several years reaching a climax as we celebrate our state centennial in 1967.

Nebraskans are more involved in centennials than we were even a few years ago. During the past year we have celebrated the Centennials of William Jennings Bryan and of the Pony Express on a state wide basis. Looking to 1961 the state as a whole will be involved in the Centennial commemorations of George W. Norris and the first year of the four year Civil War Centennials. These are in addition to numbers of anniversary celebrations in towns, counties and business institutions of the state.

Increasingly, the place of our history is being recognized in attempts to make Nebraska interesting and at-

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tractive to visitors and to prospective residents. This emphasis, especially on our military, Indian and cow country history, will be continued as Nebraska is promoted for industrial and tourist purposes. In the awakening of our state to the potential of our history the Historical Society has two major responsibilities, and our success in meeting these responsibilities will measure in major part the success of Nebraska in this program.

Our responsibilities are first to provide agencies and citizens of the state with accurate, constructive historical information which will be suitable and effective for their purposes. Second and of equal importance we must be the watchdog, the historical conscience, of the state. We must insist that as our history is used for promotional purposes it is used accurately. The State Historical Society exists for the purpose of preserving the history of the state, and to meet that function it must maintain the integrity of our history. From the state view as well, Nebraska cannot afford to cheapen and distort the real asset of our heritage for temporary state promotion. We in the Historical Society can and will perform a signal service to the state in insisting that any state emphasis upon the promotional features of our history are developed on sound values and deal with real events. Further we can and will exercise a major influence on private utilization of our historic assets in developing the state's tourist and recreational potential.

The activity and leadership of the Society in a number of areas has pointed to this function and to our effectiveness in carrying it out through the past decade. The recognition of Chimney Rock as a National Historic Site; the adoption by the state of a Historical Markers program, a program which will bear visible fruits in 1961; our emphasis upon the historical importance of areas such as Fort Atkinson, demonstrated by archeological, publication, and other activities in the areas; our museum program at Fort Robinson—these and other programs of the Society have been indications of our awareness and leadership in this field.

The next six years, leading to our State Centennial in 1967, will see our state's history often referred to and either effectively used or grossly misused. Society members, the staff, the state as a whole, can set an outstanding standard of accuracy, good taste and effective use of our history as a state asset in this period. The state is off to a good start in developing a Centennial program. Governor Burney, at the Society's suggestion, appointed an able preliminary study committee to bring in suggestions for the Centennial. Chairman of that committee is our First Vice-President, Frank Latenser of Omaha. Serving with him are LeRoy Bahensky, St. Paul; Arthur Carmody, Trenton; George A. Knight, Lincoln; Mrs. Fern Hubbard Orme, Lincoln; Harold Prichard, Falls City; Ray C. Simmons, Fremont; Bob Thomas, Norfolk, and myself as secretary.

The Society is beginning the first program in the state's preparation for Nebraska's Centennial through a generous grant from the Woods Charitable Fund. The grant establishes a series of Woods Fellowships in Nebraska History to be administered through the Society. The fellowships will make possible the preparation of studies of aspects of our state's history that need careful scholarly investigation. These studies are designed to be completed by the time of the Centennial, enriching our knowledge of the state as we focus more keenly upon the record of our first 100 years of statehood.

The program of the Historical Society in the next several years must be increasingly geared to State Centennial preparations. As we enter this period of preparation the Society has maintained an active and forward looking program. Our membership continues to grow. We have added 352 new members during the year giving us a total membership of 2720, nearly one thousand more than we had ten years ago. Our membership should be still larger for the Society to meet its obligation to encourage interest in the history of Nebraska in all parts of the state.

In our publications program *Nebraska History* and *The Historical News Letter* are furnished to members on

a regular schedule, and the weekly *Out of Old Nebraska* columns are being distributed to Nebraska newspapers through the Nebraska Press Association. The magazine continues to carry a variety of articles dealing with all phases of our history. The March 1960 issue was devoted to William Jennings Bryan in celebration of his Centennial, and the June issue contained a much needed study of the Pony Express trail across the state. Our publication of primary materials on the state's history in the form of interesting and informative journals and letters, was augmented by the appearance of the Hudson Journal and the Donnell letters.

An important addition to our publication program is the reaching of an agreement with the University of Nebraska Press to have Dr. Danker edit and prepare for publication the memoirs of Luther North. These interesting and exciting memoirs have been a Society possession, and regarded as a valuable potential book, for over twenty years. We are proud that they will soon appear in the University of Nebraska Press's new Pioneer Heritage series.

Members of the Society's staff have represented the Society at regional and national meetings including the American Historical Association, the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, the American Association for State and Local History, the Mountain Plains Museum Conference, the American Library Association, and the Plains Archeological Conference. I have continued to serve as Secretary of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association as well as on the Civil War Centennial Advisory Commission, the Board of the National Pony Express Centennial Association, and the Board of the Harry S. Truman Library Institute. The staff made sixty-four appearances before Nebraska groups during the year besides groups scheduled for programs in the building.

Our staff has remained almost constant in size. We had twenty-five monthly employees of whom six are on a part-time status, plus 12 hourly employees as of September 1.

The Society program has been greatly strengthened by major efforts by each of our department heads. Mrs. Winkelman has devoted a great deal of time, energy and talent to the development of two television programs now in being, and to working on three more in process. A series of four programs are being developed under a grant from the National Education Radio and Television Center. The grant was made to the University Television station, KUON, and to the Society as a result of the outstanding work done on the program "Land of Their Own."

We decided several years ago to concentrate our energies in using television as a means of bringing Nebraska's history to its people by preparing a relatively few programs of outstanding merit and quality. These programs we felt should be permanently available to television stations in the area. This program is now bearing fruit as the programs being produced will be available to all Nebraska television stations and will be utilized in educational television programming all across the nation.

There is real danger to any library with a collection policy as far reaching and aggressive as ours. The danger is that material may come in so rapidly and demands for the use of the materials may be so great, that additions to holdings outstrip ability to catalogue, file and put away materials. When this happens the usefulness of the collection rapidly deteriorates.

We faced the approach of such a situation in our picture collection. Rapid growth of the collection had made our original cataloguing approach obsolete. We did not have personnel to enter new materials properly and to service requests for pictures from our files. The matter was brought to a climax by the incapacitation of our picture librarian, Miss Berry in an automobile accident in the spring.

To meet the problem we transferred Miss Berry to other activities that required less physical movement and exertion when she returned to work. Dr. White took direct

charge of the picture collection and developed a new manual for arranging and cataloguing materials. The devoted service of the library staff in putting the new system into effect and the system's advantages have made our picture collection already much more accessible than it had been and point to its being even more usable in the future.

Dr. White in his ten years with the Society has continually met the challenge to develop procedures that would allow for the permanent cataloguing of rapidly growing and constantly changing collections in a manner that will both make the materials accessible now and provide ways to add to the collections into the future. In the last four years he has reorganized the picture collection, reorganized the manuscript collections and overseen the preparation of a variety of indexes and locator aides increasingly necessary as the library continues to grow.

Our archeological and museum programs have been reorganized and expanded under Mr. Kivett's direction. In 1960 we did approximately twice as much archeological field work as in any year in the last two decades. We entered a new area of activity, contracting to do research for the Park Commission's Historical Park program. Our 1961 schedule is already heavier than was the 1960 program. In large part the demands for our archeological services rest on the recognized abilities of Mr. Kivett in this field.

More detailed reports of the three departments follow:

THE MUSEUM

The active program of preservation, study and display of materials relating to Nebraska people continued during the year. The display and interpretation are more familiar to the members of the Society and the general public, but without the preservation and research program the exhibit program would not be possible.

The preservation program is largely dependent on the many individuals who donate specimens. A total of 147

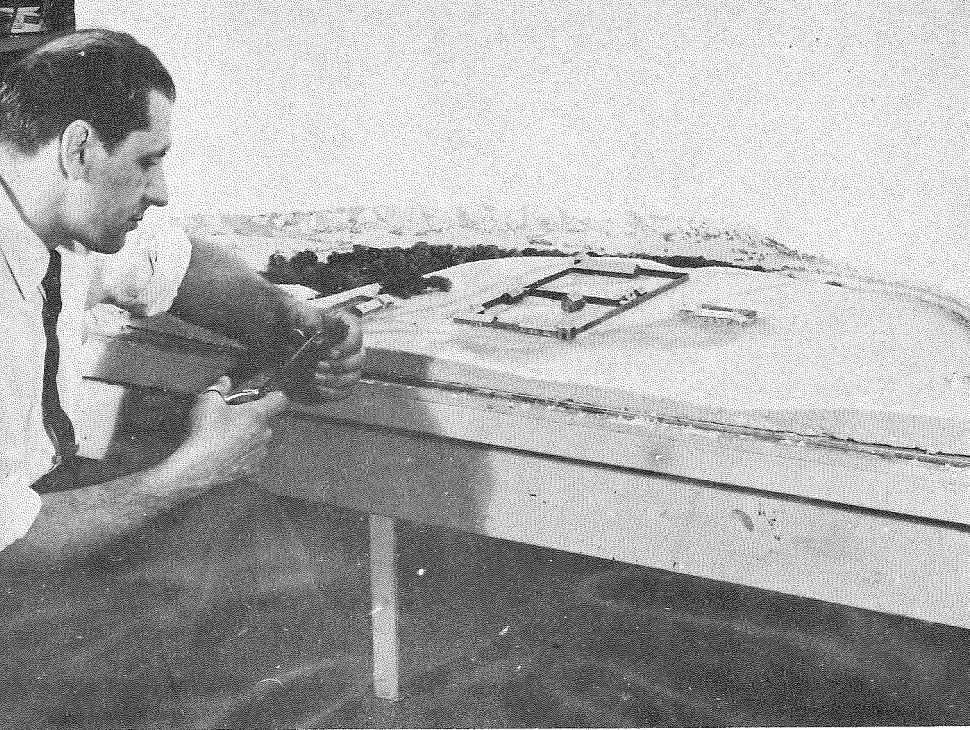


Above—Senator Roman L. Hruska addresses crowd

Fort Atkinson Open House

Below—Visitors view excavations





Above—Museum Artist Herbert Thomas Prepares Diorama of
Red Cloud Agency

Below—Omaha Cub Scouts Visit Museum

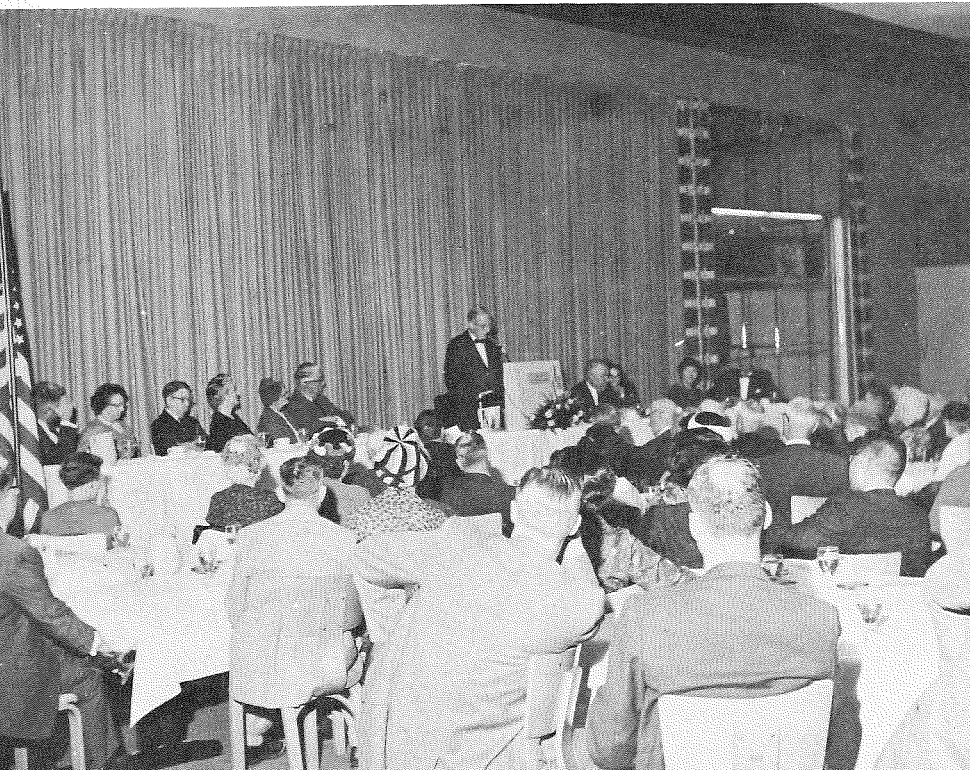




Above—Dr. White speaks at afternoon session

The Annual Meeting

Below—An attentive audience hears Dr. Billington





Above—As the audience is dismissed

The Annual Dinner

Below—Wellwishers greet Professor Billington



individuals donated 2,441 separate items to the museum collection during the year. One hundred seven were new donors and forty were individuals who have contributed in previous years. Another major source of museum specimens is the archeological work carried on by the Society.

As the museum collections become more complete an increasing number of potential donors are referred to other Nebraska museums. There is, however, a need for many items in the museum collections and we are most anxious to complete these collections while materials are still available.

In the changing display program of the museum, objects are displayed primarily for the story they illustrate of Nebraska and its people. In a sense the displays represent pages from a book concerned with Nebraska history. Various phases of this story may be emphasized. Gallery exhibits are presented in a chronological fashion from the earliest known prehistoric Indians to the atomic age of the present.

A total of seventy-one display units were completed during the year in addition to general routine cleaning and repair of existing exhibits. These display units were viewed by a total of 125,168 people; 75,144 at the Lincoln building, 17,111 at the Fort Robinson Museum and 32,913 in the State Fair Exhibits. The Art Staff also provided special art design projects and information for a number of museums throughout the state for use in their display programs.

Special displays during the year in the second floor corridor included a Post Revolutionary exhibit of textiles from the Scalumandre Museum of Textiles, New York, and the "Sod House Album" display. The album display featured photographic murals with emphasis on the Solomon D. Butcher photographic collection of Custer and Buffalo counties. Two period and one case exhibit utilized furnishings of the period. Another major display project in the Lincoln building is a full scale dining room of the early

1900's which largely utilized furnishings from the Lincoln home of the John B. Wright family donated last year by a son, John C. Wright. This room is complete to a small porch which provides viewing space. Special case displays included exhibits for Christmas, Easter and Valentine, as well as cases and a setting for the William J. Bryan Centennial. One case during the year has been devoted to temporary displays of recent donations.

Five wall panels and four case exhibits were prepared for the Fort Robinson Museum. Also completed by Mr. Herbert Thomas, our museum artist, was a diorama of the Red Cloud Indian Agency which is displayed in the same gallery as the full scale setting which depicts the interior of the Agency at Fort Robinson. The saddle and harness repair shop at Fort Robinson was put in order and opened for guided tours. Last year, the companion building, the Blacksmith Shop, was made available to the public. Several new outdoor interpretative signs and map panels useful to the general public in touring Fort Robinson were also completed.

The 1960 State Fair was another major display effort for the museum staff. Exhibits are presented in the Women's Building, a location not readily accessible to State Fair visitors. Despite this problem visitors have increased each year since 1956, when 16,899 individuals were recorded, to the 1960 season with a total of 32,913 visitors. These displays at the State Fair included an Information Center with photographic displays of the Society activities. Eight case exhibits were concerned with sample materials from the collections ranging from an exhibit of John J. Pershing items to archeological specimens recovered from Fort Atkinson and Fort Kearny. A popular exhibit was a display of woven coverlets and quilts. Another area was devoted to a Cozy Corner setting of the Gay Nineties.

Miss Sally Johnson, our Curator of History for eight years left us in February for a position with the National Park Service.

Archeological research was carried out on an expanded scale during the 1960 season with two field groups carrying on excavations. One of these projects was carried out in cooperation with the U. S. National Park Service at the site of Fort Atkinson in Washington County, Nebraska. The second project was in cooperation with the State Game, Forestation and Parks Commission as a phase in an interpretative program for this important historic site.

The archeological work was under the general supervision of Mr. Kivett. John Garrett of Yale University served as immediate field supervisor at the Fort Atkinson excavations while Roger T. Grange, Jr., was field supervisor at the Fort Kearny project.

This was the second season of work at Fort Atkinson with work having been carried on there in 1956. Major building sites which were located and tested or excavated at the site this year included the Armorers' Shop and adjacent iron working pits, the east semi-subterranean entrance, a root cellar, an agricultural blacksmith shop and a long warehouse. For the first time the location of the fortified west wall and the southwest corner of the fort were located. A similar cooperative project between the Society and the U. S. National Park Service is scheduled at Fort Atkinson during the 1961 field season.

Major excavations at Fort Kearny were carried out in several areas, including the Blacksmith-Carpenter Shop, the Civil War period fortification and several building sites around the post parade ground. The work at Fort Kearny is part of the program of historical study and interpretation at the site. The many specimens recovered from excavations at these two military posts are useful in the study of activities at the site and will be utilized for interpretative exhibits.

Other archeological work during the season included an examination of a burial site in Cass County and a preliminary survey of the Red Willow Reservoir in Frontier County. The Red Willow Survey was a cooperative project

with the U. S. National Park Service. Archeological materials were also excavated in Nance County as a result of road building activities.

THE LIBRARY

The major new development in the library during the year was the institution of a new cataloguing system in the picture library. Continuing growth of the collection and use of the pictures had made the former system inadequate to meet our needs. The new system, based on placing the pictures in groups around a point of unity, with adequate cross indexing is already making for greater usability of the collection.

Miss Berry, picture librarian for ten years, was transferred from this position to research associate in May. Her health had made direct work with the pictures increasingly difficult for her, and an automobile accident in March aggravated this situation. In her new position it is possible to make more effective use of her wide general knowledge of Nebraska history and her talents as a writer on the subject.

The picture collection was utilized by a variety of book and magazine publishers including American Book Company, Row Peterson and Company; *American Heritage* *American Peoples Encyclopedia*: University of Nebraska Press: the University Publishing Company and *Outdoor Nebraska* among others. The publishers uses are in addition to individual and exhibit requests. We provided about 650 copies of picture prints and loaned 348 more prints during the year.

A major accomplishment in the microfilming area was the filming of the *Kearney Hub* and the completion of the *Lincoln Star*. Present major projects involve the *Lincoln Evening News* and its successor the *Lincoln Journal* and the *Omaha Bee*. We are currently receiving 282 Nebraska

newspapers and 284 Nebraska periodicals together with 317 other periodicals regularly.

During the year the library had 2982 visitors in the reading room and newspaper rooms. The library staff answered 476 mail inquiries and 400 telephone inquiries. In addition the visitors to the library gave the library staff about 800 more queries.

The increase of the library holdings is indicated in the following table.

Category	1959	Additions	1960 Total
Volumes	40,668	3,048	43,176
Newspaper volumes.....	19,078	154	17,766 ¹
Maps	1,165	67	1,232
Microfilm reels.....	5,661	366	6,027
Broadsides	87	11	98
Pictures	63,396	2,531	65,927

EDUCATION DIVISION

A major activity in the Education Division was the production of a number of television programs. These programs were produced in co-operation with University of Nebraska Television.

In the production of these programs early photographs from the Society's collections were used to illustrate the script. The first program, produced in the fall of 1959 was entitled "Land of Their Own" and told the story of homesteading in the Great Plains. The program won second prize in a national contest sponsored by Broadcast Music Incorporated and the American Association for State and Local History for the best historical program produced in 1959 by a radio and television station in co-operation with a historical society.

¹ One hundred fifty-four bound volumes of newspapers were added, but we disposed of 1566 volumes of microfilmed papers during the year.

The script for this program was adapted from the letters of Uriah and Mattie Oblinger who homesteaded in Fillmore County, Nebraska, in the 1870's and wrote back to relatives in Indiana describing the hardships and rewards of pioneer life. The original Oblinger letters, now in the Society's Library, were preserved and donated by descendants. Approximately 270 photographs were used to illustrate the story. Most of the photographs used in the program were from the Society's collection of pioneer scenes taken by Solomon D. Butcher in Custer County in the period 1886-1893.

A second television program, "Main Street in a Prairie Capital," was produced in the spring of 1960. This program dealt with political and social life in Lincoln in the period 1890-1910, with special emphasis on the activities of William Jennings Bryan. Approximately three hundred photographs of Lincoln scenes and portraits of Bryan were selected from the Society's photographic collections and used in the program. Phonograph records of the period were also utilized as musical background.

Using "Land of Their Own" as a pilot program, University of Nebraska Television requested and received a grant of \$8700 from the National Educational Radio and Television Center to produce three additional programs in co-operation with the Society. These programs will deal with the types of settlers, agriculture, and small town life in the Great Plains area. Scripts for these programs will be developed from pioneer diaries, letters and reminiscences; and authentic photographs will be used as illustrations. With "Land of Their Own," these programs will constitute a series to be called "The Western Heritage Series," which will be telecast over the National Educational Television Network.

Educational activities in the building followed the general pattern established in previous years. Puppet shows, auditorium programs, and guided tours were offered. We increasingly emphasized presenting a program in the audi-

torium, either in the form of a puppet show or a film, before a group was given a tour.

One hundred and seventy-nine auditorium programs were presented to 229 groups, comprising 5,260 people. Thirty puppet performances were presented to 53 groups composed of 1,718 children. A guided tour was given to each group which attended a puppet show or auditorium program, and an additional 5,036 people were given guided tours.

We are again indebted to the Lincoln Junior League, sixteen of whose members assisted us in educational activities and museum projects throughout the year.

The Education Division answered numerous letters from teachers and school children seeking information about Nebraska. Approximately 10,000 educational leaflets were distributed to teachers in Nebraska and other states.

FOR THE FUTURE

In my opening paragraphs I mentioned a number of times the pressing need for the Society to begin preparations for the State Centennial in 1967, both in directing the thinking of the state towards that event and in the Society's internal organization. Considering the second question brings me directly to the Society's financial needs to enable it to carry out an adequate program in the next biennium.

An adequate initial staffing of the Society in its new quarters was accomplished in 1953. At that time we realized that our functions would increase and additional personnel would be needed as the effect of adequate quarters for the Society increased demands for our services. Personnel requested in the last two biennial budgets, but not provided for in appropriations the last two bienniums, are still urgently needed. They are included again in the budget request for this biennium, as well as requests for strengthening our staff in other directions.

Through the last two years in particular we have knowingly overextended our present staff in the number and variety of activities we have attempted to perform. This means that by next year we will find it necessary to increase our staff to meet our present commitments or to retrench our activities. An example of our problem is contained in a recent report from Dr. White that the library typing force at present has had to discontinue completely work on the Farmer's Index from the 1886 Gazeteer, transcribing tape recorded interviews, copying manuscripts loaned to the Society, preparing manuscript records, cataloguing the Morton pamphlet collection, typing the Andreas Index. In our photographic laboratory 42% of the work completed this year was marked "Immediate" or "Rush" or "Critical" priority. 56% was routine current work, and only 2% was devoted to highly important backlog projects. This means our backlog has grown dangerously.

Where we were able last winter to strengthen our Museum Staff by the full time assignment of Mr. Grange, from the Fort Robinson project, we suffered the loss of our Curator of History, Miss Sally Johnson, this spring when she accepted a considerably better paying position with the National Park Service. We have not filled her position because of lack of funds. We have been fortunate to be able to keep the rest of our staff intact, partly by adjusting our program to do needed and valuable work on contract. We have done needed and valuable work, but it would not have had the priority to put into our program at present if we had selected our own course of action.

To carry on our present program and to effectively meet the needs of the Society in the face of our increasing responsibilities we have requested an appropriation for the Society of \$381,690.00 and for the Fort Robinson project of \$22,500.00. With the assistance of our members in bringing the growing program need of the Society to the attention of their representatives and by effectively presenting our program to the Governor and legislature, we can confidently expect the acceptance of this request, enabling the Society to carry forward its increasing responsibilities.