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Article Summary: Aeschbacher highlights the Society's archeological activity and the completion of an ambitious television program in 1961. He identifies additional building space as the Society's greatest need for the years ahead.

Scroll down for complete article.

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Photographs / Images: Frank Latenser; Miss Rose Carson with Mr and Mrs Adolph Wensien in the Carson Room at the June opening; Mrs Allen A Besch and Mrs Clay d'A Gerken, volunteers, at work with doll collection; Civil War display in second floor exhibit room; archeological field party at work in the Red Willow Reservoir area; Philip and Ruth Sheldon in front of the Sheldon room; Emil Roeser and Louis Holmes inspecting exhibit in Hall County Court House

THE NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN 1961

BY W. D. AESCHBACHER

THE Society has experienced one of its most active and most successful years. The success can be measured in terms of progress outside the Society Building through such activities as our archeological program, where the number of significant investigations we were able to carry out and the amount of survey work we were able to accomplish, made it by far the most active year in recent history; through publications where the program of bringing the memoirs of Luther North into print mentioned in last year's report bore fruit; and through the completion of an ambitiously conceived and developed television program. Another area of progress was in the Society's position in state law. Over a period of years areas of ambiguity in the relation of the Society to the state government had developed. Legislation was introduced this year and passed to clarify the status of the Society. Inside the building in organization and storage of museum items, in extension

Dr. W. D. Aeschbacher is Director of the Nebraska State Historical Society. This report was presented in part at the 83rd annual meeting of the Nebraska State Historical Society at Lincoln, October 7, 1961.

and improvement of our classification of pictures, and in a number of other ways not always evident to the visiting eye, we have made progress as well.

The activities of the Society have initiated projects of a diverse nature that will improve the knowledge of and concern for history in the state. With encouragement and advice from the Society the Lincoln Junior League has undertaken the restoration of the Fairview Home of William Jennings Bryan. A request from the Hall County Historical Society resulted in the placing of two Civil War exhibits in the Hall County Court House. The Society has been negotiating for the transfer of certain areas at Fort Robinson from the federal government to the state and to the hands of the Society. Our activities at Fort Atkinson have been designed in part to stimulate, and have in fact stimulated interest in the acquisition of this important spot for permanent restoration.

The activities of the Society have brought a return in other ways. Every year the Society benefits from bequests left to us in the wills of members and friends. This year the Society has been notified that it will benefit substantially from cash bequests. Miss Olivia Pound, last Nebraska survivor of a distinguished Nebraska family, left many articles of historic value to the Society. She also made it the residual legatee for her estate, and it now appears that the Society will be the largest cash beneficiary from that estate. The will of Sterling Morton also recognized the program of the Society with a cash gift. The need for the Society to develop, through bequests and direct gifts, funds to support a portion of its program is an aim the Society should adopt and its friends should help it attain.

In the Annual Report last year much was said about the forthcoming State Centennial. The study committee to make recommendations on a State Centennial, appointed by Governor Burney at the Society's request, recommended that a State Centennial Commission should be established. The committee's recommendations were drafted into a bill, the bill passed, and Governor Morrison has indicated his

intention to appoint a Commission in the near future.¹ The committee to administer the Woods Fellowships in Nebraska History announced last year has awarded two fellowships, one to Professor Homer Socolofsky of Manhattan, Kansas, for a study of land use in Nebraska during the 19th century and one to Professor William E. Lass of Mankato State College, Minnesota, for a study of wagon trains in Nebraska. Three more studies are to be authorized in the present year.

The historical marker program provided for by legislation sponsored by the Society and now under the direction of the Historical Marker Council, headed by Professor J. R. Johnson of Wayne, has a total of six markers installed in various parts of the state.

The Nebraska Civil War Centennial Commission has operated with and through the Society. Its program of recognition of the enlistment of the first Nebraska units as developed at Plattsmouth and Omaha was a notable success. With the devoted help of such organizations as the Daughters of Union Veterans, the Womens Relief Corps, and the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic, it was able to have a booth at the State Fair. The movement that achieved national recognition of 1962 as the Homestead Centennial Year, received a major impetus both in conception and in development through the Commission and the Society.

Another Civil War project in the making is the publication of a Nebraska Civil War summary. Present plans project this as a number in the Society's Educational Leaflet Series. This Series is in the process of being expanded in number and upgraded in quality to make the leaflets more attractive and more usable.

¹ Since this report was prepared Governor Morrison has appointed a Commission consisting of Mrs. Ralph G. Brooks, McCook; Francis M. Dischner, Columbus; A. James Ebel, Lincoln; Frank Latenser, Omaha; Gerald J. McGinley, Ogallala; Val Peterson, Hastings; John Rosenblatt, Omaha; Bob Thomas, Norfolk; Floyd C. Wisner, Scottsbluff; and myself. Mr. Peterson has been selected chairman of the commission, Mrs. Brooks, vice chairman and I am secretary.

By other criteria that we have used to measure the Society's progress for a number of years this has been a productive year. We had 287 new members by July 1 and membership had reached 2,824; 104 more than as of September 1 of last year. We are now within range and should reach a membership of 3,000 within the present year.

An indication of change is shown in these membership figures. The reporting year of the Society has been from September 1 to August 31 for many years. Because our fiscal year begins July 1, and because other reporting periods coincided better with that date than with September 1, the Executive Board voted to change our reporting year to run from July 1 to June 30. This will be reflected in all statistics utilized in this report. Figures showing growth cover a ten rather than a twelve month period. Figures used for comparative purposes cover July 1 to June 30, as compared to last year's report covering September 1 to August 31.

Our publications program of *Nebraska History* and the *Historical News Letter* has continued in already established patterns. The June issue of the magazine was devoted to George W. Norris in his centennial year. For those interested in our Indian history, articles by Ray Mattison, Harry Anderson, William Corbusier in the April issue and Donald Danker in the September issue joined those by Terry King that appeared in September and December of 1960. The *Out of Old Nebraska* column appears regularly each week in a large segment of the Nebraska Press.

Members of the staff 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, and the Plains Archeological Conference. Dr. Danker delivered a paper at the Mississippi Valley Historical Association meeting. Mr. Grange spoke at a conference on Historic Buildings held at Ames, Iowa. Mr. Kivett spoke at a Museum Conference at General Beadle State Teachers College, Madi-

son, South Dakota. I have served as Secretary of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association and on the Board of the Harry S. Truman Library Institute and the National Pony Express Association. In the state I have served as Secretary of the Historical Markers Council, the Civil War Centennial Commission and the Nebraska Hall of Fame Commission. Besides our programming in the building staff members made appearances before more than 64 state audiences during the year.

The staff has remained constant in size with 25 permanent and 15 hourly employees, but several significant personnel changes were made. Mr. Richard Rowen came to us as Curator of History to fill the position left vacant by the departure of Sally Johnson last year. In April, Mrs. Elizabeth Radtke retired after a long and useful career with the Society and with other libraries in New York state. In January Mr. James Marshall joined the staff as salvage archeologist under our highway salvage agreement with the state highway department.

Our staff however remains almost exactly the same size as a year ago. In my report last year I called your attention to the pressing need of the Society for additional staff, and the sizable budget increase that we were requesting. In a state budget characterized by a very great reluctance to increase state expenditures the Society did receive an increase of almost 15 percent. This appropriation of \$310,000.00 as compared to the \$383,000.00 requested, recognized the fact that we had increased our area of activities especially in fiscal year 1960-1961 to a level needing such an appropriation. Since July 1 we have attempted to strengthen our program in two critically needed areas by replacing temporary and part-time workers with permanent full time people. No further expansion is possible at present.

The need for additional help to carry out adequately the program we have set for ourselves, and the program that the state should and will expect from us in the years ahead, throws an increasing responsibility on department

heads and key staff members. Their dedicated service enables us to operate as effectively as we do.

Reports from the major divisions follow:

MUSEUM

During the past year the museum has catalogued 2,858 specimens from 183 donors—This compares with 60 donors in 1950. Eighty-seven display units were completed by the museum staff, and the museum staff also contributed to other display projects as television and publications activities.

The major museum display activities were the complete reconstruction of the John and Mary Carson Victorian parlor and of the newly named Addison E. Sheldon memorial sod house. The Civil War Centennial exhibits were another extensive project of the museum staff. Interest in the display program is accurately mirrored in the attendance we have at the Society. 83,018 people visited our building in the last year and 17,623 visited the Fort Robinson museum. Another 32,913 visited the State Fair exhibits making a total of 133,554 visitors in the museum areas where we have an accurate actual count. We are experiencing a definite increase in attendance at our museum displays.

Archeological research was again a major aspect of the museum's activities during the year. Crews worked at Fort Atkinson and at the Red Willow reservoir under the immediate direction of John Garrett, and Roger T. Grange, Jr., our Assistant Museum Director, respectively. In August Mr. Grange took his crew to Fort Kearny for further work at that point. The Fort Atkinson and Red Willow work was carried on under agreements with the National Park Service. Fort Kearny work was carried out under an agreement with the State Game, Forestation and Parks Commission. In addition we have carried out extensive reconnaissance and necessary salvage archeological work in our highway salvage program. The extent and variety of

the archeological work has made it necessary for Museum Director Marvin Kivett to maintain contact with the varied activities rather than undertaking direct supervision of a crew in either of the past two summers.

Work at Red Willow, a field survey in September, 1960 and the work in the summer of 1961, uncovered an ancient camp site of 5,000 or more years ago. The site showed some relationship to the Logan Creek site in Burt County which has been the object of investigation by the Society in recent years. Among the more interesting discoveries at Fort Atkinson were a complete stoneware jar, a rare insignia of the rifle regiment, used as the cover decoration on the September issue of the magazine, and an interesting section of a brick sidewalk from the period of the fort's utilization.

A number of students working on both masters and doctoral projects utilized the Society's archeological collections during the year. Dr. Waldo R. Wedel used our photographic file and other facilities in preparing his new popular interpretation of archeology of the area, *Prehistoric Man on the Great Plains*.

LIBRARY

A number of years ago we decided to put a table containing the same statistics in the annual report each year to show the quantitative work of the library. This year we include the report for 1957, the first year that this report of all categories was made, as well as the 1960 figures, additions, and 1961 totals:

Category	1957	1960	additions 1960-61	total 1961
Volumes	37,319	43,176	1,815	44,991
Newspaper volumes	19,666	17,766	102	17,405 ²
Maps	1,047	1,232	22	1,254
Microfilm reels	4,025	6,027	535	6,562
Pictures	60,541	65,927	3,014	68,941

² One hundred two bound volumes of papers were added, but we disposed of 463 volumes of papers that had been microfilmed during the year.

The very rapid growth of our library collections and the size of the job of our library staff to examine, catalogue, and locate the materials is indicated by these figures. The library is used by our staff continually as well as by members and visitors. Three thousand eight hundred one persons utilized the reading room and the newspaper room last year. Six hundred ninety mail queries and 1,644 oral queries were answered. Again comparison with former years shows a significant growth in public service demands on our library facilities. To meet the increased number of requests and to make our holdings more available to potential users is the ever sought goal of the library. To meet this goal refinements in our cataloguing and indexing are constantly being worked out. The microfilming of the Butcher collection of photographs for readier reference, the cataloguing of the pamphlets in the John Davis collection, 13,000 new cards in the Information Index file are some of the ways this goal was sought in 1961.

In our microfilm program the project with the Lincoln papers is completed, and the filming of the old *Omaha Bee-News* is well along towards completion. The number of papers published in the state continues to decrease, four papers ceased publication during the year. As papers cease publication, and more communities are left without a local paper the necessity for careful collection of the papers that are being published and those that have been published in the state is ever impressed upon us.

Pictures from our picture collection were used for television programs, for school exhibits, by the National Park Service and the State Park Commission, by the United States Department of Agriculture and by other borrowers. Pictures of characters of western history such as Annie Oakley, Wild Bill Hickok and Doc Carver were in demand as were farm scenes, Pony Express, fur traders and many more. National Geographic, American Book Co., Charles Scribner's Sons, Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., American Heritage and L. W. Singer Co. were national publishers who utilized our picture collection.

In the library during the year the volunteer services of Herbert W. Potter and G. Hubert Smith have been utilized in classifying and arranging manuscript and picture collections to very good effect.

EDUCATION DIVISION

A major project during 1960-61 was the production of the series of four television programs in co-operation with University of Nebraska Television under a grant from the National Educational Radio and Television Center, that were mentioned last year.

Entitled "The Western Heritage Series," the programs touched on four aspects of the pioneer experience in the Great Plains. Program No. 1, "The Face of Courage," deals with the people who settled the Plains—the types of people who came, their reasons for coming and their experiences in the West. Program No. 2, "Land of Their Own," is the story of the settlement of the land, the homesteading experiences of Uriah and Mattie Oblinger who settled in Fillmore County, Nebraska in the 1870's. Program No. 3, "The Fruited Plain," depicts the problems of agriculture in the 1880's and 1890's as experienced by John Sanborn of Franklin County, Nebraska. Program No. 4, "Prairie Main Street," portrays life in a small town in 1885 and is based on the diary of Hudson Bruner who worked in a drug store in West Point, Nebraska.

Scripts for all four programs in the "Western Heritage Series" were adapted from authentic pioneer diaries, letters, and reminiscences, and old photographs were used to illustrate the scripts. Most of the manuscripts and photographic materials used in the programs were from the Society's library, but material was also secured from historical societies and libraries in Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, and Illinois. After certain technical changes in production the programs are scheduled for release in 1962.

The four programs were videotaped in January, 1961 and kinescopes (16 mm films) were made for use in the Society's educational activities. These films have been shown extensively to school groups and other groups visiting the Society. From September, 1960 to June, 1961 "The Face of Courage" was shown sixty-eight times; "Land of Their Own", one hundred and sixty-one times; "The Fruited Plain", twenty-five times; and "Prairie Main Street" ten times.

Attendance at educational activities in the building shows an increase in 1960-61. Guided tours were given to 255 groups totaling 12,133 people; two hundred and ten programs were given to 222 groups totaling 6,666 people; and forty-eight puppet shows were produced for seventy one groups, totaling 2,544 children. The Society was again assisted in its educational services by volunteers from the Lincoln Junior League.

The Educational Division again answered numerous letters of inquiry from teachers and school children. Approximately 11,373 educational leaflets were distributed to teachers in Nebraska and in other states.

A LOOK AHEAD

In the history of institutions, as in the history of nations, one can look back from vantage points and see ages or periods that have a unity, even if the unity might not have been apparent during the period involved. In the history of the Society such periods appear. The early part of the century, the period of the Secretaryship of Clarence S. Paine, shows a major theme of interest in and drive towards wider recognition than the boundaries of the state—this is particularly true in the time and effort expended on the Mississippi Valley Historical Association. In the earlier period of the Secretaryship of Addison E. Sheldon, the abilities and interest of the Secretary in publications and



Frank Latenser, Our Newly Elected President



Above—Miss Rose Carson with Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Wensien in the Carson Room at the June Opening.

Below—Mrs. Allen A. Besch and Mrs. Clay d'A Gerken, volunteer helpers, at work with doll collection.





Above—At the Annual Meeting—Philip and Ruth Sheldon in front of the Sheldon room.

Below—Emil Roeser and Louis Holmes inspect exhibit in Hall County Court House.



in public appearances is apparent. During the 1930's the great amount of federal funds expended on programs which were Society centered became an increasing larger consideration, and a major portion of the time of the Society staff was spent on administration and supervision of federally supported research and publications projects. Finally, in the period since World War II the Society under James C. Olson and more recently under myself, has been closely associated with the final authorization for, building of, and utilizing of the present building of the Society.

Now we approach the end of a period for which we can identify a focal point or nucleus. For the past eight years the program of the Society has been dominated by our building. Our museum facilities, our library, our educational program, our Society promotion has been geared to make full use of the building and to make members of the Society and people of the state aware of the building and how it can be utilized for them.

At present more and more of our activity is being diverted into other channels. The most common question I hear from interested Society members is "What do you do with all of that stuff that is given you?" My answer is much more guarded and much less confident now than it was even one or two years ago. We are being pinched for space. Policies on acceptance and use of materials have not changed, but our application of criteria by which we must evaluate material for acceptance are becoming increasingly rigid. As space limitations become more and more of a factor our aim over the past several years—how to effectively utilize and how to make the people of the state aware of our building—becomes secondary. We are now dealing with the question how may we operate most effectively.

Many new activities—the development of local historical societies, archeological salvage programs, developing plans for historical observances, in particular our State Centennial, historical markers' programs in relation to the state Game Commission—have one common denominator.

These activities place relatively smaller calls upon our building and space facilities.

Some factors that will chiefly affect the immediate future are obvious. One is the coming State Centennial. Another is the question of additional space. When the Society Building was designed ten years ago it was recognized that it would not meet the space demands of the organization for all time. The increased activity of a larger staff, the invitation and assurance of adequate housing have caused a physical growth in our holdings, both museum and library, so that we now face space problems as our building approaches 10 years of operation rather than the anticipated 20 to 25. The Executive Board has begun exploration of several ways to meet our space needs.

A definite need of the years immediately ahead is for building space. Another need that we are not meeting as rapidly as we should is the need for the Society to exert its influence more widely over the state. In my first report as Secretary in 1956, I quoted Clarence S. Paine and Addison E. Sheldon on this need from reports they made in 1907 and 1937. The need and the opportunity is as real in 1961, and is not being met comparatively better now than it was over 50 years ago.

The Society has developed a proud tradition of careful workmanship in research, of outstanding quality in production, and of unstinting service to the public. These traditions will be continued.

I hope that others in looking at the Society from the vantage of another generation can characterize the decade of the 1960's as an era in which the Society met developing housing needs successfully. More than that I hope it will be an era to which we can point as the time when a physical translation of our heritage to people in all parts of the state became more and more a reality.