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Article Summary: Aeschbacher identifies full use of the headquarters building on R Street as the Society's major priority in recent years. Important topics for the future will include the State Centennial and the creation of additional headquarters space corresponding to the Society's increasing activity.

***Scroll down for complete article.***

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Photographs / Images: John G Neihardt addressing the annual dinner; members at afternoon session of annual meeting; restored parlor of Fairview, William Jennings Bryan's home; firearms given by Napoleon Bonaparte to General Moellendorf; Dr. John B White and John Brown conferring in Dr. White's office; Maude Wisherd presiding over the Reading Room; archeologists at 20<sup>th</sup> Plains Conference examining artifacts in the archeology lab; open house at the Logan Creek site excavations near Oakland

# THE NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN 1962

BY W. D. AESCHBACHER

A CASUAL conversation with an old friend, or an exchange with a new acquaintance, either is increasingly apt to elicit a remark that there is a rapidly developing interest in history in this area. This is certainly true. For much of the developing interest, the Historical Society cannot claim credit, but it now has, and continues to have increasingly larger functions because of this developing interest. Nor does an increasing amount of interest diminish the responsibility of the Society to create interest in and knowledge of the history of our region.

Increased activities and responsibilities of the Society brought on by this interest in history is perhaps most easily identified at the periphery. In the last few years state organized and operated boards, commissions and committees dealing with historical activities have been created—a Historical Land Marks Council, a Civil War Centennial and a State Centennial Commission, a Hall of Fame Commission

*Dr. W. D. Aeschbacher is Director of the Society. This report was presented in part at the 84th Annual Meeting of the Nebraska State Historical Society held in Lincoln September 29, 1962.*

have all made an appearance. These agencies all have made some real progress. The Land Marks Council has nine markers in place, two on order, and expects to order two more for placement in the early spring. The Civil War Centennial Commission operated a booth at the 1961 State Fair, helped develop the idea of an Educational Leaflet on the Civil War, and has sponsored such things as a program recognizing the 100th Anniversary of the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. The Hall of Fame Commission has selected the state's first two honorees, George W. Norris and Willa Cather, and is presently developing a plan to acquire a bust to suitably recognize Miss Cather in the Capitol building. The State Centennial Commission has held numerous meetings and is engaged in developing an overall plan for the state Centennial. The Historical Society at the date of this report was housing a secretary for the Nebraska State Centennial Commission. The operation of the other organizations, in spite of much volunteer work by members of the various groups, falls to a large extent upon the Historical Society's staff.

Organizational activity of other kinds also indicates a growing historical interest and awareness. With some of these the State Society is deeply involved; in regard to others it has little responsibility. Such activities as the Greater Nebraska Foundation and the Fort Atkinson Foundation, as well as the Lincoln Junior League project to restore the Fairview Home of William Jennings Bryan come to mind as well as the many active local historical societies. The Historic Preservation Conference which we jointly sponsored with Joslyn, the University of Omaha and the National Trust for Historic Preservation is another example of these activities, as is the Nebraska Museums Conference.

In last year's report I indicated that the activities of satellite groups such as the Land Marks Council and Centennial Commission did put less demand upon increasingly crowded building facilities than other kinds of activity. However, space needs are becoming increasingly critical.

To meet our building needs we have initiated negotiations with the University of Nebraska to acquire land to allow us to build an addition to our present building. Certainly through the next several years the question of our building needs and how to fulfill them will be a major factor in the development of the Society. Your Executive Board is furnishing devoted and aggressive leadership in meeting the needs of the Society, now and for generations into the future. In particular our President Frank Latenser is spending a great deal of time and energy on the questions of how best to meet our current and future situation.

In reporting on any period of time the reporter has to make an assessment of what has happened, how time was spent, what was accomplished. In the last year such an assessment brings me great satisfaction in many areas.

The restoration of the Fairview Home of William Jennings Bryan falls in this category. The planning and direction of the work there did require a great deal of time and effort. From the time and effort expended we have been able to participate in, and to develop in the state, a first class restoration in the portion of the house dealt with. By our cooperative efforts we have been able to encourage an organization with other primary purposes to participate in a significant historical restoration program, such interest and participation by organizations with a variety of purposes is necessary to a fuller development of historical interest in the state.

Another area of satisfaction for me is an increasing awareness of and use of the Society and its facilities. The library reports a total of 4454 people used the reading room or newspaper room during the last year. The museum reports 84,650 people visited the building and 24,082 visited our Museum at Fort Robinson, all of these figures are substantially above last year's totals, and show an increasing awareness and use of the Society.

The granting and use of National Science Foundation funds for our Logan Creek work this summer not only allowed us to expand our program considerably, but was a



well deserved recognition of the worth of our archeological program..

Assistance from the state auditor, the First National Bank and Trust Company, the accounting firm of Miller and Moore and much hard work by Miss Helen Boehmer, the Society Bookkeeper, has enabled us to start the present fiscal year with a much more manageable and comprehensible set of books covering the Society's finances. Over a period of years as we have added fund to fund and account to account, our system had become increasingly difficult to work with and to understand.

The development of our trust fund from a paper entry with little in it to a substantial amount primarily through the addition of the Olivia Pound estate, is another accomplishment of much satisfaction to me.

Other areas of our activities are less satisfying in retrospect. Unfinished work and inability to finish projects because of current and more pressing demands in such areas as research for publication, photographic reproductions, indexing is a continuing vexation. Our membership continues to grow at the rate of about 100 a year. I feel that we should have a substantially larger membership than we now have, perhaps twice our membership to be doing an adequate job of reaching the people who are truly interested in our state's history. Inability to further emphasize field work throughout the state is a continuing frustration.

We have made substantial progress in many areas, but there are many ways in which we are far from realizing our full potential.

In summary we gained 297 new members and four life members this year to give us a total membership of 2880. Our publications program of *Nebraska History*, the *News Letter*, and the "Out of Old Nebraska" columns distributed to Nebraska newspapers has continued. The March issue of *Nebraska History* saw some change in organization with the reinstitution of an "Along the Trail" department. An article on the Farm Holiday movement in the June

issue took on contemporary significance as the National Farmers' Organization utilized similar techniques in regard to livestock prices in the fall of 1962.

A badly needed addition to our publications program has been developed through our educational division with the issuance of three new educational leaflets. These leaflets, produced by a multilith process with adequate illustrations were on topics we badly needed to have covered—one a general summary of Nebraska, one on Nebraska in the Civil War and a third on Fort Kearny. Changing patterns of use and need for informative materials for educational uses have caused us to plan to rewrite and reprint our present series and to add a number of other titles to the series.

Through individual staff members the Society has provided programs for more than 60 Nebraska organizations during the year aside from the programs presented to classes and groups in our building. Staff members represented the Society at regional and national meetings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, the American Historical Association, the Conference on Western American History, the Missouri Valley Conference for Teachers of History, the Mountain Plains Museum Conference, the Plains Archeological Conference, the Society of American Archivists. Mr. Kivett read two papers at the Plains Archeological Conference. Dr. White read a paper at the American Archivists meeting and had articles appear in *Midwest Museums Quarterly* and *Library Resources and Technical Services*. My activities outside the state have included serving as Secretary on the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, on the Board of the Truman Library Institute, and on the Board of the National Pony Express Centennial Association.

The staff has continued with about the same personnel. We deeply regretted the loss of Mr. Rudolph Fuchs, library assistant for three years, who died April 26, 1962. A long time staff member Loren Howery, our bookbinder since 1952, found it necessary to retire during the year.

One of the ways that we have been able to augment our staff activities over the years has been through the help of volunteers, as the activities of the Junior League in program activities and in art work. Our staff has received a major boost this year through the help of Mr. A. O. Andrews, who retired in March from the Lincoln Telephone and Telegraph Company. Mr. Andrews has taken over our contoura photo copy work, has taken the responsibility for seeing that other very necessary jobs are done. The staff has remained almost constant in size. As of June 30 we had 25 regular employees and about 15 working in the building on an hourly basis.

Administratively the Society operates with three divisions. The reports of these divisions follow:

### MUSEUM

One of the evidences of interest in the Society and the Museum is the total attendance and the number of individuals who donate items to the collection each year. A total of 84,650 people visited the Lincoln building during the past year and 24,082 visited the seasonal Fort Robinson Branch Museum. The State Fair Exhibits were viewed by 29,205 visitors.

A total of 206 individuals donated items to the collections. These donations varied from single items to large collections of materials. Many desirable items reflecting the story of Nebraska people were not accepted for lack of storage space.

A special project during the year was the furnishing and reconstruction of the first floor of the William J. Bryan "Fairview" home, constructed in Lincoln by Bryan in 1902. This reconstruction consists of seven rooms with the front porch being utilized as a museum or interpretation area to tell in broad outline the William J. Bryan story. This work was carried on as a cooperative project with the Bryan Hospital Board and the Lincoln Junior League.



Sixty-eight separate units of display were constructed during the year. A display case was constructed for the ground floor of the Capitol Building for special displays relating to the story of Nebraska people. A total of forty paintings from the collection were cleaned and prepared for exhibit. These include two oil paintings of the Nebraska area by William H. Jackson. These two paintings were loaned during the year for a special showing at the Museum of New Mexico.

Important archeological research was accomplished during the year. In the 1962 season work was continued at the Red Willow Reservoir nearing completion north of McCook. This project under the immediate supervision of Dr. Roger T. Grange, Jr., Assistant Museum Director was in cooperation with the U. S. National Park Service and was a continuation of excavations started there last year in an attempt to salvage archeological materials endangered by the rising waters of the reservoir. Test excavations were carried out in a number of important prehistoric sites of the Woodland culture more than one thousand years old.

A recognition of the Society's research in archeology was the grant of \$12,700 from the National Science Foundation for Marvin Kivett to carry on archeological investigations of the Logan Creek culture. Dr. Alvin W. Wolfe served as Senior Field Assistant for this work this season. Logan Creek culture is the designation for certain of the cultural zones located in an important site south of Oakland in Burt County. The grant provides for comparative studies of related specimens found in Nebraska and western Iowa.

The Highway Archeological Salvage program carried out in cooperation with the Nebraska Department of Roads has resulted in considerable new information relating to sites which will be destroyed by highway construction. Representative collections made at many of these sites will aid in the study of cultural distribution in Nebraska. Mr. John Garrett, who worked as assistant on the Fort Atkin-



son project last year joined the staff as Highway Salvage Archeologist in January of this year.

### LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

The statistical growth of the library is indicated in part by the following table:

Category	1961 total	additions	1962
Volumes .....	45,531	1,628	47,159
Newspaper Volumes .....	17,405	77	17,402*
Maps .....	1,256	4,155	5,411
Microfilm Reels .....	6,562	905	7,467
Pictures .....	68,941	3,092	71,970

These and other holdings of smaller numbers of items show one aspect of the libraries growth. The figures relating to newspaper volumes added are misleading in that this figure shows additions in new volumes of loose papers that have been bound, less the volumes of papers that have been microfilmed and disposed of. The significant addition to our map collection was occasioned by the addition of about 4,000 maps of Nebraska towns and cities 1901-1937 received from the Library of Congress.

Another measure of the growth and use of the library is in the use made of it. Four thousand four hundred fifty-four persons used our Reading room and newspaper room last year as compared to 3801 the year before. The library staff answered 1849 oral queries and 816 questions received by letter.

Work in this department can be roughly divided into two categories. One is the area of public service—the assisting of users of the library and finding the answers for queries sent to the library. A second function which becomes more essential and more complex the larger the libraries holdings become is the cataloguing, classifying, placing and indexing so that the resources of the library are as readily available as possible. One hundred eighty



Above—Dr. John G. Neihardt addresses the annual dinner.

Below—Lyle Mantor, Philip Holmgren, Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Johnson, William Aeschbacher, Marvin Kivett and Hubert Smith at afternoon session of Annual Meeting.





Above—The restored parlor of Fairview, William Jennings Bryan's home.

Below—A gift from Napoleon Bonaparte to General Moellendorf. An outstanding item from the Walter J. Charnley Firearms Collection.







Above—Dr. John B. White and John Brown confer in Dr. White's office.

Below—Miss Maude Wisherd presides over the Reading Room.





Above—Archeologists, attending 20th Plains Conference, examine artifacts in the archeology laboratory.

Below—"Open house" at the Logan Creek site excavations near Oakland



nine collections were added to our manuscript and archives collections besides additions to other existing collections. These collections are listed in the library catalog. About 13,000 new entries were made in our Information Index. Another 250 cards were inserted in the library card catalog referring to magazine articles, etc. The approximately 1,000 pamphlets in the J. Sterling Morton pamphlet collection were catalogued and a number of other aids in finding information were developed and added to.

## EDUCATION DIVISION

During 1961-62, a major project in the Education Division has been the editing and redesigning of the Society's Educational Leaflet Series. Three additional leaflets have been issued in a new format, with colored cover, printed texts, and illustrations. The new leaflets are: No. 7, "Fort Kearney;" No. 8, "Nebraska in the Civil War;" and No. 9, "Nebraska, Territory and State." These leaflets sell for ten cents at the Sales Desk and to teachers outside the state, but the Society will continue to distribute all the leaflets free of charge to Nebraska teachers. As soon as possible, we plan to change over the first six leaflets, now in mimeographed form, to the new format.

The educational puppet shows attracted seventy-five groups composed of 2,572 persons. One hundred ninety-two groups, totaling 6,413 persons, attended auditorium programs. Guided tours were given to 352 groups, totaling 12,791. Junior League volunteers again produced the puppet shows for the Society.

During the past year numerous groups and individuals have borrowed costumes from the costume-loan collection maintained in the Education Division office. Costumes in this collection are duplicates or reproductions of period clothing which the Museum does not consider suitable for inclusion in the Society's permanent clothing collection. Clothing in the costume-loan collection is loaned free of



charge to the public for educational purposes. Within recent months a considerable number of garments have been restored and repaired for addition to this collection.

### LOOKING AHEAD

Any report, any assessment of what has been done, necessarily causes one to also consider what remains and needs to be done. Where do we stand, as a Society in September 1962, what do we have before us?

Last year in my report I pointed out a number of discernible periods in the development of the Society since 1900, and that we had reached a watershed or time between periods once again, and would soon be embarking upon a new period. The nature of our new period is not yet clearly identified.

Your Executive Board under the leadership of President Latenser has adopted a program to make a substantial addition to our present building, an addition of about 50% in total space, in the next few years. To meet the present responsibilities of the Society and to prepare for additional calls upon us as the state becomes more conscious of its history and utilizes its historical assets to an even greater degree the Executive Board has approved a budget request embodying the total requested for the present biennium and providing for additions to our present staff to a total of eight and for the marked enlargement of our holding of microfilm positive prints. The biennial budget request for the Society's operation is about \$445,000 and for the Fort Robinson operation \$30,000.

Additional building space and staff to make the Society more than it has been a truly state wide organization are desirable. More than that they are necessary for the Historical Society to meet its responsibilities as the state Centennial approaches us, and for the state of Nebraska to have an historical society that is adequately serving its

needs in a manner satisfactory to it as our state prepares to embark upon a second century of development.