



It's Monday, May 2, 2022. In today's issue: Last chance to see BISON; Gravestones with no names; Secret codes of 1922 KKK medallion; Nebraska's first major league baseball player; Ash Hollow in 1851; Historical Marker Equity Program.

BISON exhibit closes May 15



If you haven't yet seen *BISON* at the [Nebraska History Museum](#) in Lincoln, make plans to visit in the next two weeks.

Before Nebraska was cattle country, it was bison country. The vast herds played a central role in the economies and cultures of numerous Indigenous peoples.

The exhibit closes May 15. [Learn more about the exhibit here.](#)

The gravestones with no names



This headstone once bore a child's name, but it has been chiseled off.

Names have also been erased from these military headstones:



Who would do such a thing, and why? Here's a clue: it wasn't vandals, and no bodies lie beneath the headstones.

Do you know where to find this strange cemetery? [Keep reading.](#)

The symbols and secret codes of a 1922 KKK membership medallion

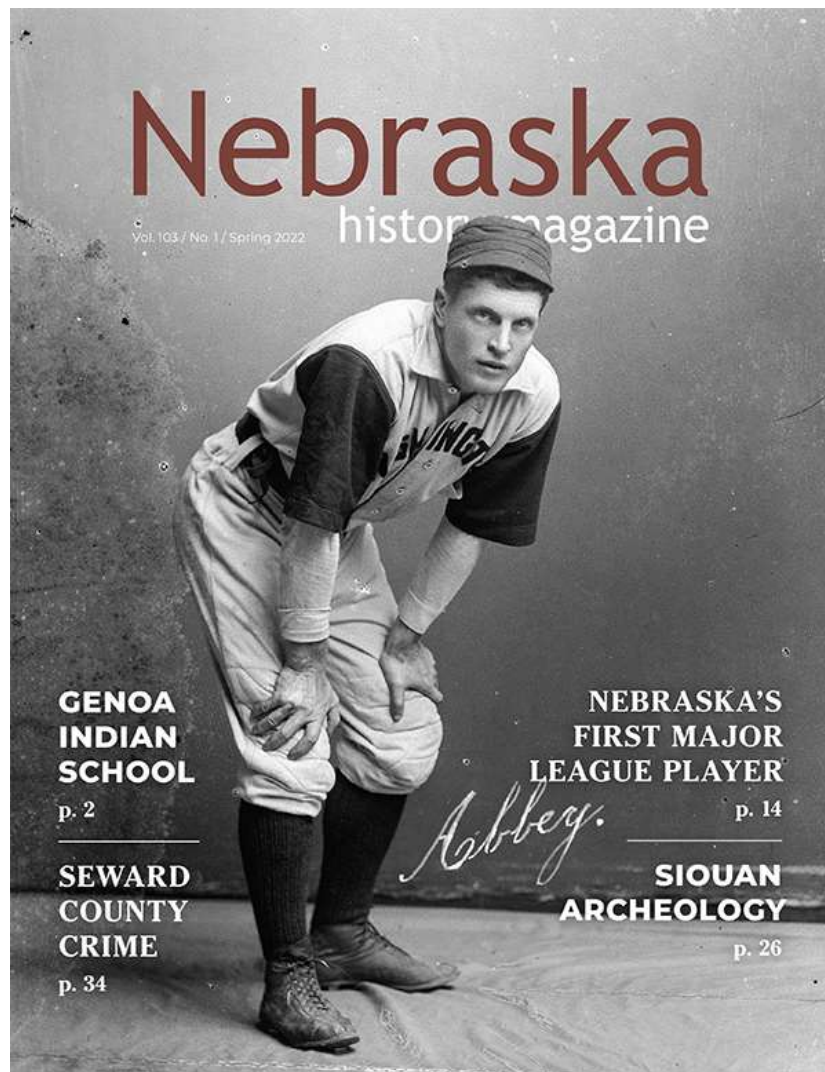


In the 1920s the Ku Klux Klan and its message of prejudice was mainstream, powerful, and even respected across the United States. At one point the Klan claimed to have 45,000 Nebraska members—probably an exaggeration, but it was big enough to dominate state governments in Indiana and Colorado, and was a force to be reckoned with elsewhere.

This pocket piece in History Nebraska's collection served as a kind of membership card for admittance to Klan meetings, or as something to show when meeting another Klansman. It demonstrates how the KKK promoted its message of white supremacy, nativism, and its militant brand of Protestantism.

It did so by invoking widely beloved symbols, while adding its own slogans and secret codes. [Keep reading.](#)

Nebraska's first major league baseball player

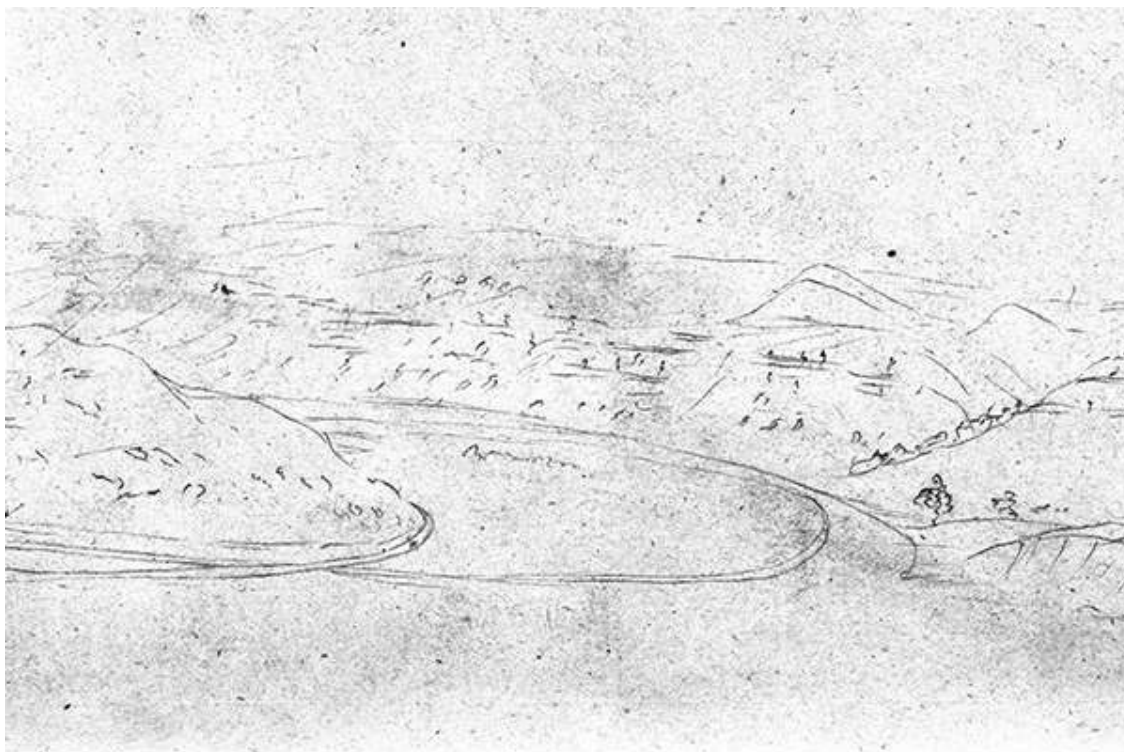


How long ago did Falls City native Charlie Abbey make the major leagues? Here's a clue: in his first game, his team lost baseball's first no-hitter at the modern 60 feet 6 inch distance between the pitching rubber and the back of home plate.

A lot about baseball was different in Abbey's era. In the 1890s there wasn't yet a clear path from the minor leagues to the majors. You had to be in the right place at the right time to be noticed – it's no coincidence that Abbey and his last minor league manager went to the Washington Senators at about the same time.

[Read more here](#), but you'll find the full story (and more photos) only in the Spring 2022 issue of *Nebraska History Magazine*, delivered quarterly to [History Nebraska members](#).

Sketching Ash Hollow in 1851



Imagine sitting in a darkened theater watching a giant canvas on stage. The canvas is spooled at both ends and advances like a giant scroll. Painted on the canvas are scenes of the Oregon Trail. A narrator describes the great journey that thousands of your fellow citizens are making.

The giant scroll was called the Pantoscope, and it was big hit in Eastern theaters in the 1850s. Designed and promoted by entrepreneur J. Wesley Jones, it was based on sketches and photographs made along the trail by several artists and photographers that Jones hired for the project.

The Pantoscope is long gone; only an artist's sketchbook remains. This sketch was unlabeled, but its position in the sketchbook led a historian to believe it

was an early sketch of Nebraska's Ash Hollow, an important stop along the trail. [Keep reading](#).

Historical Marker Equity Program now accepting grant applications



History Nebraska is accepting applications for the Historical Marker Equity Program. The program will select winning applications that share stories of underserved groups and topics. The current grant cycle is seeking the following topics: Civil Rights; Arts (Musical, Theater, etc.); Native American Perspectives; 20th Century Immigration/Refugee Movements; and Sports.

The program recently announced its first advisory council members. Eric Ewing of Omaha, Dr. Heather Fryer of Omaha, Vickie Schaepler of Kearney, and Dr. Nathan Tye of Kearney will join project coordinator Autumn Langemeier on the council. Langemeier is seeking additional members.

History Nebraska director and CEO Trevor Jones says that despite having

nearly 600 historical markers across the state, “we have long known that they do not represent the full scope of our state's rich history. This new program will facilitate the creation of new markers that will broaden our understanding of the past by filling in some of these gaps.”

Selected applicants will work directly with History Nebraska to design, produce, and install their historic marker at no cost. Thanks to the efforts of State Senator Justin Wayne of Omaha, the 2021 Nebraska legislature allocated funds for this program.

To apply for the grant, can contact autumn.langemeier@nebraska.gov.

Applications will be accepted through July 20, 2022.



History Nebraska Newsletter, David Bristow, Editor, history.nebraska.gov. © 2022

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Complete articles:

The gravestones with no names



By David L. Bristow, Editor

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Who would do such a thing, and why? Here's a clue: it wasn't vandals, and no bodies lie beneath the headstones.

Do you know where to find this strange cemetery? If you don't already know, try to guess where such a place might be and then scroll down to find out.

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The grave markers stand in the old post cemetery at Fort Robinson. Even if you've visited the fort, you might not have seen the cemetery, which is tucked away on a back road. (The **Fort Robinson History Center** has driving tour booklets with directions, historic photos, and a fold-out map.)

Between 1875 and 1945, some 258 people were buried at the post cemetery, but the location is prone to flooding—it's on bottomland near the confluence of Soldier Creek and the White River. In 1947 the Army disinterred the graves. The bodies were reburied under new headstones at **Fort McPherson National Cemetery**.

The marble headstones shown here were left behind and the names chiseled off. The area is still labeled and fenced in recognition of its former role, and out of respect for any unmarked and unidentified graves that might remain.

The fort closed in 1948. Today a state historical marker tells the cemetery's story. It is one of several markers on the grounds of what is now Fort Robinson State Historical Park.



A sign on the cemetery gate:



(Posted March 3, 2022)

Categories:

[cemeteries](#), [Fort Robinson](#), [Army](#)

The symbols and secret codes of a 1922 KKK membership medallion



By David L. Bristow, Editor

In the 1920s the Ku Klux Klan and its message of prejudice was mainstream, powerful, and even respected across the United States. At one point the Klan claimed to have 45,000 Nebraska members—probably an exaggeration, but it was big enough to dominate state governments in Indiana and Colorado, and was a force to be reckoned with elsewhere.

Though inspired by the original KKK of the post-Civil War South, the “second” Ku Klux Klan was a privately held corporation that was part hate group and part multi-

level marketing scheme selling memberships, robes, literature, and tokens like this one to an eager membership.

This pocket piece in History Nebraska's collection served as a kind of membership card for admittance to Klan meetings, or as something to show when meeting another Klansman. It demonstrates how the KKK used symbolism and secret codes to promote its message of white supremacy, nativism, and its militant brand of Protestantism.

The medallion invokes widely beloved symbols—the Constitution (with a cross superimposed), the Bible, and the US flag—essentially claiming them for the Klan under the slogan “ONE COUNTRY, ONE FLAG, ONE LANGUAGE.” Less prominent, to the left of the Constitution is a fasces, a bundle of rods associated with ancient Rome and symbolizing collective power and governance.

The unintentional irony is thick:

The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution promises equal protection under the law regardless of race or national origin; the Klan's very existence was based on its members' rejection of this idea.

Three-fourths of the Christian Bible is comprised of the Hebrew Scriptures, and the rest celebrates a certain Jewish rabbi; the Klan was anti-Semitic.

The Stars and Stripes had been the enemy flag in the eyes of the original 1860s Klansmen; the twentieth century Klan revered these Confederate terrorists as their spiritual predecessors.

None of these contradictions mattered to the Klan's leadership. Klan ideology never emphasized intellectual coherence. Instead, it tapped people's fears about where their country was headed. In the early twentieth century the United States was becoming increasingly urban and ethnically diverse. The Great Migration brought large numbers of African Americans to northern cities.

The Klan stoked existing fears that the country was becoming decadent and foreign. At the same time, the Klan invoked deeply held feelings of patriotism and

religious reverence. It used all these emotions to fuel support for its social and political agenda.

The Klan was not secretive about its agenda, and it was so powerful and widely respected that members did not need to hide their identities. Still, like many other fraternal organizations, the Klan fostered feelings of specialness and belonging through the use of secret codes.

On the front side of the medallion, O.S.F.K. stands for “One School, Flag, Kountry.” (The Klan opposed Catholic schools and held that Catholicism was un-American. "Kountry" is an example of the Klan's style of frequently spelling "c" words with a "k".)

The reverse side is full of secret messages:



- SYMWAO: Spend Your Money With Americans Only.
- 1866 – 1915: The founding years of the first and second Ku Klux Klan
- A.K.I.A.: A Klansman I Am.
- Non Silba Sed Anthar: Not for self, for others

I haven't learned what "F.B.P.," "L.F.E.," or "MOKANA" mean.

The donor of this particular token believes it belonged to his great-great grandfather, who lived in Waco, in York County, Nebraska. The words scratched on the reverse side are difficult to make out, but we believe they say "128 Seward" or "12 8 Seward." (Waco is near Seward County.) Similar tokens were once carried in the pockets of many Nebraskans; numerous designs from this period are found nationwide.

(Posted March 28, 2022)

[Read more about the KKK in Nebraska.](#)

[Read about the American Protective Association, a similar group in the 1890s.](#)

Sources:

Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (New York: Liveright, 2017).

Michael Schuyler, "[The Ku Klux Klan in Nebraska, 1920-1930](#)" *Nebraska History* 66 (1985): 234-256.

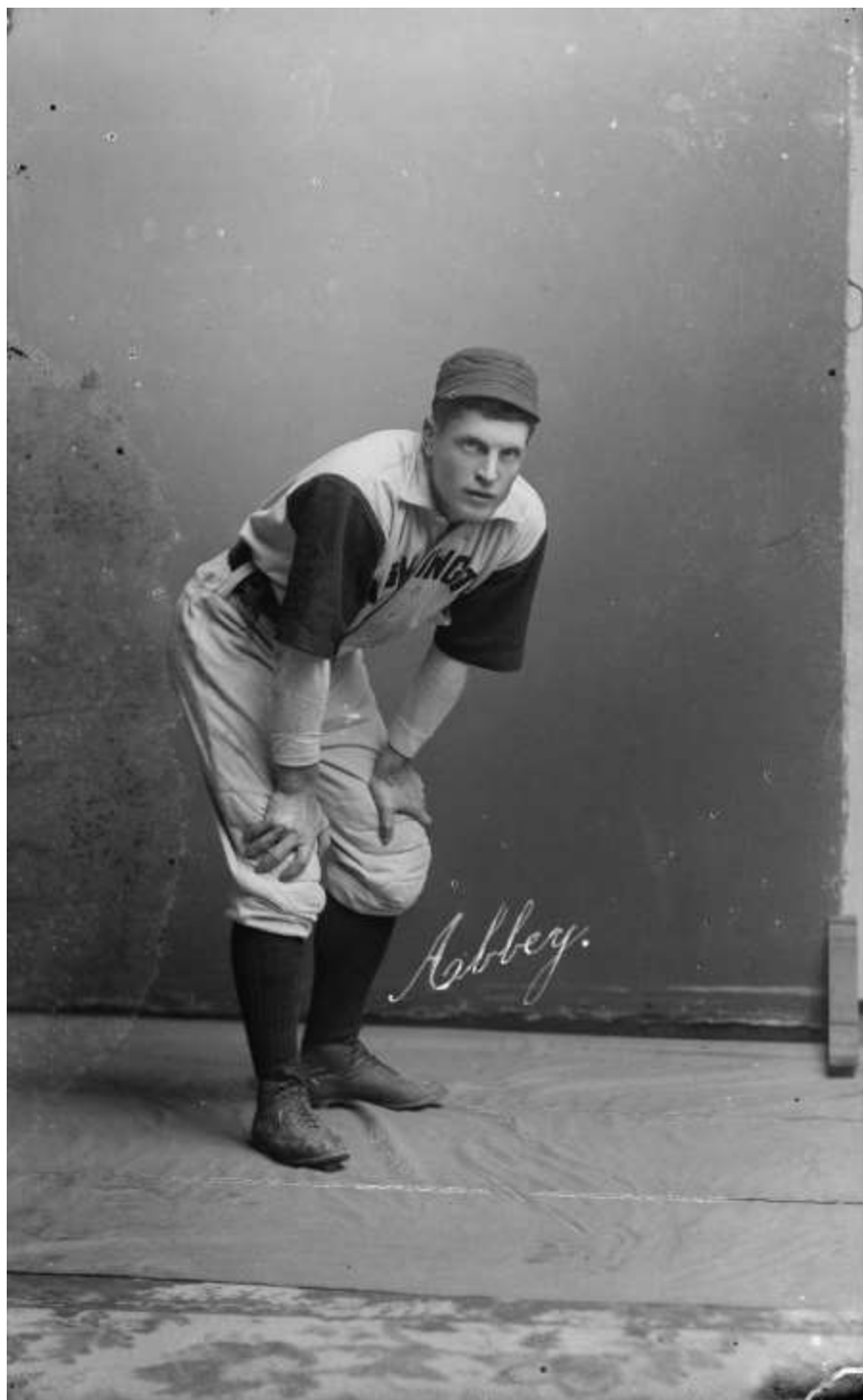
"Token – Ku Klux Klan,"

Numista, <https://en.numista.com/catalogue/pieces128517.html>

Categories:

[Ku Klux Klan](#), [African Americans](#), [nativism](#)

Nebraska's First Major League Player



By Breanna Fanta, Editorial Assistant

Chances are you won't find his name anywhere among your baseball collections or referenced in any popular sports literature. Charlie Abbey wasn't a Babe Ruth, Willie Mays, or a Lou Gehrig; he didn't have any records that gained him that kind of fame. But he was the first native Nebraskan to play major league baseball.

David Alan Johnson shares how in 1893 this Falls City native earned spot on the Washington Senators roster in "Abbey Dazed Them': Nebraska's First Major League Baseball Player," featured in the Spring 2022 issue of *Nebraska History Magazine*.

Like every aspiring baseball player, Abbey had big dreams of making it to the major leagues. He started small, playing on semi-pro teams in Kearney and Beatrice, before securing a spot on a minor league team. However, with constant salary reductions and the market manipulation of players, the minor leagues at that time were unstable and did not yet provide a clear path to the majors.

For five seasons, Abbey jumped around teams—starting his 1891 season with the St. Paul (MN) Apostles and ending it with the Portland (OR) Gladiators—but that quickly changed after joining the Columbus (OH) Reds in 1892.

Pictured: "Charlie Abbey as a member of the Washington Senators baseball team, 1893-1897. One of a series of photos by Washington D.C. photographer C. M. Bell." Library of Congress Prints and Photographs

Gus Schmelz, a baseball manager with a history of major league success, met Abbey as a player for the Reds and was impressed. Abbey didn't have a great batting average, but his speed and strength in the outfield made him a player Schmelz would remember for his next managing job.

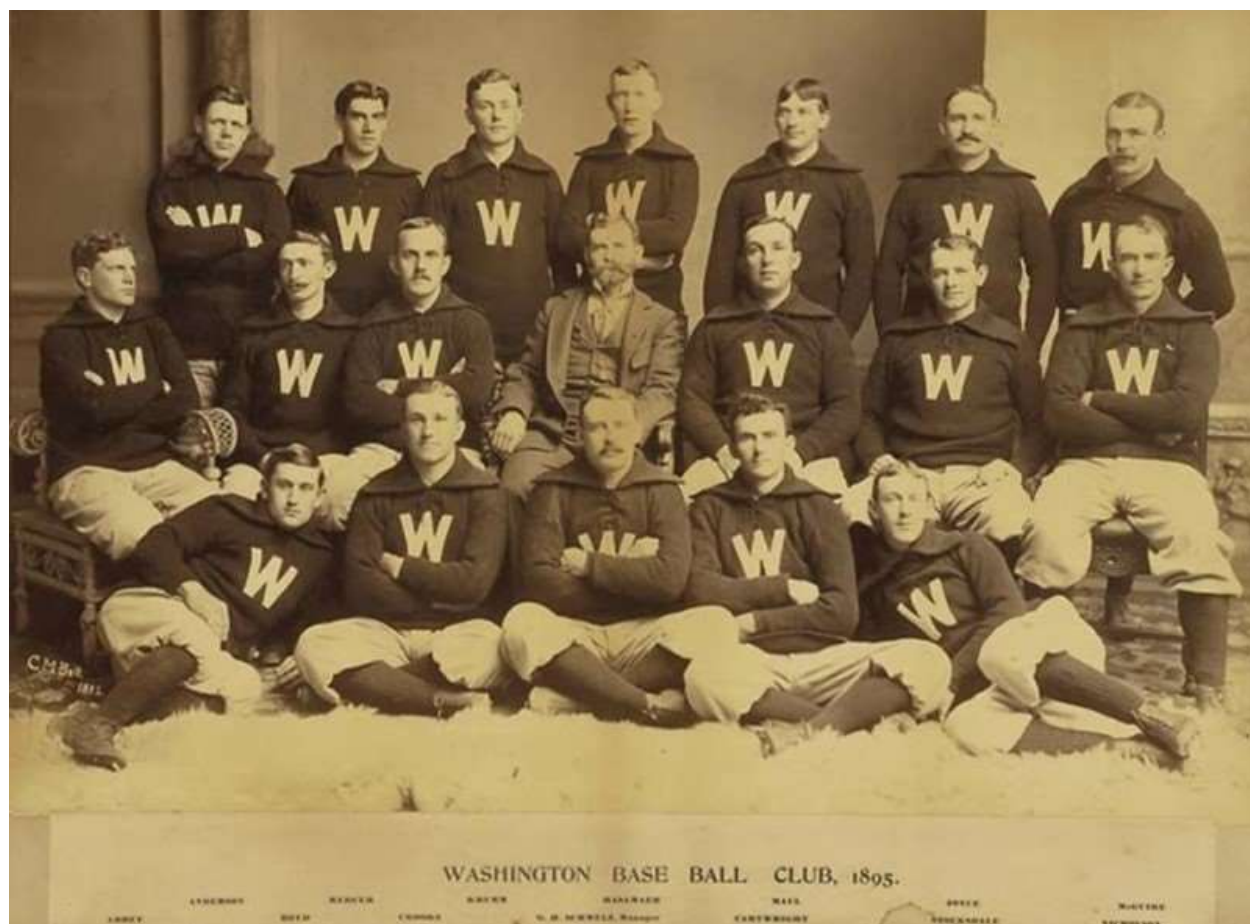
The two worked together to produce successful seasons for the Chattanooga (TN) Warriors. Then the Washington Senators' new owner, Earl Wagner, offered Schmelz the manager's job late in the 1893 season. Abbey made his major league debut on August 16.

That August and September, Abbey played 31 games as the Senators' left fielder. He batted .259, had a record of 9 stolen bases, and an outstanding .937 fielding average.

His debut reflected the same potential that Schmelz saw two years prior. The following season would be the best of Abbey's career.

During his first full season he hit 7 homes run with an average of .314 – a record that made him one of only 33 Washington players to hit .300 before 1911. Scoring 101 runs batted in, stealing 31 bases, and splitting his time between center and left field, Abbey proved a strong asset to the team. His defense skills were so impressive that League President Nick Young called him “one of the greatest outfielders in the league.”

Abbey's skill on the field gained him Wagner's trust and respect, and made him one of the Washington team's most popular players among fans, writers, and teammates.



"The 1895 Washington Senators. The team never posted a winning season in the 1890s. Abbey shown far left and team manager Gus Schmelz at center." *Wikipedia*

The 1895 season, however, would be the beginning of his decline.

Abbey's significant decline in batting and fielding, and inconsistency put him at the bottom of the batting order. The public noticed his slump and wondered what had happened to the old Charles Abbey.

It wasn't until August that his playing improved. Many papers, like the *Star*, wrote about his reemergence: "If Charlie Abbey had hit the ball throughout the season as he has been hitting it during the past six weeks, he would be up among the first dozen sluggers of the league."

The 1896 season wasn't much better. Abbey, who once reflected fielding strength, was now sharing his time in right field. He hit .262, made only one home run, stole

16 bases, and his fielding average dropped below .900 for the first time in his career. Despite these records, he managed some good plays.

Some of his catches that spring made reporters hopeful: "It was the old Charlie Abbey, he of 1894... his work established him firmly in the affections of the public."

Abbey wasn't the only one underperforming though, the team had a losing streak. Wagner, frustrated by the losses, bought a league in Toronto Canada, fire Schmelz as manager, and prepared to 'clean house' for the 1897 season.

After the game against Chicago on August 19th, Abbey was let go and ended the season on another team.

He played a total of 452 games over the span of a five-season career, which was typical for the time.



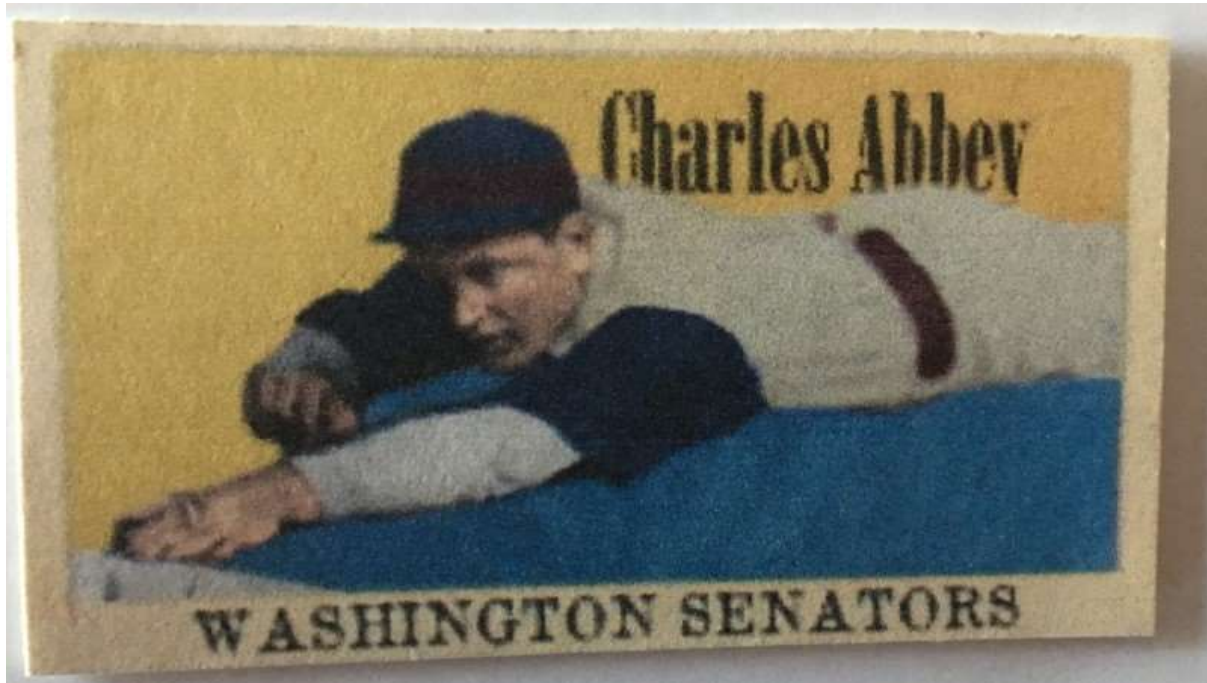
Unlike many players who struggled to cope with post-athletic life, Abbey appeared to handle it with grace. He stayed in D.C., was married, and worked at the *Washington Post*. But his life took a tragic turn in 1906.

On his way to work one January morning, Abbey was exiting a car on a busy street when he was knocked down by a passing vehicle. Landing in oncoming traffic, his arm was run over and had to be amputated just above the elbow.

Less is known about the last years of Abbey's life. The 1920 census indicates that he moved to Seattle, was divorced, worked as an advertising solicitor, and lived in a boarding house. He died April 27, 1926, and was buried in Falls City.

Charles S. Abbey may not have been a Hall of Famer, but he encountered many whose were—such as Buck Ewing, who called Abbey the “best fielder in the country” in 1894.

"A studio portrait of Abbey was adapted for a baseball card." Library of Congress Prints and Photographs



Abbey was also part of an important moment in baseball history, though he was on the losing side. Johnson writes, “1893 marked the first season with pitchers setting up at the modern 60’ 6” distance from home plate. Charlie’s debut featured a no-hitter by Baltimore pitcher Bill Hawk—the first delivered from the now iconic distance associated with baseball.”

The entire article can be found in the Spring 2022 edition of the Nebraska History Magazine. Members receive four issues per year.

[Learn More](#)

Categories:
[baseball](#), [Falls City](#)

Sketching Ash Hollow in 1851



By David L. Bristow, Editor

Imagine sitting in a darkened theater watching a giant canvas on stage. The canvas is spooled at both ends and advances like a giant scroll. Painted on the canvas are scenes of the Oregon Trail. A narrator describes the great journey that thousands of your fellow citizens are making.

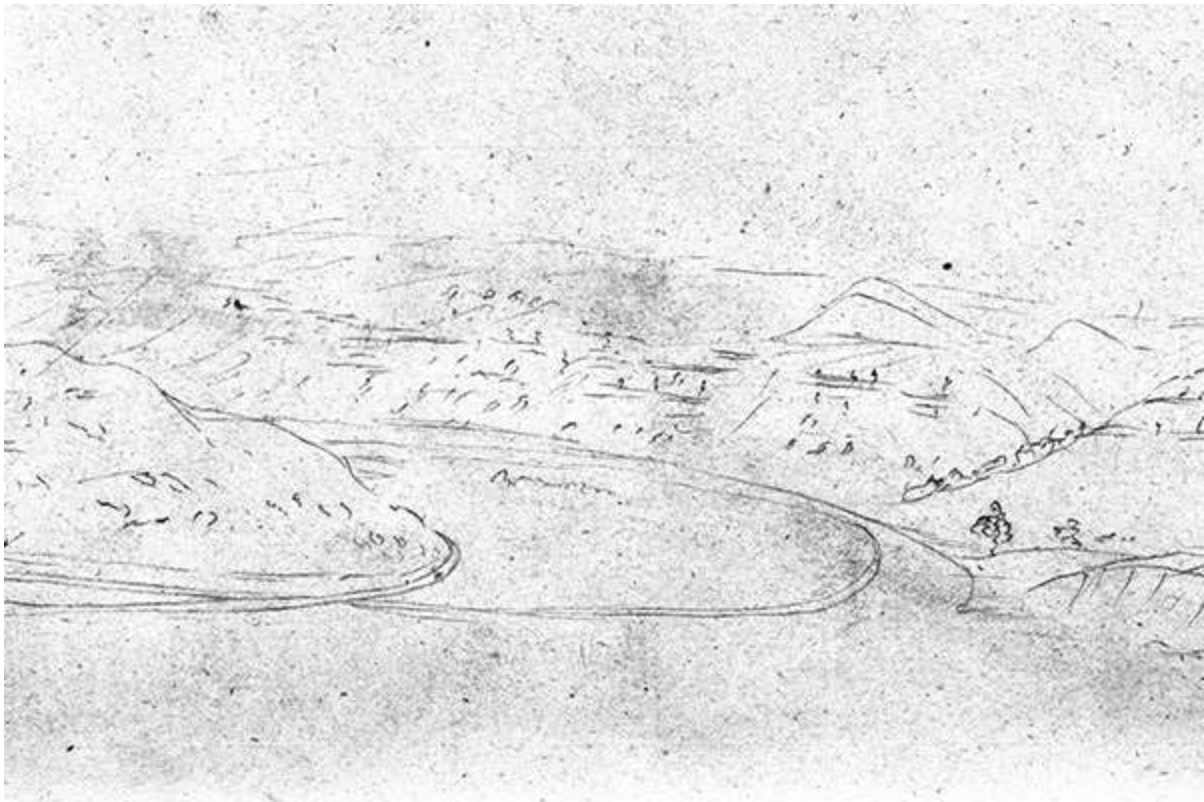
The giant scroll was called the Pantoscope, and it was big hit in Eastern theaters in the 1850s. Designed and promoted by entrepreneur J. Wesley Jones, it was based on

sketches and photographs made along the trail by several artists and photographers that Jones hired for the project.

The Pantoscope and most of the original images are lost, except for those of one of the artists, William Quesenbury (CUSH-en-berry). The *Omaha World-Herald* purchased his sketchbook and donated it to History Nebraska.

David Murphy of History Nebraska co-authored a book about Quesenbury titled *Scenery, Curiosities and Stupendous Rocks*. He visited places “Cush” had sketched, and was impressed with the artist’s accuracy. Some of the sketches were labeled, but most were not.

The one shown here was not, but its placement in the sketchbook led Murphy to believe it portrayed Ash Hollow, an important stop along the trail and now a state historical park. A drawing made in 1851 would be one of the earliest views of the site, and would show it at the peak of westward migration.



A detail of Quesensbury's sketch.

To be sure, Murphy studied topographic maps and then visited Ash Hollow. He carried a copy of the sketch to help identify the place where his view matched the lines on the paper. When he found the spot he was looking northeast toward the Platte valley.

One big difference was all the trees that now obscure the 1850s view of the valley. Fire suppression allows them grow thick, and present-day travelers aren't cutting them down for firewood. Here's how Jones described the scene for the Pantoscope: "Winding over Precipitous Craggs We descend through Ash Hollow, to the north branch of the Platte river in the distance It take its name from the fine groves of Ash Trees which ... have nearly succumbed to the necessities of the traveller, Who here lays in a supply of fuel to boils his coffee, for the next two hundred miles affords not even a schrub Large Enough for a Walking Stick."



Ash Hollow from the air. History Nebraska RG3013-2-8

Posted April 12, 2022. This story first appeared in the July 2021 issue of NEBRASKA*land* magazine.

Categories:

[Ash Hollow](#), [Overland Trail](#)