

Part 4: 1967-present

In some ways, the fourth and final section of this pictorial history has been the most difficult to assemble, because it is the one for which we have the least historical perspective. What are the truly important developments of the past fifty years? Editors of a bicentennial issue of *Nebraska History* are likely to make very different selections.

That said, it seems obvious that the ongoing rural-to-urban population shift is significant, and that it has been driven by economic changes that are also significant. Everywhere, bigger farms and bigger companies produce more with fewer workers. At the same time, Nebraska's population has grown older and, in many communities, more racially and ethnically diverse, and roles such as political leader and sports hero are no longer exclusively male.

"Nebraska... The Good Life" began appearing on highway signs in 1971, and Nebraskans have yet to tire of the slogan. What could be better than the Good Life? Here are glimpses of how Nebraskans lived it, missed it, or fought to achieve it in the past fifty years.



State centennial parade, Bennet, 1967. Nebraska communities celebrated with parades and fairs, while a state commission sponsored events such as a historical pageant at Ash Hollow, a Miss Centennial Nebraska contest, and a one-raft Nebraska Navy that floated down the Missouri River. Like 1867, the centennial year was also marked by political struggle. Governor Norbert Tiemann and the Unicameral finally agreed on a major overhaul of Nebraska's tax system. Before 1967, Nebraska had no state sales tax or personal income tax, relying instead on state taxes on property and household goods. NSHS RG2133-3-4



Nebraska Head Coach Bob Devaney with halfback Mick Ziegler, October 1968. Under Devaney, the Nebraska football program rose to national prominence in the 1960s, but fans complained after back-to-back 6-4 seasons in 1967 and 1968. Some even started a petition drive to have him fired. Devaney promoted Tom Osborne to offensive coordinator, and Nebraska won national championships in 1970 and 1971. Devaney would not be the last Husker football coach to face sky-high expectations. *Lincoln Journal Star*



Robert Kennedy at Lexington, April 28, 1968, part of a whistle-stop campaign tour from Omaha to Cheyenne. With few states having presidential primaries, Nebraska's May 14 primary loomed large in the run-up to the national conventions. Kennedy won Nebraska and three other states before his assassination on June 5. On the Republican side, Richard Nixon's decisive Nebraska victory made his nomination seem inevitable, but Ronald Reagan's surprisingly strong showing—despite not campaigning here—pointed toward the future. NSHS RG2772-1



Black Panthers leaving Omaha police headquarters, June 27, 1969. Taken in for questioning, the young men were released because they had broken no law. Omaha's Near North Side was in the midst of several days of rioting following the fatal shooting of an unarmed, fourteen-year-old black girl by a white police officer. The neighborhood was torn by rioting in 1966, 1968, and 1969. While condemning the destruction, Omaha's black leaders expressed frustration at ongoing housing and job discrimination, and de-facto segregation in the public schools.

NSHS RG2467-19



Hollis Stabler, Vietnam, 1969. A member of the Omaha Tribe and son of a decorated World War II combat veteran, Stabler served with the U.S. Marine Corps' Third Reconnaissance Battalion, receiving an honorable discharge in 1970. More than 40,000 Nebraskans served in the military during the Vietnam era, and nearly 400 were killed in the war. NSHS RG5511-4-1



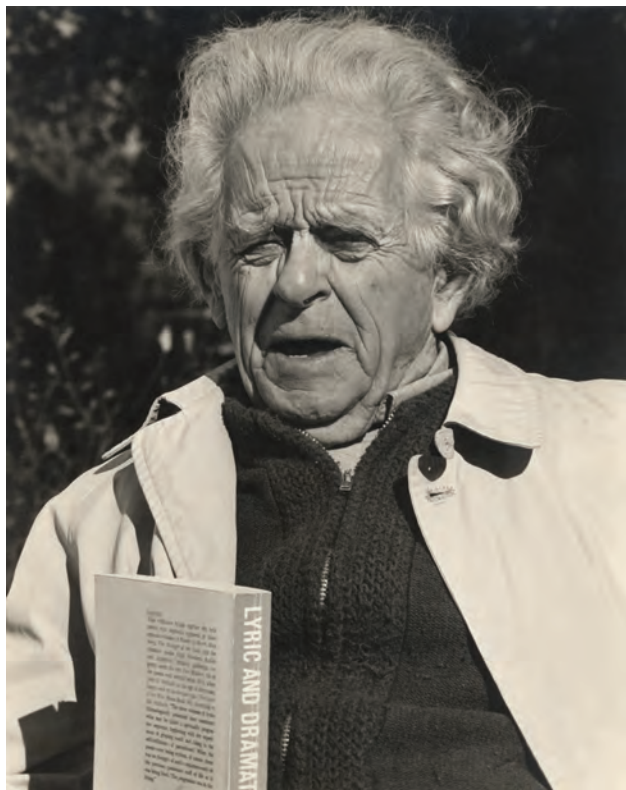
All-university town hall meeting, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Coliseum, May 5, 1970. One day earlier, four students at Kent State University in Ohio had been killed by gunfire from the Ohio National Guard. The shootings took place during a rally protesting the Vietnam War— specifically President Nixon’s decision to send ground troops into neighboring Cambodia. In response both to the Cambodian Incursion and to Kent State, UNL students filled the 4,000-seat arena, voting in favor of a three-day strike on classes. Omaha World-Herald



In this undated image, the center pivot’s distinctive crop circle is still rare enough on the landscape to be worthy of an aerial photo. Patented in 1952 by Frank Zybach of Columbus, center-pivot irrigation overcame early skepticism and technical challenges before expanding rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s. The technology allowed farmers an efficient means of tapping the vast Ogallala Aquifer that underlies much of the state. Water remains a limited resource, however, and disputes over surface water rights have embroiled Nebraska in lawsuits with neighboring states. NSHS RG3358-127



Tornados in Grand Island, June 3, 1980. Many Nebraska towns have tornado stories. Only Grand Island residents can speak of seven tornados touching down in one night. The "Night of the Twisters" killed five people and injured two hundred. In this photo, one tornado touches down near Grand Island High School, while a second is barely visible on the left. The lights are flashes from breaking power lines. The storm did \$300 million worth of damage (in 1980 dollars). Much of the debris now forms Tornado Hill, a landmark in the otherwise flat city. NSHS RG813-501



Nebraska Poet Laureate John G. Neihardt, at Neihardt Day in Bancroft, early 1970s. Believing that the American West was as worthy of epic treatment as anything in classical literature, Neihardt spent many years researching and writing his five-part epic poem, *A Cycle of the West*. But he is best remembered for *Black Elk Speaks*, a 1932 book written in collaboration with Lakota holy man Nicholas Black Elk. The John G. Neihardt Center was built in 1976 as part of a state historic site in Bancroft. NSHS RG2042



Looking west along the 800 block of Harney Street in Jobbers Canyon, Omaha, 1986. City leaders touted the warehouse district as a key to downtown redevelopment, but that was before ConAgra wanted the land for a new headquarters. The ensuing struggle pitted the leverage of a Fortune 500 company against a vision of economic development through historic preservation. The result, in 1989, was the largest-ever demolition of a district listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2015 ConAgra announced the relocation of its headquarters to a historic warehouse in Chicago. Lynn Meyer



Nebraska State Fair, Lincoln, 1972. Five communities have hosted the state fair. Nebraska City held a territorial fair in 1859 and then hosted the first state fair in 1868. Brownville hosted the fair in 1870-71. The fair then rotated between Omaha and Lincoln for the next three decades, settled in Lincoln from 1901 to 2009, and then moved to its current home in Grand Island. NSHS RG3356-38-18



Helen Boosalis and Kay Orr before their debate, September 5, 1986. Former Lincoln Mayor Boosalis and State Treasurer Orr made history in the nation's first gubernatorial election in which both major-party nominees were women. Orr became the first Republican woman to be elected governor in the United States.
Ted Kirk, Lincoln Journal Star



Abengoa Bioenergy near York, undated. The ethanol plant opened in 1994 and closed in 2015 before re-opening under new ownership. Nebraska currently has twenty-five ethanol plants. The first was built in 1985. By 2009 Nebraska had become the nation's second-largest producer of ethanol behind Iowa. The prices of corn and oil remain volatile, however. Like agriculture in general, ethanol is subject to major fluctuations in profitability.
Eric Gregory, Lincoln Journal Star





Downtown Omaha, looking west from the Missouri River, 2005. Omaha has rebuilt its formerly industrial riverfront. In the foreground, Heartland of America Park and the ConAgra campus stand on the former site of Jobbers Canyon. Just to the north of this view, the CenturyLink Center and Lewis and Clark Landing (both completed in 2003) occupy the former sites of the Asarco lead refinery and Union Pacific rail yards and repair shops. The city's skyline has also changed: completed in 2002, the forty-five-story First National Bank Tower surpassed the Woodmen Tower (1969) as Nebraska's tallest building. James R. Burnett, Omaha World-Herald



Warren Buffett (left) and Charlie Munger onscreen at the Berkshire Hathaway annual shareholders meeting, Omaha Civic Auditorium, 2001. Buffett is the holding company's largest shareholder and longtime CEO; Munger is its longtime vice chairman. For many years Buffett has been one of the world's wealthiest people, usually second only to Bill Gates. Despite Buffett's middle-class, Midwestern public persona, the Berkshire Hathaway annual meeting has grown into an arena-filling event, dubbed the "Woodstock of Capitalism" by the press. Omaha World-Herald



Rally marchers leave Pine Ridge, South Dakota, on their way to Whiteclay, Nebraska, on June 26, 1999. The demonstration by Native Americans protested unsolved murders and the sale of alcohol in Whiteclay. The sale of alcohol is prohibited on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Just across the state line, Whiteclay consists mainly of liquor stores selling beer to people from the reservation, and is noted for public drunkenness and violence. Activists have long argued that the area is rightfully part of the reservation; federal courts have not supported this view. William Lauer, Lincoln Journal Star



A lightning-sparked wildfire threatens Chadron State College, July 28, 2006. Hundreds of firefighters, local residents, and college workers held the fire at bay. Area fires burned more than 68,000 acres before they were contained on August 5. According to the Nebraska Forest Service, wildfires have been getting larger and the intervals between them shorter; the NFS says climate change is a major factor. Thus far, 2012 is the worst wildfire season on record in Nebraska, with more than 500,000 acres burned. Con Marshall, Chadron State College



World Record Tractor Parade at the Nebraska State Fair, Grand Island, August 25, 2012. The event set a Guinness world's record for the largest parade of classic tractors, with 964. While still in Lincoln, the fair struggled with declining attendance during the early 2000s. It recovered, but the landlocked University of Nebraska-Lincoln wanted the fairgrounds for its new Nebraska Innovation Campus. The state legislature agreed, and in 2010 the fair moved to Grand Island, where it has been well-attended. VisitGrandIsland.com



Educators, students, and parents stand for the national anthem at the Latino Summit, Kearney, 2013. The annual event is presented by the Nebraska Latino American Commission and the Nebraska Department of Education. More than 167,000 Nebraskans identified as Hispanic in the 2010 census, about 9 percent of the state's population. According to the University of Nebraska at Omaha's Center for Public Affairs Research, Hispanics will comprise about 24 percent of the state's population by 2050. This figure assumes slower migration in the future, but is based on the disparity between an aging white population and a relatively youthful Hispanic population. Nebraska Latino American Commission



Aerial view of the suburban/rural edge in Elkhorn, looking west over the Elkhorn River, 2017. According to UNO's Center for Public Affairs Research, as of 2013 nearly two-thirds of Nebraska's 1.8 million people lived in the metropolitan counties surrounding Omaha, Lincoln, Sioux City (Iowa), and Grand Island. Census data reveals a dramatic rural-to-urban shift since the 1930s. And while the state's total population has grown, Nebraska's eighty non-metro counties had more people in 1890 than they have today. Google Maps



Fawn Lake Ranch, near Gordon, 2016. “Exposed groundwater in valleys between sand dunes creates some of the most beautiful and important wetlands in North America,” writes Chris Helzer of the Nature Conservancy. Chris Helzer

These 150 photographs reveal tremendous changes in population, culture, and technology, and part of what they document is the growing power of humans to alter the natural environment. But after millennia of human occupation and 150 years of statehood, life in Nebraska is still subject to the limits imposed by land, water, and sky. Nebraskans of the future will make their own history—perhaps a very different history from all that preceded it—but they will not escape the fundamental challenges of their Great Plains environment.