

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form**

This form is used for documenting property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (formerly 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information.

 X New Submission Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Nebraska Interstate 80 Bicentennial Sculptures

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

Development and Implementation of Interstate 80 Bicentennial Sculptures in Nebraska, 1973-1976

C. Form Prepared by:

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Support by Elizabeth Chase

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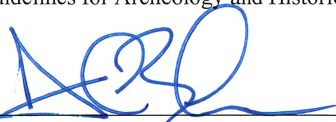
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telephone 402-770-5877

date May 20, 2026

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation.



Signature of certifying official

Director

Title

June 18, 2026

Date

Nebraska State Historical Society

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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E. Statement of Historic Contexts

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1. Introduction

Between 1973 and 1976, Nebraska planned for, funded, and constructed eight contemporary art sculptures at interstate rest areas to commemorate the nation's Bicentennial. Interstate 80 (I-80) runs east to west through the central part of the state and is the only interstate in Nebraska. Although ten sculptures were originally intended, only eight were constructed because of limited funding. Sculptures were selected from a juried competition and were a gift to the state and the traveling public to enhance traveler experience through Nebraska. The sculptures were placed on the "Final List of Nationally and Exceptionally Significant Features of the Interstate Highway System" in Nebraska in 2006 and were identified as Nebraska's 500 Mile Sculpture Garden significant for their art and community involvement.¹ These sculptures are now 50 years old and this context will support listing them in the National Register of Historic Places as part of America 250, the nation's 250th or semiquincentennial celebration. This context will establish the history of this statewide program, led by the Nebraska Interstate 80 Bicentennial Sculpture Corporation and the Nebraska American Revolution Bicentennial Commission (NARBC) program and its significance at the national level under Criterion A in the area of Art. This document addresses the program's surviving seven Bicentennial sculptures in Nebraska's I-80 rest areas.

2. Early Roads and the Interstate System

Overland transportation networks have played a significant role in shaping settlement patterns and economic development in the United States. Throughout history, roadways have facilitated movement, trade, and communication. Early examples, including Roman road networks and routes established by Indigenous peoples across the North American continent, demonstrate long-standing traditions of constructing formalized travel corridors.² The first federally funded interstate route was authorized in 1806, when the National Road was established. Conceived by, Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury under President Thomas Jefferson, the National Road represents the earliest example of a standardized national highway system. Today, known as Route 40, it is the earliest precursor of a standardized interstate system with uniform width, surface, and elevation requirements. As the road grew and developed through the 1820s, features like tolls and toll gates, mile markers for wayfinding purposes, and communities developed throughout the corridor in Pennsylvania and Virginia. Use of the National Road was diminished by the mid-nineteenth century as rail transportation became the dominant mode of long-distance travel. The arrival and immediate popularity of the automobile renewed demand for improved roadway conditions.³

The Good Roads Movement, supported by farmers and the U.S. Post Office, advocated for farm-to-market roads during the 1880s and into the early 1900s. Bicycle advocates established the League of American Wheelmen, whose motto was "lifting our people out of the mud," and promoted standardized macadam roads to transport

¹ List of Nationally and Exceptionally Significant Features of the Federal Interstate Highway System. Accessed at https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/historic_pres/highways_list.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1

² Library of Congress Research Guides, Native American Spaces: Cartographic Resources at the Library of Congress. Accessed at www.guides.loc.gov/native-america-spaces/published-sources/trails

³ "History of the Road." Accessed at the National Road Heritage Foundation. www.nationalrdrfoundation.org/the-national-road/history-of-the-road/

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crops to local railheads, ease rural mail delivery, and increase bicycle tourism and transportation.⁴ Good roads advocates lobbied government officials for financial support to build and continue to improve and maintain existing roads. The U.S. Department of Agriculture established the first federal agency to address roads in 1893 when the Office of Road Inquiry was formed within the United States Department of Agriculture.⁵ Subsequent federal activities included testing materials, developing construction specifications, and issuing construction guidelines in 1911. Other road and highway advocacy groups, like the Lincoln Highway Association developed similar guidelines and specifications. Existing roads quickly deteriorated across the country as the popularity of the automobile increased. Autos were heavier and tourism routes damaged the macadam and dirt roads previously used by bicyclists and horses.

During this period, cross-country automobile routes were formalized across the nation, including in Nebraska. Named highways-such as the Lincoln Highway, Meridian Highway, and Omaha-Lincoln-Denver Highway-provided early wayfinding systems that predated the modern numbered highway network. These routes represent an important transitional phase between locally maintained roads of inconsistent quality and the later standardized federally coordinated system of interstate highways. The Interstate and Defense Highway System of today reflects the culmination of these earlier efforts to regulate roadway design, enhance transportation efficiency, and ensure national connectivity.

In 1919, while the traveling public was enjoying automobile tourism, Dwight D. Eisenhower, then a young Army Lieutenant Colonel, took part in a cross-country expedition of 81 Army vehicles. The convoy tested the challenges of moving an army across the country. Their route roughly followed the Lincoln Highway.⁶ Deteriorated road conditions, particularly west of the Mississippi River, limited the convoy's progress to about six miles per day. These conditions made it unclear if this unprecedented mission could even be successfully completed. Ultimately, the mission was a success with the definitive result concluding that transcontinental highways should be standardized, constructed, and maintained by the Federal government.⁷ Other federal administrations recognized the need, and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt studied various concepts for implementing a standardized interstate system. The project did not reach a successful conclusion, and after the outbreak of World War II, it was no longer considered a priority.

As Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, Eisenhower eventually led the Allied forces to victory over the Nazis in World War II. Contributing to that defeat, was the ability to move quickly and efficiently on the German autobahns. In 1944, toward the end of the war, and under President Roosevelt's leadership, Congress enacted the

⁴ Peter J. Hugill. "Good Roads and the Automobile in the United States 1880-1929." *Geographical Review* 72 (1982): 327-49. Macadam is a road surfacing material made from rock that is graded, compressed, and then bound together with water. The road surface was crested in the center and stone fragments had to be small to fit together and provide a generally smooth finish. It was a method designed by Scottish engineer John Loudon McAdam.; Mead and Hunt, Nebraska Historic Highway Survey, August 2002, 9; David J. Wishard, Ed. "Good Roads Movement," Encyclopedia of the Great Plains, accessed at www.plainshumanities.unl.edu/encylclopedia/doc/egp.tra.013.html

⁵ Nebraska Historic Highway Survey, 10.

⁶ The Lincoln Highway is U.S. Highway 30 through Nebraska today.

⁷ David A. Pfeiffer. "Ike's Interstates at 50: Anniversary of the Highway System Recalls Eisenhower's Role as Cataylst." *Prologue Magazine*, Summer 2006, Vol 38, No. 2. Accessed at www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2006/summer/interstates.html

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Federal-Aid Highway Act which was largely ineffective because it came with no provision for construction funds.⁸

When President Dwight D. Eisenhower ascended to the presidency in 1953, his administration prioritized an interstate system. He established the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways in 1956 which has been called the Greatest Public Works Project in History.⁹ Eisenhower's motives were based in military strategy and built on his observations from the First Transcontinental Motor Convoy, his experiences with the efficient German Autobahn during World War II, and the fear of mass egress that was introduced from the destruction seen during the 1953 testing of the Soviet Union's hydrogen bomb. Insufficient road systems would limit Americans from escaping a threatened nuclear attack and a sophisticated and comprehensive system of roads should be a showcase of national defense and the American landscape.

The Missouri Highway Commission was awarded the first contract to begin building an interstate roadway generally following the Route 66 and beginning approximately 160 miles southwest of St. Louis. Kansas and Pennsylvania also claim that they were the first to begin construction.¹⁰

The interstate system was built around uniform construction standards that dictated lane widths, travel speeds, and shoulder width. It was designed for high-speed travel and maximum safety by eliminating sharp curves, adding shoulders and medians, and cloverleaf interchanges to maintain traffic flow. Traffic lanes were required to be at least 12 feet wide and designed for speeds up to 70 miles per hours.¹¹

The federal government financed 90% of the interstate highway system through a one cent increase in gasoline and diesel fuel taxes, a three cent raise in tire tax per pound, a 2% raise in tax on new trucks, trailers, and buses, a new three cent per pound tax on camelback or retread rubber, and a highway-user tax on heavy vehicles of \$1.50 per 1,000 pounds of gross weight on vehicles over 26,000 pounds. Nebraska passed a companion law in 1957 that raised state motor fuel taxes from six to seven cents with the belief that amount would be sufficient for their 10% financial obligation.¹²

3. Interstate 80 in Nebraska

Interstate 80 (I-80) is one of the nation's main east-west transcontinental highways extending 2,904 miles beginning at the George Washington Bridge in New Jersey and continuing east to the San Francisco-Oakland Bay bridge in California. It crosses eleven states and connects with every major north-south interstate. In Nebraska, I-80 stretches approximately 450 miles from Omaha in the east to the Wyoming State line in the west. It was constructed over a 17-year period from 1957 to 1974. To fund the state's 10% portion of the cost, the Nebraska Legislature raised state motor fuel taxes from six to seven cents in 1957, believing this would be sufficient to meet their financial obligations. The Nebraska Department of Roads (NDOR), the State Highway Commission,

⁸ Pfeiffer, "Ike's Interstates."

⁹ "History of the Interstate Highway System." Accessed at <https://highways.dot.gov/highway-history/interstate-system/50th-anniversary/history-interstate-highway-system> Eisenhower served as the 34th President of the United States, from 1953-1961.

¹⁰ Lee Lacy. "Dwight D. Eisenhower and the birth of the Interstate Highway System," Accessed at https://www.army.mil/article/198095/dwight_d_eisenhower_and_the_birth_of_the_interstate_highway_system

¹¹ Mead and Hunt. *Historic Highways in Nebraska*, August 2002, 120.

¹² *Historic Highways in Nebraska*, 118.

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and the Governor jointly oversaw corridor planning and route selection.¹³ Some controversy occurred regarding selecting the final route, but a corridor was selected generally following a path north of the Platte River across the state. Construction commenced in the Omaha-Lincoln corridor, the most heavily traveled portion of the state, where work began in 1957 and concluded with the opening of a route in 1962. Construction progressed westward over the subsequent decade, with the final section poured in 1973, and the highway designated I-80. Nebraska was the first state to complete its' section of I-80 at a cost of \$435 million which averaged about \$950,000 per mile.¹⁴ The state celebrated a "Golden Link" ceremony in October 1974 held five miles west of Sidney to mark the opening of the final segment. A brass-top section of channel-iron was embedded across all four lanes of traffic at the rest areas west of Sidney as a symbolic completion link.¹⁵

4. Interstate Rest Areas

The Federal-Aid Highway Act not only completed the I-80 transportation corridor itself but also provided respite for the traveling public. Safety rest areas constituted a planned and functional component of the system and were formally integrated into federal design guidance beginning in the late 1950s. The American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) published *A Guide on Safety Rest Areas for the National System of Interstate and defense Highways* in 1958 with an update in 1968, that established nationally standardized expectations for rest area planning and design. Design standards emphasized accessibility, separating car and truck parking areas, identifying the comfort station as the central architectural element, and increasing safety through straightened and lengthened access points. Although national guidance established the baseline requirements, individual states retained flexibility to adapt materials and architectural styles to reflect regional contexts.¹⁶ Rest areas were typically located near urban areas (generally one to five miles from the edge of a city), and prior to on and off ramps for travelers to stop for comfort breaks, make phone calls, collect information, or read maps. Rest area locations, land acquisition, and construction were an integral part of interstate planning.¹⁷ The development of national standards for ease of use marked a pivot from roads as a military concern to roads as a tourist and local asset.

Nebraska regarded itself as a leader in providing rest areas for the traveling public by utilizing higher quality materials such as concrete over asphalt, and viewing each rest area as an "Oasis on the Plains."¹⁸ Rest areas were generally sited at 50-60 mile intervals and Nebraska standardized their basic programmatic components to include

¹³ The Nebraska Department of Roads changed its name in 2017 when the Nebraska Department of Aeronautics and the Nebraska Department of Roads merged to create the new Nebraska Department of Transportation. Throughout this nomination, the agency will be referred to as the Nebraska Department of Roads.

¹⁴ "50 Years of Interstate: Nebraska and the Nation." Interstate History Book accessed at www.dot.nebraska.gov

¹⁵ *Historic Highways in Nebraska*, 125. The "Golden Link" is no longer extant. It has since been removed as part of a previous highway improvement project.

¹⁶ One example of a regional context are the concrete tipis or wigwams in South Dakota rest areas which are also listed in the National Register. Texas constructed frame oil rigs over picnic tables, and Kansas had concrete tipis at picnic tables. These are but a few examples of regional context reflected in the built environment at rest areas across the region. CB Nelson, *The Interstate Tipis of South Dakota Multiple Property Documentation Form*. December 2014 NRHP #64501233.

¹⁷ Mead and Hunt, *Texas Roadside Parks Study: Historic Context & National Register Requirements*. Texas Department of Transportation, 2015, 91-93.

¹⁸ *Historic Highways in Nebraska*, 122.

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picnic facilities, open grassy areas, tourist information kiosks, and modern sanitary facilities. Landscape areas featured lawns, shrubs, trees, and open spaces for safe, comfortable respite.¹⁹

The first two rest areas on I-80 in Nebraska were opened in 1963 and located near the Ashland and Greenwood interchanges between Lincoln and Omaha. Six additional sites were ready by 1965 and included one at the Alda interchange, one at Gibbon interchange, and two near Kearney and Cozad interchanges. NDOR modified rest areas in the 1970s by adding open picnic areas at sites with large trees to provide shade, tourist information booths, and play areas for children.

These facilities provided the physical and contextual setting for the later installation of the state's Bicentennial sculptures, which were located within rest areas for public accessibility and visibility to those traveling the I-80 corridor. Nebraska's 500 Mile Sculpture Garden was created as a lasting legacy for travelers funded by the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration.

5. The American Revolution Bicentennial Commission

National planning for the commemoration of the United States Bicentennial began in 1966 when Congress established The American Revolution Bicentennial Commission (ARBC) on July 4, 1966. The ARBC served as the central federal body responsible for coordinating commemorative activities, developing educational programming, and encouraging nationwide participation in the 1976 celebrations. They reported to Congress in July 1970, identifying three themes the Bicentennial should embrace. These included *Heritage '76*, a call to Americans to remember their heritage and place it in its appropriate historical perspective. *Festival U.S.A.*, an opportunity to encourage Americans to expand their knowledge of the country and welcome visitors. *Horizons '76*, a challenge to all to undertake at least one project that expressed the pride, priorities, and hopes of their community looking into the future.²⁰ ARBC encouraged states, cities, organizations, and individuals to propose commemorative initiatives that aligned with their national themes.

The commission was comprised of presidential appointees from the Senate, House of Representatives, Presidential Cabinet members, Federal judiciary members, and ex-officio members from the general public. During these early planning years, effort was largely directed toward developing concepts for a major exposition in Philadelphia which would serve as the focal point for the national celebration. An idea which was abandoned by 1972. This commission eventually evolved to the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) in 1973 to manage and expend federal funds more efficiently. States began planning in earnest and project applications spiked into the thousands by April of 1975 with 3,078 projects under the *Heritage* theme, 2,240 under the *Festival* theme, and 1,581 under the *Horizons* theme.²¹

Before disbanding in 1973, ARBC assisted in establishing commissions in each state. Subsequently, they designed a logo, developed a commemorative stamp and medal program, and initiated work on a computerized information database for bicentennial events. In addition to its national initiatives, the ARBC provided funding for state-level

¹⁹ *Historic Highways in Nebraska*, 122.

²⁰ Report to the Congress: Planning for America's Bicentennial Celebration—A Progress Report. United States General Accounting Office. Comptroller General of the United States, US. Government Accountability Office, June 6, 1975. Accessed at www.gao.gov/assets/red-75-373

²¹ *Report to Congress*. 9-11.

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programs, with Alabama, Massachusetts, and Virginia among the first to benefit. Funds in these states could be used for a wide variety of projects, including promotional activities such as short films documenting local history, historic trails, reenactments, tree plantings, museums and memorials, booklets and brochures, traveling exhibits, beauty pageants, and interpretive centers. For instance, in Virginia, funds supported creation of a historic trail that traced key Revolutionary War sites, while Alabama produced a short film highlighting its colonial heritage.²²

ARBA published weekly newsletters called *Bicentennial Times*, documenting contributions from across the country. It mentioned the activities of thousands of Bicentennial Communities, many of which were in Nebraska, updated subscribers to new programs from across the country, and provided acknowledgements for ongoing programs. In ARBA's first report to Congress, Administrator John Warner emphasized the success and validity of the program and illustrated that through the overwhelming evidence and widespread participation, no single geographic location dominated funding or activities.²³ By July 1976, there were nearly 12,000 Bicentennial Communities across the country. Warner identified that as one of the greatest landmark achievements of the Bicentennial. ARBA estimated private contributions toward the celebrations at \$38 million from approximately 345 companies.²⁴

6. Programs and Activities in Other States

Funding for programs across the nation had few limitations. In 1975, the General Accounting Office conducted a survey and submitted a report to Congress indicating that numerous programs had been initiated and resources were allocated effectively. Responses to their survey were varied because of the lack of limitations on funding. A community in Alaska shared that the Girl Scouts sponsored a 13-mile stretch of the Iditarod Trail, which served as a dogsled mail route both in the early 1900s and throughout Alaska's gold rush era. The trail was overgrown and hazardous in parts with some associated ruins from old mining camps. Mining camp structures were restored with assistance from the Boy Scouts. Trails were cleared, footbridges constructed, historic sites identified and cataloged, and trail signs and markers installed.

Historic preservation activities were popular across the country. California planned to restore El Pueblo de San Jose de Guadalupe in San Jose, a two-room adobe building, known to be the oldest building in the oldest civil settlement in the state. One small Missouri community hosted an "old-time" fiddlers' contest, a street fair, a trapshooting competition, and published a two-volume history of the community. Historical pageants, such as one entitled "Echoes Along the Yellowstone," were performed at the Lower Yellowstone Valley. Other states and communities hosted parades, Native American pow-wows, dinner celebrations, and fairs.²⁵

An exhibition titled "The World of Franklin and Jefferson" was curated and premiered at the Grand Palais in Paris on January 10, 1975, to inaugurate international bicentennial celebrations. This exhibit was a collaborative effort between ARBA and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It highlighted Franklin and Jefferson's roles in colonial American history. Following its debut, the exhibition traveled to Warsaw and the British Museum in

²² Report to Congress. 9-11.

²³ "Cites Validity of Individual Celebrations," *Bicentennial Times*, Vol. 2, Sept, 1975, 177.

²⁴ "President Commends Bicentennial Communities." *Bicentennial Times*, Vol, 3, July 1976, 326.

²⁵ Report to Congress. 13-15.

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London, subsequently concluding its tour in the United States with stops in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

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Among the most memorable activities was the American Freedom Train, a privately sponsored project that exhibited historic documents and artifacts on a cross-country tour in a specially curated and painted train. The train travelled the country, and it was estimated that ten million people viewed the exhibits. Sponsored by the American Freedom Train Foundation, the effort cost approximately \$18 million. Cars were painted red, white, and blue and were pulled by a steam locomotive. Each car presented a different theme, and visitors traveled through the exhibits on a moving walkway that accommodated 1,800 people per hour for 14 hours a day. Visitors carried individual transistor radios to listen to a narration of the exhibits.²⁷

Additional legislation, enacted in March 1972, created a grant program to establish and finance program activities of the state commissions. Each state had access to \$45,000 for 1972 and 1973 to organize, staff, recruit, employ, initiate, and coordinate plans and programs related to developing bicentennial activities. Supplemental funding was allocated to projects that aligned with one of the three bicentennial themes—*Heritage, Festival, Horizons*—or that sub-granted at least fifty percent of the total grant to state or local government agencies or nonprofit organizations. Additionally, it was stipulated that grant funds must not exceed fifty percent of a project's total cost.²⁸ The funding intent was to encourage local and grass roots participation by as many groups as possible.

Fine arts projects were among the smallest group of Bicentennial celebration categories. Support was given to programs associated with the fine arts including the Seattle Opera's four-year music festival program. The Ballet Folk Company in Moscow, Idaho produced an original ballet for the Bicentennial based on American western history. It included choreography called "Ceremony on the Open Plains" featuring Calamity Jane as the main character. One other example was a choral work composed by Pulitzer Prize winning musician John La Montaine. His piece, commissioned by Penn State University, incorporated historical events and quotes from the 1750s through the 1770s. It was first performed at the beginning of the 1975–1976 academic year by the University Choir and the Penn State University Symphony Orchestra.²⁹

7. Nebraska Bicentennial Celebrations

(Because of the number of government agencies introduced in each section and the associated abbreviations, a guide to those abbreviations is provided at the beginning of each section for quick reference. Abbreviations: American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, ARBA; Nebraska American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, NARBC)

Each state received ARBA funds through a grant process. To receive funds, register, and track their projects, states had to form their own commissions. Nebraska American Revolution Bicentennial Commission (NARBC) was passed by Legislative Bill 1339 on August 10, 1972. The NARBC had paid staff and administrative membership from across the state.³⁰ Communities across Nebraska submitted grant requests through NARBC to support their local Bicentennial activities. The motto adopted by the NARBC was "A Past to Remember, A Future

²⁶ Report to Congress. 15.

²⁷ Report to Congress. 16.

²⁸ Report to Congress, 24. Grant recipients could use in-kind contributions for up to 50 percent of its matching share, which Nebraska did utilize.

²⁹ "Penn State commissions Prize Composer." *Bicentennial Times*. Volume 3, No. 1, 5.

³⁰ *Bicentennial Final Report to Congress*, 179.

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to Mold.” In total, NARBC funded nearly 2,000 projects statewide. Today, the I-80 sculptures remain the most prominent of all the Bicentennial activities in Nebraska.³¹

A wide variety of projects were funded under all themes in Nebraska, examples of which included a living history farm, an annual ethnic awareness festival, television coverage of a Mexican-American festival in Scottsbluff, a climatological atlas of Nebraska, creation of a Nebraska art center through acquisition of six western Americana paintings by Nebraska artist C. Ellsworth, funding for Arbor Day Foundation, construction of a John J. Neihardt Center project, and the design and development of an Iowa-Nebraska Bicentennial Friendship Fountain.³²

Nebraska 4-H Club members sponsored a Bicentennial project that involved a speech and music contests with the themes “Our American Heritage” and “Spirit of ’76.”³³ Helen Worley was recognized as Omaha’s Betsy Ross by crocheting the world’s largest American flag and creating a bicentennial quilt with the seal of Nebraska as the center point. Worley was called out in a feature article about women’s contributions to Bicentennial activity across the country in ARBA’s *Bicentennial Times* publication.³⁴

Another major *Horizons* ’76 themed project in Nebraska took place at Boys Town in Omaha.³⁵ The multi-faceted project included converting the original home of Boys Town founder, Father Flanagan, into a museum. Support was also given to the Boys Town Institute for Communication Disorders in Children which assisted disabled children, and the Boys Town Center for the Study of Youth Development which operated a national research center that served disadvantaged children around the world. The Boys Town Concert Choir, comprised of children who resided at the home, produced a twelve-song musical tribute album to the country and the Bicentennial celebrations called “Boys Town Sings America.” Capitol Records in Hollywood produced and sold the album locally.³⁶

NARBC provided matching funds to a photographic documentation project in which all of Nebraska’s 93 counties were photographed between 1975–1976. Called *Nebraska Photo Documentary*. Robert Starck and Lynn Dance of Lincoln directed the project with the final collection showing at the Sheldon Art Gallery at the University of Nebraska. All negatives and images were later archived at the Nebraska State Historical Society.³⁷

In the official *Comprehensive Calendar of Events* published by ARBA, Nebraska’s major Bicentennial projects were divided into two categories: events and projects. The major events were identified as the Interstate 80 Rest Area Sculpture Project, the Wagon Train following Oregon and Mormon Trails through Nebraska, Ethnic Festivals across the state, and Nebraska Land Days which featured the largest parade in Nebraska and took place

³¹ *Comprehensive Calendar of bicentennial events: event details for States west of the Mississippi River, Feb. 1976*. American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, Washington, D.C., 1976, Nebraska. 2-169

³² “Nearly 500 projects Draw Grants From Sale of Stamps and Medals.” *Bicentennial Times*. Volume 1, No. 5, 2.

³³ “The States.” *Bicentennial Times*, Vol. 2, May 1975, 140.

³⁴ “Women in Wide-Ranging Bicentennial Activity; Orphan Becomes Omaha, Nebraska, “Betsy Ross,” *Bicentennial times*, Vol. 2, August 1975, 179.

³⁵ *Horizons* ’76 was the same them under which the I-80 Sculpture project was organized. *Horizons* was the theme that was forward looking and meant to seek futuristic and contemporary themes.

³⁶ “*Horizons* ’76 Gets Big Boost in Boys Town.” *Bicentennial Times*, Vol. 3, May 1975, 289.

³⁷ Bicentennial Final Report to Congress, 301

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in North Platte. Major Bicentennial projects included the historic marker and landscape for President Gerald Ford Birthplace in Omaha, the Friendship Fountain between Iowa and Nebraska which would tower 160 feet above the Missouri River and was designed by Isamu Noguschi, and Black Elk/John J. Neihardt Monument which was erected near the campus of Dana College in Blair.³⁸

In total, Nebraska celebrated the Bicentennial with 866 projects and 1,062 events. There were 506 officially recognized Bicentennial Communities, 11 colleges/universities, and 3 military installations in the state. Nebraska's population in 1976 was 1,533,000.³⁹

The Interstate 80 Bicentennial Sculpture Project emerged as Nebraska's most ambitious statewide Bicentennial initiative.

8. Nebraska's Interstate 80 Sculpture Project

(Abbreviations: Nebraska Interstate 80 Bicentennial Sculpture Corporation, The Corporation; American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, ARBA; Nebraska American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, NARBC; National Endowment for the Arts, NEA; Nebraska Arts Council, NAC; Nebraska Department of Roads, NDOR; Nebraska Department of Economic Development, OED)

Nebraska's I-80 Sculpture Project was conceived in 1973 as a means of integrating public art into the newly completed interstate corridor and as part of the Bicentennial celebrations.⁴⁰ The project was at times controversial and was completed by 1976, as a lasting commemoration of America's Bicentennial. Nebraska established the Nebraska Interstate 80 Bicentennial Sculpture Corporation (The Corporation) to administer, plan, and implement the sculpture project. This was a working group, distinct and separate from the NARBC. The Corporation applied the *Horizons '76* theme to support the concept of contemporary art expressed in the free-standing works created by eight American sculptors, selected from a nation-wide competition. The project was funded by the ARBA, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), NARBC, Nebraska Arts Council (NAC), and through private donations from Nebraska businesses, and communities. In all, 121 artists submitted proposals, and of those, ten were selected, with eight sculptures constructed at Nebraska rest areas. The project was controversial across the state with many supporters and detractors whose main concerns were the abstract nature of the objects, finances, and the fact that none of the sculptors were from Nebraska.⁴¹

Nebraska Governor Jim Exon urged the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce to develop Bicentennial concepts that would attract visitors to the state. The I-80 Bicentennial Sculpture project was refined after two other public art

³⁸ Natalie Kammerer. "Omaha's Riverfront: A Land of Perpetual Possibility." Douglas County Historical Society online article, accessed at www.douglascohistry.org/tag/friendship-fountain. The fountain tower project was ultimately canceled and never constructed. Neither state welcomed the project because of maintenance and operation costs as well as constructing a project between city and state lines. The design incorporated spraying water directed by a windmill and was likened to an oil derrick or high-tension wire towers. Maquettes of the Friendship Fountain are in the Noguchi Archives and can be accessed at www.archive.noguchi.org; *Comprehensive Calendar of Bicentennial Events: event details for States west of the Mississippi River, Feb. 1976*. American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, Washington, D.C., 1976, Nebraska. 2-169

³⁹ Bicentennial Final Report to Congress, 301.

⁴⁰ Ten sculptures were planned from the beginning of the program, however due to funding shortages, only eight sculptures were actually commissioned and constructed. Original plaques were created prior to the completion of the program that today, still identify ten sculptures, rather than the eight that were actually completed.

⁴¹ Mary A. Lierley, "Nebraska Interstate 80 Bicentennial Sculpture Project." Ph.D. diss., North Texas State University, 1982. lii.

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projects were discussed. Thomas A. Yates initially conceived the idea of an Interstate sculpture as early as 1971. Yates thought a giant mastodon sculpture would be the best attraction, because one of the largest mastodons discovered was on display at the University of Nebraska's Morrill Hall. Another concept included a giant football player outside Lincoln and astride I-80. Early discussions of this concept even included the possibility of a restaurant in the helmet. When Norman Geske was made aware of this, he claimed it was a "ludicrous idea...that we've got to stop."⁴²

Geske and Yates knew each other and were both influential and well-known individuals in the art and business communities.⁴³ Geske was the Director of the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus. He established the outdoor sculpture garden at the Gallery and completed a survey of American sculpture in 1970. Geske was a pivotal national figure in the art community, and his input changed the course of the project. Geske's relationship with the University led to both men including Durward "Woody" Varner, the University President in on the planning. It was during these dialogues that the concept of linking contemporary art in the form of a series of sculptures along the interstate could be partnered with the 1976 Bicentennial Celebrations.

In May 1973, Yates, with the support of Geske, submitted a revised proposal to the NARBC. This plan replaced the single mastodon sculpture with a sculpture garden featuring distinct works located at interstate rest areas. Geske and Yates envisioned a competitive, juried process to select artists, an in-residence program where each artist would be required to live and work in Nebraska communities while their pieces were being locally fabricated, and installation of these contemporary sculptures within rest areas along the I-80 corridor. Geske's guidance played a significant role in shaping both the direction and outcome of the bicentennial sculpture initiative.⁴⁴

The plan was presented to partnering agencies in August 1973. These included the NAC, Nebraska Office of Economic Development (OED), Nebraska Chamber of Commerce, NARBC, Nebraska Department of Roads (NDOR), Governor Exon, and private business executives.⁴⁵ With their support and acceptance, the project became public at a press conference that month. It was adopted in August 1973 and ARBA awarded the program a \$100,000 grant.⁴⁶

U.S. Senator Roman L. Hruska of Nebraska was Chair of the Sub-committee on Federal Charters, Holidays, and Celebrations (Committee on the Judiciary), that charted ARBA in 1973, after ARBC was abolished. Hruska

⁴² Interview III. Norman Geske. Recorded for the Center for Great Plains Studies University of Nebraska-Lincoln by Barbara Sommer, February 6, 2004. Transcript copy from Art Thompson private collection.

⁴³ Nebraska Authors Norman Geske, accessed at www.nebraskauthors.org/authors/norman-a-geske. Norman Geske was a pivotal figure in the international art community. He was the director of the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery on the University of Nebraska Lincoln campus from 1956-1983.

⁴⁴ Lierley, 9; Press Release, "The Nation's First Statewide Highway Sculpture Garden will be Dedicated in Nebraska on July 4, 1976." From the collection of Art Thompson.

⁴⁵ Nebraska Department of Roads is now the Nebraska Department of Transportation. In 2017 the Nebraska Department of Roads merged with the Nebraska Department of Aeronautics and became the Nebraska Department of Transportation. www.dot.nebraska.gov

⁴⁶ Lierley, 17.

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supported the I-80 sculpture project and his speech, recorded in the Congressional Record on October 8, 1973, in part stated about the *Horizons '76* theme:

A most imaginative step in this direction is the proposal to create outdoor sculpture projects at the rest stops along Interstate 80 with the artists involved sharing in the life of nearby communities. This proposal should be called to the attention of all fifty states. It responds to the recognized need to balance the openness of natural beauty in the Interstate system with exposure to artistic expression. For the surrounding communities it means coming to accept art and the artist as integral with daily living and not as luxuries to be experienced in brief escapes from the demands of physical and economic survival. Our forebears had to exercise a great deal of imagination to fuel their hopes that someday the Plains would be rich with signs of civilization. The sculpture and artist-in-residence proposal reflects and reinforces that imaginative spirit. I commend those who conceived it.⁴⁷

To implement the project, another committee, the Nebraska Interstate 80 Bicentennial Sculpture Corporation (the Corporation), was formed and headquartered at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery. Officers of the Corporation included the following:

- President: Durward B. “Woody” Varner (University of Nebraska President, Lincoln)
- Vice-President: Willis A. Strauss (Chairman of the Board, Northern Natural Gas Company, Omaha)
- Vice-President: George B. Cook (Chairman of the Board, Bankers Life Nebraska, Lincoln)
- Secretary/Treasurer: Arthur (Art) Thompson (Executive Director, Bicentennial Project)
- Board Members:
 - Norman A. Geske (Director, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery)
 - Goldwin A. McLellan (President, Business Committee for the Arts, New York City)
 - Ronald W. Roskens (Chancellor, University of Nebraska Omaha)
 - Thomas A. Yates (Vice President, Bankers Life Nebraska)⁴⁸

The *Horizons '76* theme provided this group with a platform to explore abstract designs, as the theme alluded to a future that was unknown and did not require expression through representational objects. Subject matter was a requirement in the sculpture project request for proposal, and all the artists who responded submitted abstract designs. This became controversial.⁴⁹ Yates described them and proposals when he wrote:

“Horizons” has to do with the future...These ten works of art are going to be created in the present and viewed in the future. It is worth noting that the sculptors who will be doing the work are living and working in the twentieth century. It is now! Figurative sculpture (General Grant on his horse) was at its peak in the eighteenth and nineteenth century but is not what American sculptors are up to today. And so, we are not celebrating the past, but the present and the future through the medium of sculpture.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Congress.gov. “Congressional Record.” Vol. 119, Part 25, 33151-33152, accessed November 18, 2025 at <https://www.congress.gov/bound-congressional-record/1973/10/08/senate-section>.

⁴⁸ Lierley, 5.; “Nebraska’s Five-Hundred Mile Sculpture Garden,” *Nebraska Living*, XLI (September, 1977), 16.

⁴⁹ Lierley, 9.

⁵⁰ “Sculpture on the Interstate,” Nebraska Interstate 80 Bicentennial Sculpture Corporation, brochure, n.d., p. 1. From personal collection of Art Thompson.

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The project was officially sanctioned by ARBA on March 6, 1975, when funds, both public and private, were secured. At that time, ARBA added eight programs to their list of officially sanctioned projects. They included The Freedom Train, Nebraska Sculptures of the Interstate Program, Sound and Light at the US Capitol, Partners in the America's Bicentennial Program, Bicentennial Parade of American Music, Internation, SYNCON, and Cominguea-Escalante Trail.⁵¹ In 1976, ARBA considered the I-80 Sculpture Project one of the four most outstanding commemorative events in the country.⁵² According to the Corporation, among the purposes of the project was to provide "access to some of the best sculpture of our time outside of museum walls."⁵³

Funding came from a variety of sources, with private corporate donations and in-kind community donations playing a key role in successfully funding and implementing the program. Notably, there were no state tax funds directed to the project. The table below illustrates the funding and funding sources.

Funding Source	Amount
American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (through the state chapter Nebraska American Revolution Bicentennial Administration)	\$100,000
American Revolution Bicentennial Administration-direct grant to project	\$12,500
National Endowment for the Arts (through the University of Nebraska)	\$20,000
Nebraska Arts Council (through the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery)	\$2,500
Corporate Contributions	\$340,000
In Kind community donations*	\$50,000 (estimated)
Total	\$525,000

**In kind donations were provided by host-cities and included, "concrete work for Von Ringelheim by Beatrice Construction Company, use of pick-up truck for Padovano by Joe Dye Company, cor-ten steel for Raimondi by Hansen Building Specialties, and storage space for limestone for Graves by Miller Seed Company."*⁵⁴

John Warner, federal Administrator of ARBA, came to Lincoln from Washington D.C. on March 6, 1975, to officially recognize the project as a National Bicentennial Project during a ceremony at the University Club in Lincoln.

Once established and sanctioned, work began in earnest to identify and select artists. Geske and Art Thompson held a press conference announcing that galleries and sculptors across the country received solicitation letters from the NIBSC for the competition. A notice was published in a bulletin from the National Sculpture Center at the University of Kansas. Artists were asked to supply the nature of the work proposed which included scale, material, cost, and commission, as well as a statement of willingness to participate in the residence program. The

⁵¹ The name of the project evolved and had several references. This reference here of the Nebraska Sculptures of the Interstate Program was only used in the ARBA announcement of the project. Elsewhere the project was referred to as the I-80 Sculpture Garden, the 450 Mile Sculpture Garden and Nebraska's Interstate Sculptures.

⁵² Lierley, 143.

⁵³ Correspondence and Press release, "Interstate 80 Bicentennial Sculpture Project," Nebraska I-80 Sculpture Corporation Records, Box 4, File P2.01.

⁵⁴ Lierley, 12.

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artists were required to illustrate a “demonstrated competence” in large scale objects suitable for the outdoors, they had to live and work in a selected Nebraska community and had to create an object that would contribute to the education and enjoyment of those traveling through Nebraska, with materials and methods required to be obtained in Nebraska. NDOR contributed to the requirements by noting that they would all be located on publicly (state) owned land and that all appropriate regulations associated with the Interstate Highway System had to be met. They also emphasized that the sculptures would be permanent installations in public rest stops and they would not be monitored or maintained as might be typical for an art object. They required that each artist, “consider immunity to vandalism, safety, and maintenance.” Among the recommended materials were concrete, stone, brick, steel, treated timber, wrought iron, aluminum, bronze, brass, and copper. Not recommended were living pieces that utilized landscaping or other plant materials, earth sculptures, or those with breakable materials, sharp areas or moving parts.⁵⁵

Of the 121 entries the Corporation received, 11 were from Nebraska artists. Three art experts – Wilder Green, Director of the American Federation of Arts in New York City; Thomas Maytham, Director of the Denver Art Museum; and, Joseph Stuart, Director of the South Dakota Memorial Art Center in Brookings-formed the jury that reviewed the first round of submittals. They invited the top 46 artists to submit final proposals.⁵⁶

Between January 15 and February 10, 1975, proposals submitted by the 46 semi-finalists were displayed at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery. The screening process included consideration of the artists’ willingness to live and construct their work in Nebraska, cost and materials estimates, and a location selection preference. Each artist received a map of the state showing rest area locations and site plans, including potential sculpture locations. Environmental information such as average temperatures, winds, and ecological data was included. Each of the 46 semi-finalists were asked to select the rest area they preferred as part of their final proposal. Of particular emphasis, was the artist in residence program because each artist was required to work with school groups, funding sponsors, and others to discuss their work. Local potential host communities then reviewed the proposals to indicate their preferences. NDOR and the Federal Highway Administration made additional reviews for conformance with regulations, maintenance, engineering, and safety.⁵⁷ On February 7, 1975, a second jury comprised of Donald B. Goodall, Director of the University Art Museum in Austin, Texas; Stephen Prokopoff, Director of the Museum of Contemporary Arts, Chicago, Illinois; and, Mary Vercauterren, Associate Director of the Fine Arts Center at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst screened the 46 proposals and recommended ten artists with four alternates, as their final selections.⁵⁸

Art Thompson notified each artist and negotiated contracts between the artist and the Corporation in April 1975. Contracts included payment agreements, details of the artist in residence program (room, board, working space, meetings, etc.), materials needed, equipment (provided by artist or project), engineering or landscaping requirements, liability issues, sculpture location, sculpture orientation, sculpture size, and needed working space. Additional site-specific details were also addressed. NDOR requested John Raimondi’s piece, “Erma’s Desire”

⁵⁵ Lierley, 18.

⁵⁶ Background Information provided in Nebraska Interstate-80 Bicentennial Sculpture Project Correspondence and press release. Nebraska I-80 Sculpture Corporation Records, Box 1, Folder B-2.

⁵⁷ Press Release.

⁵⁸ Lierley, 22.

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be placed on a concrete slab and corners rounded at the end of the beams.⁵⁹ Ultimately this did not happen, and “Erma’s Desire” rises directly out of the earth with sharp points at the end of the beams.⁶⁰ Commission costs ranged from \$8,000 to \$60,000 per piece. With all requirements met, on July 9, 1975, at dual press conferences in New York City and Lincoln, Nebraska, the ten sculptors were announced, and photographs of their renderings were released to the public. The table below lists each artist awarded a commission, their location, the chosen rest area site, and the name of their piece.⁶¹

<i>Sculptor</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Sculpture</i>	<i>Site</i>
Richard Field	Northfield, Minnesota	<i>Memorial to the American Bandshell</i>	Platte River Eastbound (Omaha)
Paul Von Ringelheim	New York City	<i>Arrival</i>	Blue River Eastbound (Seward/Milford)
Bradford Graves	New York City	<i>Crossing the Plains</i>	York Westbound
John Raimondi	South Portland, Maine	<i>Erma’s Desire</i>	Grand Island Eastbound
George Baker	Altadena, California	<i>Nebraska Wind Sculpture</i>	Kearney Westbound
Steven Urry	New York City	<i>Platte River Ribbon</i>	Cozad Eastbound*
Anthony Padovano	North Bergen, New Jersey	<i>Nebraskan Gateway</i>	Brady Westbound (North Platte)
Linda Howard	New York City	<i>Up/Over</i>	Ogallala Westbound
Hans Van de Bovenkamp	Tillson, New York	<i>Roadway Confluence</i>	Sidney Westbound**
Jerry Rothman	Los Angeles, California	<i>Seed of Nebraska</i>	Kimball Eastbound*

*These two sculptures were never completed because of lack of funds.

**This sculpture was completed but is no longer extant.

⁵⁹ Lierley, 24.

⁶⁰ Additional detailed information on “Erma’s Desire” and John Raimondi can be found on the individual National Register nomination as well as in the following section on the controversy that ensued.

⁶¹ Lierley, 25.

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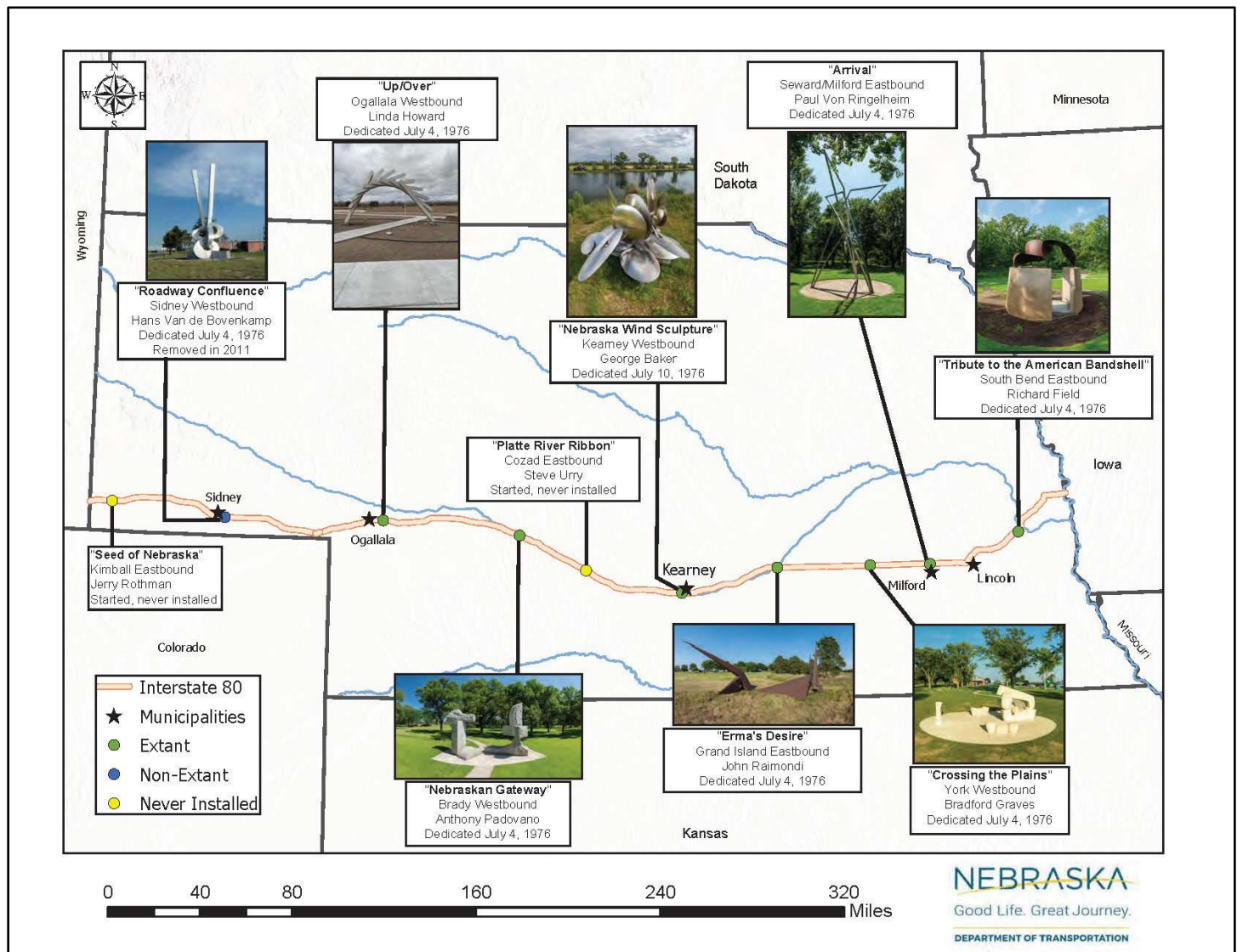


Figure 1. Illustrated map showing location and image of each sculpture. Map courtesy Nebraska Department of Transportation.

Along with living in the communities where the sculptures would be located, each sculptor was expected to provide educational programs to schools, utilize local craftsman in the construction of their pieces, and work in local spaces to finalize the development of their sculptures.⁶² To support the project, Art Thompson, Thomas Yates, Norman Geske, and Forrest Critchfield held meetings in each of the host cities along the Interstate to ensure their support and endorse the project. The artists were queried about their thoughts on the Nebraska commissions and their experience in the communities through the artist in residence programs. The results were uniformly positive. Paul von Ringelheim wrote that, "The Interstate 80 project turned out to be much more than a commission-it was a true opportunity to meet and understand the members of the community...With Interstate 80, the community wanted to experience the artists as much as it wanted to receive the work."⁶³

⁶² Lierley, 25.

⁶³ Lierley, 51. Based on personal correspondence between the author and Paul von Ringelheim.

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Seven out of ten sculptures were finished and put in place for the dedication ceremonies on July 4, 1976. The eighth piece, *Nebraska Wind Sculpture* in Kearney, was completed later in September 1976. Two remaining pieces at Kimball Eastbound and Cozad Eastbound were never constructed due to funding constraints that largely stemmed from project controversies.

9. Controversy to Completion

Though this project was praised by ARBA, it was controversial at the state level. The controversy was two-fold and included concerns about the vagaries on accepting the sculptures as gifts to the state, and the public perception of the program. Nebraskans were unsatisfied at the abstract designs and the lack of local artists involved. Robert Hodesh dubbed the controversy “The Great Bicentennial Sculpture War” in his 1977 *Ford Times Magazine* article.⁶⁴ Many in the public believed their input was bypassed and that local or statewide participation in the project was not invited. They were forced to like something imposed on them by a jury from out of state. Norman Geske stated in an interview with the Omaha World-Herald that “geysers of controversy” erupted. He also stated, the controversy could be advantageous to increase awareness of the project. He “had to discourage lots of high hopes that there would be cowboys on horseback.”⁶⁵

The *New York Times* reported on the project and the controversy surrounding one particular piece, the sculpture titled “Erma’s Desire” by John Raimondi to be placed in Grand Island. One letter to the editor stated, “We decided that it is Erma’s Desire that she doesn’t give birth to another pointed-head child who will grow up to be another legislator who would appropriate money for such utter foolishness.”⁶⁶ The Hall County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to deny a building permit for the piece. However, because it was to be constructed on state-owned land, the threat of denying a building permit did not hold any power.

One Lincoln headline summed it up stating, “No Indians, No Bison, No Covered Wagons, I-80 Sculpture Project Unveiled.”⁶⁷ The project continued to make national news when the “Today Show” covered the controversy and guests Linda Howard, the sculptor of *Up/Over* in Ogallala and Ann Svoboda, the Chair of Ogallala support group were interviewed.⁶⁸

NDOR and the Corporation worked to introduce the project to communities across the state. They flooded the public media market with news releases, and held public meetings in May 1975 at Gretna, York, Kearney, Sidney, and North Platte to explain their involvement in the project. Art Thompson, Corporation board member and project director, along with NDOR officials explained the project and opened public dialog. One point of contention, aside from the aesthetics, was the state’s ability to receive gifts. State statute allowed NDOR (as an agency) to receive gifts, but the State of Nebraska could not. Any gift to the state, exceeding \$10,000, must be approved by the governor and the legislature. These legal technicalities had to be resolved, and the issue was so

⁶⁴ Robert Hodesh, “The Great Bicentennial Sculpture War,” *Ford Times Magazine*, September 1977, 38.

⁶⁵ *Grand Island Daily Independent*, (Grand Island, NE) July 11, 1975.

⁶⁶ “Geysers of Protest for Nebraska Art.” *The New York Times* (New York, New York) July 31, 1975. It should also be noted here that no state taxpayer funds were used in the Bicentennial Sculpture project.

⁶⁷ Helen Hagge. “No Indians, No Bison, No Covered Wagons, I-80 Sculpture Project Unveiled,” *Lincoln Evening Journal*, July 9, 1975, 1.

⁶⁸ Additional information and details on controversy regarding individual sculptures can be found in the individual National Register forms for each object.

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serious that the Corporation had to contact the artists to inform them of this technicality and the potential problems it posed. The delay and uncertainty during the period from August to December 1975 was significant in project planning. Corporate contributions lagged and as a result, only eight of the ten sculptures could be completed.⁶⁹

Though Governor Exon favored the project and supported it, on May 22, 1975, he vetoed the \$150,000 in state funds that were to be used towards it. He requested a legal interpretation whether he could solely approve/accept the project or whether legislative action was needed. A series of legislative hearings ensued, in Lincoln, Omaha, Grand Island, North Platte, and Scottsbluff, all in December 1975. These provided the public with another opportunity to comment on the project. A standard meeting format was established as part of fact-finding and to tabulate public perception of the project. The structure of the meetings included a chance for those in favor of accepting the sculptures as gifts to speak, and then those opposed. No demonstrations or other distractions were permitted, and no conclusions were made as part of the meetings. They served as a record and resource for the Legislature to consider in their decision-making process. The meetings were well attended, with 175 at Grand Island alone.⁷⁰

Leo Daly, introduced the project during the hearings, and reminded the attending public that many of the most beloved public art pieces were controversial when they were constructed, including the *Blizzard of '88* mural in the rotunda of the Nebraska State Capitol, also an abstract mosaic representing the devastating natural event.⁷¹ The swell of negativity was felt. Art Thompson, worried about the project being postponed, encouraged supporters and opponents to speak up. He stated:

Controversy over the sculpture itself is certainly expected and valid, as we all differ in our likes and dislikes. The important point is that those who like the project because of its concept, the sculpture, or on the basis of artistic freedom must speak out now...Because our detractors have been highly visible and our supporters have not, many people, including some senators, are of the opinion that most people are opposed to the project. I do not believe this to be the case. It is time for those who support the arts, freedom of expression, and the rights of people to enjoy art of their choice to speak out.⁷²

At the same time, the State Highway Commission recognized the public's concern over the absence of traditional themes that affected the public perception of the project.

Hundreds of people attended the meetings with three times as many speaking in favor of the sculptures. Opponents repeated their dissatisfaction with the designs, use of taxpayer money, maintenance costs, lack of Nebraska artists, and locations.⁷³ The artist-in-residence program, promotion of visual arts in Nebraska, appreciation of the sculptures themselves, the national publicity that created a different image for Nebraska, and the promotion of tourism in the state were the issues most brought up by the public during the meetings. Oppositional issues included a general dislike of the designs because they were not historical and were abstract in nature, the

⁶⁹ Lierley, 59-60.

⁷⁰ Lierley 62-64.

⁷¹ At the time Leo Daly was Chair of the NIBSC and attended the meetings. Leo Daly was the son of the founder of Leo A. Daly architecture, one of the largest architecture firms in the country. Leo A Daly was founded in 1915, has approximately 1,000 employees and over 30 offices internationally. The firm is headquartered in Omaha. www.leoadaly.com; Lierley, 64.

⁷² Art Thompson, letter to the Nebraska Arts Council, October 30, 1975. Bicentennial Sculpture Collection, NSHS archive.

⁷³ Gail DeBuse Potter. *The Bicentennial Sculpture Project: A Nebraska Controversy*. Unpublished article.

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expenditure of public funds, future maintenance, location within the rest areas, and the lack of Nebraska artists among the sculptors selected.⁷⁴

The matter of maintenance, ownership, and state funding proved persuasive, impacting the public, legislators, and the governor in their decision-making process. State officials reviewed the project again and remained concerned about accepting the sculptures as gifts, because they would be valued at more than \$10,000 per piece. Governor Exon believed they were already approved when the legislative bill LB610 was approved in 1975 accepting the program. He expressed his continued support for the project, provided state tax dollars were eliminated.

Despite the ongoing controversy, Governor Exon maintained his support of the program and his lack of comment on the aesthetics of the project was noted by many. This is documented in a letter where he states, "The discussion at this time is revolving around the artistic quality of the actual works...I strongly feel that the selection of artwork and the judgment of art quality should not be made in the political arena. I am not an art expert and, therefore, do not feel qualified to make artistic judgments."⁷⁵

At the end of the legislative hearings on December 5, 1975, the final report calculated that 680 people attended and 37 spoke in favor of the project with 17 speaking against the project. Presenting this unbiased documentation pleased State Senator Ralph Kelly who was chair of the legislature's Subcommittee on the I-80 sculptures.⁷⁶ Senator Kelly was a pivotal legislative force in the project. He believed these statistics illustrated the successful non-partisan process to support the legislature's decision to formally accept the project (and the sculptures as gifts to the state).

He ultimately submitted a report to the Executive Board's Subcommittee on the I-80 Sculpture Project in December 1975. He identified four alternatives for the Executive Board's consideration including refusing the sculptures, accepting the sculptures, accepting five modern sculptures and requiring five traditional pieces, or accepting all ten pieces and instructing the Nebraska Arts Council to create a similar "All Nebraska Project" that would add ten traditional sculptures. The Nebraska Attorney General offered his opinion that the Department of Roads did not need legislative or gubernatorial approval to accept the sculptures. On January 14, 1976, Senators Kelly and John Savage introduced Legislative Resolution 108 to accept the sculptures on behalf of the citizens of Nebraska.⁷⁷

With this approval, the Corporation needed to quickly raise nearly \$200,000 between January and July 1976, to complete the project for that year's July 4 celebrations. It became clear that the delay caused by the controversy would impact project completion and additional fundraising.⁷⁸

Seven of the ten commissioned pieces were completed and celebrated in dedication ceremonies on July 4, 1976. They included Paul Von Ringelheim's *Arrival* for the Blue River eastbound rest area; Brad Graves' *Crossing the*

⁷⁴ Lierley, 79.

⁷⁵ Governor James Exon, to Leon Olson, Landmarks, Inc., Lincoln, NE Dec. 9, 1975, Nebraska I-80 Bicentennial Sculpture Corporation Records, Box 2, File L1.03.

⁷⁶ "Nebraska Blue Book." 1973-1978, accessed at www.govdocs.neb/leg1978-1979. Senator Ralph Kelly served District 35 in the Nebraska State Legislature (Grand Island).

⁷⁷ Potter, 20. John Savage was a Senator from Omaha's 10th District.

⁷⁸ "The Nation's First Statewide Highway Sculpture Garden will be Dedicated in Nebraska on July 4, 1976", press release from the collection of Art Thompson.

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Plains at the York westbound rest stop; John Raimondi's *Erma's Desire* at the Grand Island eastbound rest stop; Anthony Padovano's *Nebraska Gateway* for the Brady westbound rest stop; Linda Howard's *Up/Over* for the Ogallala westbound rest stop; Hans Van de Bovenkamp's *Roadway Confluence* for the Sidney westbound rest stop; and Richard Field's *Memorial to the American Bandshell* at the Platte River eastbound rest stop. George Baker's *Nebraska Wind Sculpture* at the Kearney westbound rest stop was completed and later dedicated in September, but Steve Urry's *Platte River Ribbon* for the Cozad eastbound rest stop and Jerry Rothman's *Seed of Nebraska* for the Kimball eastbound rest stop were never completed because of a lack of funds. Plaques were cast and mounted close to the ground on short concrete bases at each of the rest areas and today they still state that each sculpture is one of ten rather than the one of eight that were actually installed.⁷⁹

During the dedication ceremonies on July 4, 1976, Lieutenant Governor Gerald Whelan and other dignitaries flew by helicopter to each site across the state in a timed event that began every hour on the hour, starting with Richard Field's sculpture *Memorial to the American Bandshell*, the easternmost location, at the Platte River East Bound rest area near Omaha at noon. Whelan stated that, "We will inaugurate a museum without walls that has been created in the midst of our prairie landscape and dedicate works of art that will one day be considered historic landmarks."⁸⁰

In 1976, ARBA announced that it considered the I-80 Bicentennial Sculpture project one of the four most outstanding commemorative events in the United States.⁸¹

10. Conclusions

Despite the controversy, legal entanglements, and logistical challenges, Nebraska's Interstate sculptures were a success. ARBA recognized it as one of the four most outstanding state Bicentennial projects in the country. In 1977, the Business Committee for the Arts in New York City awarded their Business in the Arts Award to Bankers Life Nebraska and Northern Natural Gas Company for their support of the project. Despite these recognitions, the broader regional and national art community made no nod toward the project. There was no mention of the project in any of the major art publications. Sculptor Anthony Padovano believed strongly in the I-80 sculpture project. He expressed that in his opinion it was one of the "most important contributions to contemporary sculpture in the twentieth century."⁸² He also expressed some regret that it did not receive more attention and recognition from the art community. Padovano was one of the most accomplished sculptors in the group and had received the prestigious international Prix de Rome award.⁸³ As a public art program, the I-80 Bicentennial sculptures were recognized across the country. The art community was not as vociferous about the project or recognizing the individual works of art.

These objects have remained within their respective rest area locations since their installation in 1976. One piece, Hans Van de Bovenkamp's *Roadway Confluence* at the Sidney Westbound rest area is no longer extant. It was a

⁷⁹ Potter, 21.

⁸⁰ Press Release. George Baker's sculpture at the Kearney Westbound rest area "Nebraska Wind Sculpture" was not completed in time for the grand dedication tour. It was installed in September and separate dedication was held for it on September 10, 1976.

⁸¹ Lierley, 14.

⁸² Lierley, 42.

⁸³ Lierley, 145-147.

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35-foot-tall sculpture of polished lightweight aluminum and was pummeled by the harsh Nebraska winds in its location near Sidney. The structure was unstable and created a safety hazard for visitors. NDOR undertook rehabilitation work that involved drilling holes and cutting out access plates in the sculpture. Structural reinforcement, including large diameter rebar and prestressed cables were installed to secure the upright elements of the sculpture to the base. Specialized expertise in welding was required to provide structural support and that allowed the hollow sculpture to be filled with concrete. This renovation was completed in October 1997. These repair efforts deteriorated the work even further, and in March 2009, it was removed by NDOR.⁸⁴

During the same period the sculpture was deteriorating, the Federal Highway Administration and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation were in discussions to declare the interstate highway system exempt from Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. As the interstate approached the 50-year anniversary in 2006, many sections would have achieved the age at which resources are evaluated for historic significance. To address the volume of work this could generate, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation adopted the *Section 106 Exemption Regarding Effects to the Interstate Highway System* on March 10, 2005. This excludes most of the interstate system from consideration as a historic property under Section 106, and as a result, Federal agencies were no longer required to consider any interstate highway as a historic property under Section 106. It also provided the opportunity for each state to identify features of the system that are in some way exceptional and should be considered National Register eligible, and as a result not covered by the federal exemption.⁸⁵

The Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Robert Puschendorf took a strong stance that the I-80 Bicentennial Sculptures were eligible for the National Register and should be part of the list of *Nationally and Exceptionally Significant Features of the Federal Interstate Highway System* (the List). Puschendorf, along with Heritage Nebraska (a statewide historic preservation organization, now defunct) pushed NDOR, FHWA, and the ACHP to include the sculptures. At the time of this dialog the objects were only 30 years old and did not meet the minimum age recommendation for National Register eligibility. Puschendorf stated in an oral interview, that he remembers when they were installed and the controversy around the program. He described himself as a budding historian at the time, and once in the position to consider them within the context of the federal highway system, was convinced of their historic significance. Today, there are two resources on the List in Nebraska, one of which is the I-80 Bicentennial Sculptures.⁸⁶

Following the removal of *Roadway Confluence*, a dialog began between NDOR, NAC, Sheldon Art Museum, Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office, and Heritage Nebraska to discuss the future maintenance of the remaining seven sculptures. As a result, NDOR and the NAC entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2011 that remains in place today. That document concluded the state would conduct routine (non-structural) maintenance to the sculptures and surrounding areas. They would also keep the remaining sculptures in their present locations except when a move may be required for highway or rest area reconstruction. They would continue to consult with appropriate parties regarding any work identified beyond routine maintenance.

⁸⁴ "Nebraska Department of Roads Continuing the Story, 1997-2006." A supplement to "A Story of Highway Development in Nebraska" accessed at www.dot.nebraska.gov/history-general-continuing-story

⁸⁵ "Historic Roads, Interstate Highway System." Environmental Review Toolkit, accessed at https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_topics/historic_pres/roads.aspx

⁸⁶ Oral interview between Robert Puschendorf and Melissa Dirr Gengler, November 2025.

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Maintenance officials would notify NAC when any concerns regarding structural integrity or damage to the sculptures were identified. Each agency would continue to seek maintenance funds, conduct repairs, and relocate (if required) as part of future activities. They also agreed to store the remnants of “Roadway Confluence” in the storage yard near Sidney for a period of one year.⁸⁷

In support of these efforts, the NAC agreed to conduct an annual assessment of the sculptures and share their findings with transportation officials. They would also consult regarding any work beyond routine maintenance or if one of the pieces must be moved. To support these efforts, the NAC would also seek funding to support the maintenance, repair, and if required relocation of any of the sculptures. Most recent activity includes conservation assessments and work recommendations of all seven remaining sculptures completed in 2024 and 2025. This agreement remains in effect today and this partnership is in support of the efforts to list the sculptures in the National Register.⁸⁸

F. Associated Property Types

(Provide description, significance, and registration requirements.)

Eight sculptures were ultimately erected at I-80 rest areas across Nebraska, and seven remain today. The sculptures are one-of-a-kind fine art objects selected through a juried competition. They vary in size, materials, and location within the rest areas. There is only one property type for this context and of that one property type there are only seven extant examples. The property type is an artistic object of various materials designed and built by an artist and constructed within a local community as part of an artist in residency program. Each sculpture is accessible to the public via the system of walkways at the various rest areas. Sculptures are placed with context in mind, and each location is driven by the specific nature of each I-80 rest area. Context was driven by NDOR, safety and engineering standards, and appropriateness for each piece within the I-80 corridor.

It is important to note that the associative attributes for each object centers around their location within I-80 rest areas in Nebraska. The specific location within the rest area or even the specific rest area itself is not as critical as the association with the interstate rest area system. Each sculpture was selected for the project before a rest area or community location was identified, so the materials, locations within the rest areas, and communities themselves are not as critical as the associative location within the I-80 corridor and the rest area system. There are no property subtypes as this is a small finite group of objects with a specific associative context, which will not grow.

These objects were reviewed using National Register Criteria A, B, C, and D. For this nomination, Criterion A—significance in the area of Art—is the most relevant, as explained further below. Criterion A pertains to properties connected to key events in the context of the public art program established in Nebraska through the American Bicentennial. The Bicentennial itself and its nationwide planning represent a notable chapter in America’s history. While the event itself is undeniably significant, *National Register Bulletin 15, How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, clarifies that simply being linked to historic events or trends does not satisfy Criterion A; the property must have a direct and important association. Many projects, activities, and events took place

⁸⁷ “Memorandum of Understanding Between the Nebraska Department of Roads and the Nebraska Arts Council. On file at Nebraska Department of Transportation, May 2011.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

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throughout Nebraska during the Bicentennial. Although these sculptures serve as lasting reminders of the era, their true importance comes from their association with the public art program that required competitive selection, in-residence service, and use of local resources. Nebraska established this important public art program within the context of planning for the U.S. Bicentennial commemorative celebrations nationwide and efficiently managed this ambitious public arts program led by the Nebraska Interstate 80 Bicentennial Sculpture Corporation and the Nebraska American Revolution Bicentennial Commission. The seven surviving sculptures at the seven rest areas are excellent representations of an arts program organized and successfully executed in service to the celebration and commemoration of the U.S. Bicentennial. They are therefore eligible for listing under Criterion A in the area of Art.⁸⁹

Criterion B did not identify any individuals whose historical contributions are represented by this project. This standard applies to properties that showcase a person's major achievements, not their birthplace or commemorative sites. To meet this criterion, it is necessary to name an influential person and link their noteworthy accomplishments to this project and its sculptures. Since the project was managed by a team and a corporation rather than a single individual, no one stands out as a leader. Further investigation into each artist might uncover relevant significance, potentially supporting the nomination of a particular sculpture under Criterion B. However, as of now, no additional context has been found that would justify recognizing any individual artist for Criterion B significance.⁹⁰

These objects are not eligible under Criterion D, as they are extant rather than ruins or subsurface artifacts. Given the comprehensive nature of the historic record, there is no reasonable expectation that these objects would provide information beyond what is already documented.

The objects could be eligible under Criterion C for their significance in the area of Art. Their physical characteristics do not fall into a style, period, or type of construction as each object is a unique form and material, rather they are categorized as the vision of each individual artist. Spatial relationships, orientation, planning, materials, artistry, and environmental relationships are important considerations to National Register eligibility. There is not a specific element of location or setting for each individual site of the sculptures, outside of their location in an interstate rest area. Each sculpture was uniquely sited within the rest area based on safety considerations, engineering standards, and accessibility recommended by NDOR and based on established safety requirements. To be considered eligible under Criterion C in the area of art, an analysis of the artistic movements in monumental, abstract sculpture in the 1970s would need to be developed. That information has not been developed for this project.

The rest areas themselves are ever-changing, constantly being modernized and improved. They are not considered eligible or part of this nomination. Boundary considerations for each object include only the footprint of the object itself (with any supporting base or armature). Associated with the sculptures are a grouping of small cast markers that were mass produced prior to the completion of the project. The marker text notes that ten sculptures were constructed as part of the project. Only eight sculptures were constructed because there were not sufficient funds to complete all ten sculptures. Because the signs were produced and printed prior to the completion of the

⁸⁹ Bulletin 15, 12.⁹⁰ Bulletin 15, 14.

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program, they were never changed and today identify each sculpture as being one of ten. The signs are not part of this context.

The condition of the sculptures varies based on materials. Concrete and stone materials have seen some spalling over time while some metals have patinaed or even rusted over time. These condition issues do not inherently contribute to or detract from the physical characteristics that imbue the sculptures with significance, rather the expression of the artists vision is important. The period of construction of these objects is the first half of 1976. Seven of the eight sculptures that were commissioned were in place by July 4, 1976, to celebrate the bicentennial. The last sculpture was installed in September 1976. No other sculptures or objects are part of this evaluation.

The sculptures are significant at the national level as art objects that were commissioned as part of a public art program and considered a gift to Nebraska and the traveling American public. They were meant to stir emotions and create dialog, rather than represent easily recognizable and literal figures. As such, their abstract nature is a key component to their significance under Criterion A. These sculptures embody the vision of Nebraska's bicentennial committee under the artistic leadership of Norman Geske and implemented by project Director, Art Thompson. They are the only examples of Nebraska's I-80 bicentennial sculptures.

Registration Requirements

The seven remaining sculptures are significant under Criterion A in the area of Art at the national level of significance. The sculptures were placed within rest areas along the interstate in Nebraska. This corridor was selected to benefit all those who traveled the state and the residents of the state who would have easy access to them. Each was selected through a juried competition and located at an interstate rest area in Nebraska. There are no unifying characteristics in terms of property types (other than being art objects) or materials. To be part of this contextual cover, the sculptures must have been selected as part of the juried bicentennial art competition, must have been created and built by the selected artist, and must currently be located within an interstate rest area. They are significant because of their accessibility to the traveling public utilizing the interstate rest area system in Nebraska. They represent the work of master artists selected from a national competition and each unique object embodies the distinctive characteristics of the creative process.

The sculptures were quite controversial at the time of their installation with many in Nebraska yearning for a more traditional, representative, and easily identifiable subject matter. The contemporary and interpretive objects that were installed created a new artistic dialog in Nebraska. Visionaries of the project, Norman Geske and Art Thompson, spurred the dialog through their commitment to the competition and the theme of looking to the future. These sculptures commemorate the Bicentennial celebration and met the theme of *Horizons '76...looking forward*.

Integrity and Criteria Considerations

As part of a commemorative program, the American Bicentennial, the objects must be assessed under Criteria Consideration F. A commemorative property is one that was designed or constructed after an important historical event but is not directly associated with that event. The objects all meet the requirements of Criteria Consideration F for Commemorative Properties because they were produced and installed as part of a nationwide commemorative event. This differs from a commemorative plaque or historical marker installed to recognize a

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past event, like a monument to a battle or a community's settlement. Their association with the commemoration of the American Bicentennial is part of their funding, planning, and construction and not an inherent part of their associative significance under Criterion A.

Significance of these properties is derived from their value as cultural expressions from the date of their creation. Properties must possess significance on their own value and merit and not on the value or merit of the event being memorialized.⁹¹ These seven interstate sculptures are significant under Criterion A as exemplars of the public art program in Nebraska. Though commemorative properties are generally not considered eligible, these sculptures are being nominated under this cover for their association with the public art program expressed through the contemporary vision of each artist under Criterion A.

These sculptures retain excellent physical integrity today. Their physical integrity is integral to their location within I-80 rest areas. The surroundings have changed little with the exception of minor rest area improvements and in some cases, new rest area buildings. Sculptures are generally accessed by a series of walkways that wind around the grassy and tree covered areas providing respite for travelers. Materials, setting, feeling, and association are all established by the unique and varied physical characteristics and materials of each object and their association with the transportation setting. One sculpture, *Nebraska Wind Sculpture*, at the Kearney Westbound rest area has been moved within the rest area. It and any sculptures moved in the future should be assessed against Criteria Consideration B: Moved Properties, whose consideration for listing in the NRHP is limited "because significance is embodied in locations and settings as well as in the properties themselves. Moving a property destroys the relationships between the property and its surroundings and destroys associations with historic events and persons. A move may also cause the loss of historic features ... as well as loss of the potential for associated archeological deposits."⁹² The kinetic sculpture has been moved from its original location in the rest area pond to an appropriate new location adjacent to the pond (elaborated upon in the sculpture's nomination). The sculpture retains integrity because the important location is the context within the rest area and not the specific site within the rest area (elaborated upon below, under "Geographical Data").

The period of significance under Criterion A begins in 1973, when the NARBA and the Corporation were formed, and extends to 1976, the year of their construction and installation.

G. Geographical Data

Geographical location: Currently there are seven sculptures located at Nebraska Interstate 80 Rest areas as identified below. The specific rest area is not significant to the geographical data, but the location within a rest area associated with I-80 is important. The public art program was designed to engage the traveling public by locating monumental art within rest areas along I-80. The intent of the program from its inception was to engage and activate the rest areas along the Interstate with the art objects. As such, location within a rest area along I-80 is among the key components of physical integrity. The association with rest areas and the interstate is more important than the specific rest areas. As such, if a sculpture is moved, a new location within another rest area could contribute to retaining physical integrity, because the sculpture would still meet all the important parameters of the public art program. It would provide an opportunity for the traveling public to interact with art while

⁹¹ National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, 45.

⁹² National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, 29.

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traveling the I-80 system. Additionally, the object's original location within the rest area contributes to the physical integrity of each piece, but location within the rest area is not critical to express the character defining features of a piece, being chosen (as stated above) based on safety, engineering standards, and accessibility, which are subject to change. A sculpture may be moved within the rest area and still retain physical integrity. The proposed boundary for each nominated property would be the footprint of the sculpture itself which would include any supporting base or armature.

Platte River East Bound

Blue River East Bound

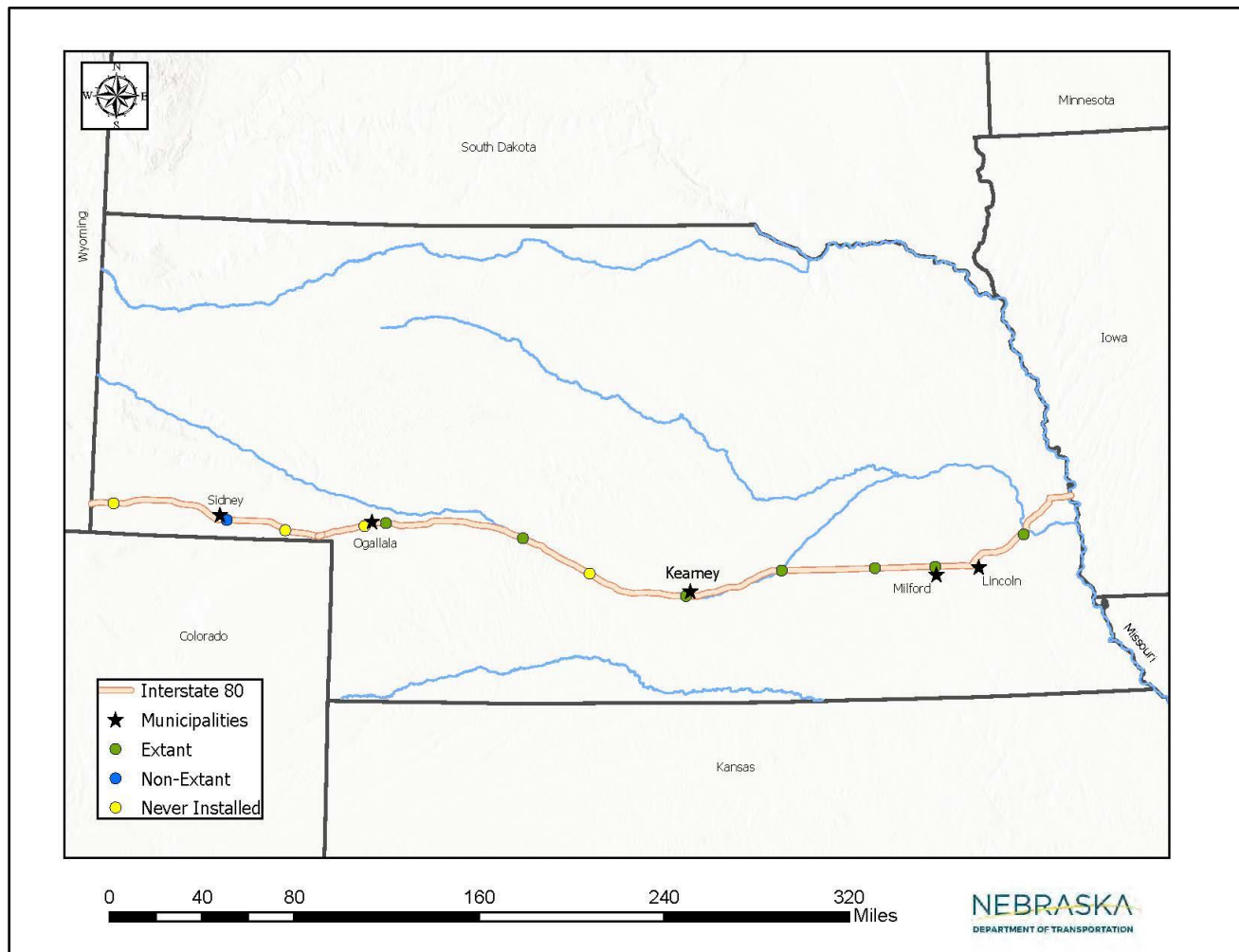
York West Bound

Grand Island East Bound

Kearney West Bound

Brady West Bound

Ogallala West Bound



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Figure 2. Green dots on map above illustrate the location of extant sculptures in rest areas along I-80.

H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

(Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.)

The purpose of this context is to document the Bicentennial I-80 sculptures in Nebraska. A comprehensive literature search, records review, and site file inventory was conducted that included a variety of primary and secondary source materials which included meeting minutes of the planning committees, newspaper articles, television broadcasts, Nebraska Department of Transportation files, online resources of the Nebraska Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration, thesis studies, unpublished articles, private archival collections, and the collections of the Nebraska Interstate Bicentennial Sculpture Project collection housed at the Nebraska State Historical Society Library and Archive.

Historic context research and documentation supported the significance of the sculptures as art objects. Context research also developed and presented an understanding of the organized federal, state, and local efforts to commemorate the nation's bicentennial through a variety of celebrations, with a focus on Nebraska's efforts. Each artist was researched and their background information provided to establish their contributions to the art community across the country. Additionally, the context and controversy of this program among Nebraska residents was also explored through televised local meetings, national news media, and state public television documentaries.

Preliminary research at the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office and the Nebraska Department of Transportation identified the rest areas where the seven extant sculptures are located. Field inventory was conducted to document their existing condition and photograph each sculpture. The Nebraska Arts Council contributed by sharing their conservation efforts to preserve and maintain the sculptures. Conservation reports completed by Jensen Conservation in 2024 contributed to an understanding of the condition and treatment methods to maintain the objects.

Correspondence between the Federal Highway Administration, the Nebraska Department of Transportation, and the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office between approximately 2000 and 2009 were critical to reference the dialog among the agencies regarding the potential eligibility of the resources. The Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office in partnership with the Nebraska Department of Transportation conducted a survey of historic highways in 2002 that included a study of I-80. The sculptures were ultimately listed on the "Final List of Nationally and Exceptionally Significant Features of the Federal Interstate Highway System" in 2006. Following that listing the Nebraska Department of Transportation entered into an agreement with the Nebraska Arts Council to maintain and preserve the sculptures.

Highway history has been well documented in Nebraska through previous studies and National Register Multiple Property Document Forms for resources such as the Meridian Highway and the Lincoln Highway. Though there has been extensive correspondence, dialog, and review of the sculptures themselves, there has not been a concerted effort to document them as historic properties outside the consultation that took place in the early 2000s and resulted in them being placed on the Federal Highway exemption list mentioned above.

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Primary resources from meetings, personal archives, and those involved in the planning of this project who remain active in the community today supported the contextual development. Oral interviews with participants including Art Thompson who was one of the planners were valuable in contributing to the context. Recorded interviews with Norman Geske also contributed to a firsthand expression of the project and its planning.

Support for this project is widespread among the managing and regulatory agencies associated with these sculptures. This project was largely driven to recognize these as historically significant objects under Criterion A in the area of Art and as part of the upcoming US 250 celebrations scheduled for July 4, 2026. An appropriate 50-year milestone for these Bicentennial objects.

Consultation with the Committee for the Preservation of the I-80 Bicentennial Sculptures, an advocacy group established in 2024, provided guidance as well. They raise funds to conserve, interpret, recognize, and educate the public about this important art project. The organization is housed at the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation and works closely with the NAC to educate and reinvigorate public involvement in the project. They are actively raising funds to conserve each sculpture, to support this nomination process, and to program activities for the America 250 Celebrations. Art Thompson, the director of the original I-80 Bicentennial Sculpture project, is an active part of the current committee.

Conclusion

Nebraska's I-80 Bicentennial sculpture project is nationally significant under Criterion A in the area of Art. The "Horizons" theme selected by the Corporation addressed the future of America. Of the three selected themes, which also included "Heritage" and "Festival," "Horizons" was the least frequently used, at less than 23% of all projects proposed as of April 1975. Several national and state organizations sanctioned the project including ARBA, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), NARBC, Federal Highway Commission, and the NAC. At a 1975 celebration in Lincoln, John Warner, ARBA Director, officially accepted the public art program as a nationally celebrated Bicentennial event. The project was considered exceptional by ARBA as a national Bicentennial commemoration. In 1976, they recognized the project as one of the four most outstanding Bicentennial plans in the United States, supporting the importance of the project.⁹³ The Business Committee for the Arts of New York City bestowed additional national commendation in March 1977 by awarding its 11th annual honorarium to corporate business for participation in the Arts to Bankers Life Nebraska and Northern Natural Gas Company for their part in the project. Corporate officers, George Cook and Willis Strauss took an active role in the project, and the companies were significant financial supporters.⁹⁴

The project was regarded and known by people in various parts of the country from their own personal travel and first-hand experience, reading about the project, or word-of-mouth. Requests for information about the project came from California, Massachusetts, Texas, and Idaho among others. It even touched the fashion industry when the artwork was used in a Vogue Magazine advertisement for Hovland-Swanson. Louis Shackelford, Hovland-Swanson president posted the ad in the June issue of the magazine. Their reasoning was in the "tremendous impact the sculptures have for Nebraska and the nation," and that the company considered the public art project to be

⁹³ Lierley, 143.

⁹⁴ Lierley, 144. Total funding for the project was approximately \$525,000 and approximately 80% of those funds came from Nebraska businesses and individuals while 20% was from federal tax money and royalties from Bicentennial items. Recognition within the business community of their donations and generosity was important on the national stage for these Nebraska businesses.

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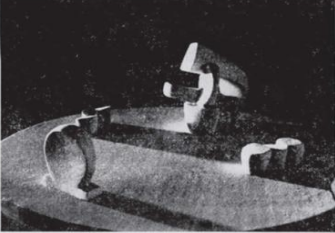
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one of the finest contributions to the Bicentennial celebrations by any state in the nation. The advertisement even utilized the “Horizons” theme by noting that the women’s fashions would be modern and not looking to the past but “on the horizon to our third century.”⁹⁵

Bradford Graves' "Crossing the Plains"—9' long x 7' wide x 10' high limestone sculpture to be located near York. First in a series of ten.

As seen in June VOGUE



bicentennial impressions

Nebraska's Bicentennial **SCULPTURE GARDEN** being created along Nebraska's I-80 from east to west. Modern sculptures, not looking to the past, but looking on the horizon to our third century. **ST. JOHN KNITS** created for the woman who appreciates the quality and luxury of a hand knit. As you can see, by shaping and detail it is a virtually timeless suit. Black or alabaster, sizes 4 to 16, \$220. The new **HOVLAND-SWANSON** store soon to be in Omaha's Regency Fashion Court, one of the nation's finest shopping centers. Come to see us, as we begin an age of new adventure with Nebraska, and America and You!

hovland-swanson
LINCOLN • GRAND ISLAND • OMAHA '78

OPENING IN AUGUST - HOVLAND-SWANSON IN OMAHA'S REGENCY FASHION COURT



bicentennial impressions

hovland-swanson

10 Advertisement

11 Advertisement



bicentennial impressions

hovland-swanson

6 David Webb

7 Hovland-Swanson

⁹⁵ "York I-80 Sculpture to Be Featured in Ad." York News-Times (York, Nebraska) May 4, 1976, 1. Hovland-Swanson was a high-end Nebraska based department store.

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Advertisement from the Omaha World-Herald (May 30, 1976) for Hovland-Swanson Department Store. The store utilized the bicentennial sculptures in a series of advertisements they ran in Vogue magazine. The advertisement above features Bradford Graves' Crossing the Plains. The company utilized images of all the sculptures in their ads. A two-page from Vogue Magazine August 1976 issue and below a single page ad next to a David Webb jewelry ad featuring Nebraska's Bicentennial Sculpture program. Vogue Archives at www.archive.vogue.com

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

Nebraska Interstate 80 Bicentennial Sculptures

Name of Multiple Property Listing

Nebraska

State

The Bicentennial of the United States of America: A final report to the people/prepared and submitted to the Congress of the United States by the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration. American Revolution Bicentennial Administration. Washington, D.C., 1977. Accessed through Hathi Trust at <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015043515108>

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1: 60-100 hours (generally existing multiple property submissions by paid consultants and by Maine State Historic Preservation staff for in-house, individual nomination preparation)

Tier 2: 120 hours (generally individual nominations by paid consultants)

Tier 3: 230 hours (generally new district nominations by paid consultants)

Tier 4: 280 hours (generally newly proposed MPS cover documents by paid consultants).

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting reports. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.