

2023-2024
**ANNUAL
REPORT**



Library
Archives
Research Room

Historic
Preservation
Conservation

Museums
Archeology
Historic Sites



Assist property owners, communities, and local governments as they preserve their historic buildings. We do this through tax credits, education, and recognition via the National Register of Historic Places.

Conserve fragile and damaged objects, paper, and paintings for museums and individuals at our Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center in Omaha.

Discover and interpret our state's rich archeological heritage, chronicling more than 12,000 years of human life and culture in Nebraska.

Who We Are

The Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS) was formally founded in 1878, made a state institution in 1883, made an official non-code state agency in 1994, and made a code agency in 2024. (During the years 2018 through the 2023-2024 fiscal year the agency did business as "History Nebraska.") Per statute, the NSHS collects, preserves, studies, and shares Nebraska's history, holding the state's historical resources in trust to benefit all.

What We Do

Places you can visit: The Nebraska History Museum in Lincoln and historic sites from Chimney Rock and Fort Robinson in the west, to the George W. Norris House in McCook, Neligh Mill in Neligh, the John G. Neihardt State Historic Site in Bancroft, and the Thomas P. Kennard House and Nebraska Statehood Memorial in Lincoln—plus more than 500 historical markers across the state. In addition, we:

Educate. We have programs for all ages, and our publications range from scholarly articles to classroom materials to popular blog posts at history.nebraska.gov.

Preserve the Nebraska history library, which includes books, maps, and newspapers; the state archives (manuscripts, photographs, audio-visual materials, and public records); and museum artifacts. We assist researchers from professional historians to genealogists and students.

NEBRASKA HISTORY MUSEUM

This year the museum opened two exhibits pertaining to the Holocaust. "Portraits of Survival: Photographs by David Radler" features a black and white photo gallery of individuals from Nebraska's Holocaust survivors and military liberator community. Viewers feel as though they are looking into the essence of each of the beloved members of our local community. This exhibit is on display in tandem with "The True Wartime Escape: Margret and H.A. Rey's Journey from France," which tells the story of how the creators of the "Curious George" books escaped the Holocaust.

Both of these traveling exhibits are from the Institute of Holocaust Education in Omaha, and are supported by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Harris Center for Judaic Studies.

This year the museum also opened "Play Unplugged," an interactive exhibit featuring non-electronic games and activities of yesteryear.

In May 2024, the museum hosted an event honoring the induction of Omaha-born Malcolm X into the Nebraska Hall of Fame. In June, the museum welcomed bestselling author Harry MacLean to talk about his new book, *Starkweather: The Untold Story of the Killing Spree that Changed America*.



Education

The NSHS Education Department served a total of 15,199 learners this fiscal year, a record number.

- 13,516 student learners
 - 5,266 student learners participated in virtual field trips.
 - 6,959 student learners visited the Nebraska History Museum on field trips.
 - 1,291 participated in summer workshops.
- 1,683 family and adult learners:
 - 565 learners through community outreach programs
 - 524 learners attended Nebraska History Museum events (Free Admission Days, Haunted History, Author Events, and others)
 - 594 learners participated in other educational programming

The nine different virtual field trips that we currently offer make our museum and historic sites accessible to the entire state. This year our virtual programming was recognized with a 2023-2024 Pinnacle Award from the Center for Interactive Learning Collaboration.

HISTORIC SITES

Sen. George Norris Historic Site

A new virtual field trip about the Nebraska Unicameral was seen by 366 participants during the spring semester of 2024. Norris promoted this unique system of state government, which Nebraska has been using since 1937.

Chimney Rock

Chimney Rock did \$130,088.96 in gift store sales and \$66,076 in admissions. Additionally, we sold 477 memberships and hosted more than 1,100 school groups at the Museum! For our 47 online virtual field trips, we had nearly 1,484 attendees.

A newly constructed walking trail, funded by the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation, greatly increased the amount of time the public spends at the Museum. Visitors also enjoy viewing bighorn sheep that are seen frequently on or around the Rock.

Fort Robinson Museum

The Northern Cheyenne came out with architects and photographers to get a better look at the area for their proposed Healing Trail and presented their concept of what that will look like in the next 5 years as they build the trail here.

Site Manager Sandra Wounded Arrow has been making daily presentations at the Blacksmith shop, Harness shop, and Guard House where Crazy Horse was killed. Her article about Buffalo Soldier bands at Fort Robinson appeared in the Winter 2023 issue of *Nebraska History Magazine*.

Neligh Mill

This year we've completed tuckpointing and masonry repair at the mill, introduced a new historic program, and welcomed representatives of the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska, who presented a round dance program.

John G. Neihardt Center

Managed by the John G. Neihardt Foundation, the site continued to grow its programming, outreach, and partnerships, resulting in a record number of on-site visitors: 1,634, up from 1,260 last fiscal year. Attendance has grown by at least 25% annually since the site reopened after closing for Covid in parts of 2020-21.

Along with offering free monthly humanities programs, JGNSHS hosted its 58th Annual Neihardt Day celebration, 43rd Annual Spring Conference, 4th annual hike to the top of Black Elk Peak, and its annual fundraiser the Laureate's Feast. New activities, curricula, and marketing was created in a successful effort to engage with more schools, civic clubs, and organizations. In June, 60 Native American children ages 5-17 attended the Cultural Connections Camp at the Neihardt Center and spent a week participating in culturally relevant activities.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership supports the NSHS financially. Our current membership total is 1,886.

ARCHEOLOGY

Construction Projects

The State Archeology Office (SAO) conducted more than \$705,000 worth of contract work for the Nebraska Department of Transportation, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and a variety of environmental





Large quantities of blacksmithing debris—over 16,000 grams’ (over 36 pounds!) worth of clinker, slag, and coal—was recovered from 17 excavation units, along with fragments of tools, lead ammunition, assorted metal, and even an English gun flint! All evidence suggests the excavation location was, indeed, the site of a blacksmithing building.

GERALD R. FORD CONSERVATION CENTER

The NSHS’s Gerald Ford Conservation Center in Omaha helped preserve and care for numerous historical items and artwork throughout the year by offering conservation services to a wide range of public and private clients. Our efforts contributed to the longevity and accessibility of items for future generations, and aided in encouraging respect of cultural heritage.

This year the Ford Center added a paintings conservator, a highly skilled position that is financially supported by the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation.

A few of our achievements this past year included treatment of several 1898 Indian Congress photo albums, a group of Native American items, early American military items, large antique maps, a family’s heirloom decorative eagle sculpture, a stage show photograph with a connection to an early 20th century Omaha dance instructor, and the conservation of the Willa Cather childhood home wallpaper. Additional treatments were completed on items created by a range of artists; among them were George Catlin, Terrence Van Duren, Paul Jenkins, Marek Zyga, Bill Mack, George Condo, and Nancy Friedmann Sanchez.

PRINT MEDIA

We continue to produce our quarterly *Nebraska History Magazine* for members, plus a monthly email newsletter, monthly “A Brief History” column for *NEBRASKAland* magazine, weekly Nebraska History Moments delivered by email, and daily Nebraska History Moments for the legislature during their annual session.

consulting firms and local governments. These efforts resulted in examination of around 99 proposed construction projects across Nebraska. State and federal laws and regulations mandate the identification of significant archeological sites, standing structures, bridges, and neighborhoods that may be negatively impacted by construction activities.

Massacre Canyon Oral Tradition and Archeology Project

In 2023, the SAO began work with Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma to document oral histories and initiate archeological fieldwork. The Massacre Canyon Oral Tradition and Archeology Project seeks to provide a more comprehensive history of the events that transpired at Massacre Canyon (Hitchcock County) in August 1873 when a hunting party of around 450 Pawnees were attacked by a large force of Oglala and Brule Lakota, leaving at least 75 Pawnees dead. A primary research objective is to determine whether any archeological evidence of the one-day battle exists 150 years later.

Work is partially funded by Historic Preservation Fund grant money managed by the Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office. To learn more, search for “Massacre Canyon oral history” at history.nebraska.gov

Volunteer Dig at Fort Atkinson State Historical Park

To celebrate Nebraska Archeology Month, the SAO partnered with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for another volunteer archeological dig at Fort Atkinson State Historical Park (Washington County). Over two days in early October, nearly 40 volunteers were assisted by SAO staff in searching for evidence of one of the fort’s blacksmithing shops.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

Rural Nebraska Historic Preservation Grant

The Rural Nebraska Historic Preservation (RNHP) program awarded six grants to projects across the state to rehabilitate structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places. As of June 2024, two projects have been fully completed: new roofs for the old Mason City High School in Mason City and the Oak Ballroom in Schuyler. Grants were also awarded to the Washington County Frahm House Museum in Fort Calhoun, the Ponca Community Building in Niobrara, the Miner House in Red Cloud, and the Keystone Hotel in McCook.

Preservation Month

As part of Historic Preservation Month, in May SHPO staff participated in PresFest at the Joslyn Castle in Omaha. Staff talked to attendees about the National Register, Historic Tax Credits, how to take care of historic homes, and other historic preservation-related topics. SHPO staff also tested people's knowledge with a trivia game on topics like historic buildings in Omaha, world architecture, and Nebraska history.

Neligh Becomes the Newest Certified Local Government

After numerous town meetings, community visits, and consultation with the National Park Service, Neligh has become Nebraska's newest Certified Local Government (CLG). As the state's ninth community in this program, Neligh is now eligible for Historic Preservation Grants to fund community projects related to historic preservation that only CLGs can apply for. Eligible projects can include the creation of walking tours, a speaker series, building surveys, the development of planning documents, or even small-scale rehabilitation projects.

Plattsmouth High School Historic Tax Credit Project

Just a few years ago the old Plattsmouth High School was in such disrepair that a tree was growing inside it. Then a new owner announced a plan to save the building by utilizing all three of the Nebraska Historic Tax Incentive Programs (Federal Historic Tax Credits, Nebraska Historic Tax Credits, and Valuation Incentive Program)

to rehabilitate the former school into affordable housing. The project was completed in early 2024 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony followed by a SHPO-organized Rehab Roadshow to show off the completed project to local stakeholders.

The Nebraska Historic Tax Credit, re-authorized by the legislature in 2023, has had new applications from a dozen project sites in eight communities from September to May. Demand for the program from rural communities has grown significantly.

Historical Marker Programs

During the past fiscal year, the NSHS Historical Marker Program (under the moniker of History Nebraska) ordered 22 historical markers. During this time, roughly 10 historical markers were delivered and installed. These markers had a variety of themes, including Nebraska and the arts, civil rights, and the history of Grant County (as the county's first official state historical marker). Outreach for the Historical Marker Equity Program (created by the legislature in 2022) further boosted interest in historical markers and led to greater community engagement and participation in the programs.

ACCESS TO COLLECTIONS

Assisting Researchers. Staff responded to 2,465 distance reference requests (a 65% increase from last fiscal year) and served 502 researchers in the James E. Potter Research Room (18% decrease from last year).

Digitization. Staff added 720 collection records to our public PastPerfect database (505 museum objects and 215 archeological objects).

Archival Materials. 13,395 pages were scanned in-house by staff, volunteers, and work-study students. 2,087 new metadata records and 4,901 legacy records updated in our public Preservica database. Our partnership with FamilySearch resulted in 675,505 pages scanned.

NHPRC Grant. Work has begun on a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission to migrate data from Word or PDF finding aids into our ArchivesSpace database. This will provide consistency and improved searchability to researchers.



documenting events held at the auditorium from the 1950s through the 2000s, as well as facilities records, photos, etc.

Collections Management and Care

Collections purchased and placed a new system of data loggers to ensure long-term collections preservation. We are now able to see changes in temperature and relative humidity in real time and make adjustments. The new system also includes building at our historic sites for the first time. The data has allowed us to troubleshoot conditions to ensure long-term preservation of collections for the public.

GRANT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation (NSHSF) supported the NSHS's statewide, all-sites free admission day through its Dr. Don R. Gerlach Education Fund. The NSHSF supported maintenance and repairs at the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center through its Paxson Bequest Endowment, and supported historical marker repair through its Special Projects Fund.

The Nebraska State Historical Society received funding as a beneficiary through Executive Order #96948 by the City of Lincoln. Funding was through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

The Nebraska State Historical Society received funding from the Nebraska Department of Transportation grant number SPR-FY23 (020) for archeology services.

The State Historic Preservation Office of the Nebraska State Historical Society is financed in part with federal funds from the Historic Preservation Fund, administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior under Grant Number P22AP01544, P22AF01254, and P23AF01076. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of the Interior.

This program receives Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of

- Collection of photographs of Angel De Cora, Winnebago painter and Native American rights advocate. Born at the Winnebago Agency in Thurston County in 1871, Angel sought to translate Indigenous customs and lifestyles into and through Western and European artistic traditions.
- The J. Allen Hawkins Photograph Collection. A professional photographer in California, Hawkins took almost 200 photographs during family trips to Thedford, Nebraska, during the 1940s-1950s.
- Terms of Endearment movie collection. Sheila Exstrom donated part of her collection from working as the medical advisor/consultant on the 1983 motion picture, including a director's chair used by actress Shirley MacLaine on set, photographs, and other items.
- Voter ID law collection. Staff worked with the Secretary of State's office to collect materials relating to new voter identification laws, part of the NSHS's work to record the history of politics and laws politics and laws in Nebraska, and their impact on Nebraskans.
- Gown was worn by Ak-Sar-Ben Countess Anne Marr Witt Curran in 1961. That year the countess, princess, and queen gowns were designed by well-known Black couture designer Ann Lowe. The dress is currently at the Ford Conservation Center receiving cleaning and conservation work.
- Pershing Auditorium records. We received more than 70 cubic feet of records, mostly show files,

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National Park Service

1849 C Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20240

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Funding for the *Righting A Wrong: Japanese Americans and World War II* exhibit was provided in part by Humanities Nebraska and the Nebraska Cultural Endowment.

Funding for the *Righting A Wrong: Japanese Americans and World War II* exhibit provided in part by the Lew Ehn Foundation.

Marketing for the *Righting A Wrong: Japanese Americans and World War II* exhibit was funded in part by the Lancaster County Visitor Promotion Fund.

The Nebraska State Historical Society projects and services funded in part by the History Nebraska Foundation.

Marketing for events at the Neligh Mill was funded in part by the Antelope County Visitor Promotion Fund.

The Nebraska State Historical Society received funding from the America 250 Foundation.

**Financial Report
Nebraska State Historical Society
Fiscal Year 2024**

Revenues

State Appropriations	52.40%	\$4,920,699.22
309 Funds	7.32%	\$687,284.67
Earned Income & Membership	17.09%	\$1,604,442.94
Federal Grants & Contracts	11.32%	\$1,063,370.86
Foundation Support	.80%	\$75,124.49
Donations, Grants & Special Events	11.07%	\$1,039,612.07
Total Revenues		\$9,390,534.25*

Expenditures

Administrative Services	16.27%	\$1,396,274.18
Museum & Historic Sites	32.46%	\$2,785,969.13
Collections	11.21%	\$961,667.34
Archeology	15.22%	\$1,306,123.04
Historic Preservation	12.13%	\$1,040,940.15
Conservation	6.12%	\$525,492.17
Research & Publications	6.59%	\$565,140.18
Total Expenditures		\$8,581,616.19

*Does not include indirect and in-kind support from other organizations.

Michelle Furby, Chief Financial Officer



