



ANNUAL REPORT

2019-2020



History
NEBRASKA



Front cover: the first visitors at the newly-renovated Chimney Rock Museum, 2020, and women in Lincoln during the flu pandemic of 1918

History Nebraska
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History
NEBRASKA

WHO WE ARE

We are a state agency dedicated to preserving and sharing the history of Nebraska. Founded in 1878 as the Nebraska State Historical Society, today's History Nebraska is a statewide team of professional employees, student workers, and volunteers.

We exist because Nebraskans believe that our history matters. History shapes our present and future. It strengthens our connection to place. It teaches us the skills of informed citizenship. It shows how Nebraskans play a vital role in the larger story of the United States.

OUR AUDACIOUS GOAL

To be the most engaging and relevant state historical society in the nation.

But how do we get there? (See our strategic plan on the next page!)

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 state archives and collections of rare manuscripts, photographs, and objects. We assist researchers from professional historians to genealogists and students. We do this through tax credits, education, and recognition via the National Register of Historic Places. Since 2015, the Nebraska Historic Tax Credit alone has contributed over \$200 million in economic activity statewide.

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.

STRATEGIC PLAN

1. Grow Our Audiences
2. Increase Access to Collections
3. Grow Financial Sustainability
4. Expand Outreach & Engagement
5. Increase Teamwork & Accountability

Grow Our Audiences

Website and social media

As we digitize our collections, more and more people are using our website at history.nebraska.gov. Since our 2018 rebranding, the use of History Nebraska's online resources has increased 165 percent. This year alone the number of users is up 20 percent, and Google searches leading to our site are up 36 percent. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic we developed and delivered a host of new resources for children and educators.

Social media helps us to engage the public, share history, and promote our events and resources. Over 18,000 people follow us on Facebook. This year our social media reach grew by 17 percent on Facebook, 27 percent on Twitter, and 77 percent on Instagram.

Print media, TV, radio

We continue to produce our quarterly Nebraska History magazine for members, plus a monthly email newsletter, monthly "A Brief History" column for NEBRASKAland magazine, and daily Nebraska History Moments during each legislative session.

History Nebraska has become a go-to organization when TV and radio news reporters need on-air expertise on historical topics. This year History Nebraska's resources have been covered in outlets ranging from The New York Times to Animals Today. In addition, NET Television featured Ford Center paintings conservator Kenneth Bé as he restored a painting for the Homestead National Monument. The restoration became an episode of Nebraska Stories in February 2020.

Archeology public dig

As part of the 2019 Archeology Month celebration, staff and volunteers from History Nebraska joined 25 community members for a two-day excavation at Courthouse and Jail Rocks. They excavated a seventeenth century Plains Apache bison hunting camp, finding butchered bones, stone tools, and pottery fragments. Participants had a great time not only finding and recording important remains but also learning how and why archeologists excavate and interpret sites.

Curiosity-based learning

History Nebraska has become a national leader in curiosity research in museums. Over the past several years we have adopted a new philosophy for field trips and volunteers, and are now basing history lessons on curiosity and wonder. This fiscal year we prepared to launch a new groundbreaking hands-on history lab at our Nebraska History Museum and begin work on statewide history learning initiatives.



Community archeology dig:
September 2019, Courthouse & Jailhouse Rock
Bayard, NE

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Increase Access to Collections

New exhibits

The story of the most mentioned landmark on Oregon Trail is being told once again. The Chimney Rock Museum reopened August 1, 2020, after a \$1.9 million renovation. Visitors of all ages are experiencing many new amenities and features, including new exhibits, a newly expanded education room for school programs, new theater space, improved gift shop, and the addition of new space to act as a storm shelter.

The Nebraska History Museum's exhibit Votes for Women: Nebraska's Suffrage Story won a 2020 Award of Excellence from the American Association for State and Local History. The AASLH Leadership in History Awards, now in its 75th year, is the most prestigious recognition for achievement in the preservation and interpretation of state and local history.

Another new NHM exhibit explores Nebraska's deep past: Piecing Together the Past: An Exhibit Exploring 13,000 Years of History with Nebraska's Archeologists. The exhibit uses artifacts, photos, and interactive exhibits to show how archeologists work like detectives, finding clues that tell a meaningful and compelling story.

Digitization Project

History Nebraska's Board of Trustees has made digitization of our resources their top priority. During the past year, we've hired our first-ever digital archivist, and collections staff have focused on the prep work of cleaning up records, choosing preservation software, and prioritizing collections. Our audacious goal is to put 1,000,000 digital records online this year.

We're also partnering with Newspapers.com to digitize our newspaper collection and make it searchable online. Soon, every visitor to our research room will have instant digital access to hundreds of Nebraska newspapers, and with a Newspapers.com subscription, they will be accessible from anywhere.

Teacher Toolkits

One of the ways we responded to COVID-19 closures was to develop toolkits for teachers and families to help keep students at home entertained, while still teaching them valuable lessons through history. Our toolkit tour, Nebraska Unwrapped, supports Nebraska State Social Studies Standards and offers a behind the scenes tour of some of items in the archives.



Newly renovated Chimney Rock Museum
July 2020, Bayard, NE

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Grow Financial Sustainability



Introducing the History Nebraska Foundation

Currently, the state of Nebraska supports about half of History Nebraska's operational costs. Remaining support comes from foundations, donations, and earned revenue.

In order to achieve our dreams and objectives, we must increase our private support to ensure long-term financial stability. Founded in 2020, the new History Nebraska

Foundation (historynebraskafoundation.org) is 100 percent dedicated to the mission, work, strategic goals, and funding for History Nebraska. It will create endowments for long-term support, apply for grants and gifts, and solicit donations from across the state that are solely and specifically dedicated to supporting our vision.

Earning revenue during COVID

As of early 2020 we had increased attendance at our historic sites by 13 percent over the previous three years, and we were on track to have one of our best revenue-generating years ever. Then came COVID-19, and our sites were closed from March 17-July 6, 2020. But while our doors were closed we worked on:

- Partnering with GROW Nebraska (grownebraska.org) to offer select History Nebraska merchandise to an online audience.
- Launching a new customer relations management (CRM) system to better analyze our interactions with the public, and manage sales and events.
- Applying for numerous grants to offset some of our lost income from being closed for nearly four months.



“Border welcome sign” for sale both online and in stores.

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Expand Outreach & Engagement

COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter collecting

Nebraskans have made history this year. History Nebraska has partnered with community members to document and collect the stories of how Nebraskans are understanding, experiencing, and reacting to this tumultuous time in history. Through news media and social media, we reached out to Nebraskans to collect objects related to the pandemic and to the Black Lives Matter protests. We created an online portal (under the Collections tab at history.nebraska.gov) to help adults and kids create digital journals or donate physical or digital content for our collection. And we published an online guide to our Black history resources.

Historic Preservation partnerships

Historic Preservation focuses on preserving historic places and buildings. But it's not only about buildings; it's about serving communities. The work of the State Historic Preservation Office at History Nebraska involves community partnerships and collaboration, such as:

- Robbers Cave LiDAR. We worked with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to produce high-resolution 3-D scans of the famous cave beneath Lincoln. This three-billion data point record will guide future preservation and was incorporated into a nomination for the National Register of Historic Places.
- Preservation workshops. History Nebraska co-sponsored an expert-led masonry workshop with the Nebraska Department of Administrative Services (309), The Nebraska Masonry Alliance, Wayne County and Berggren Architects, that taught 35 masons and other construction professionals how to care appropriately for historic masonry.
- Four County Nebraska Historic Resource Structure and Inventory Project. We surveyed structures in Fillmore, Furnas, Garfield, and Howard counties, producing written reports and brochures that will guide local leaders and property owners in future preservation efforts and National Register nominations.
- CAMP training is not about setting up a tent! CAMP is the Commission Assistance and Mentoring Program. It helps Certified Local Governments learn about preservation incentives and benefits, historic preservation law, standards and guidelines, and other topics to help local leaders reap the benefits of historic preservation in their communities. We worked with representatives from nine Nebraska communities.

Partnerships in Archeology

History Nebraska archeologists work closely with the Nebraska Department of Transportation and other governmental agencies to assist them in complying with state and federal historic preservation laws.

This year the Archeology team evaluated 160 Nebraska Department of Transportation projects for potential impacts to important archeological sites, historic buildings or district, or unusual bridges. We also examined another 20 projects for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and other agencies.

If important properties cannot be avoided through re-design, they become the focus of archeological excavations or detailed historic research and descriptions.



*Making 3-D LiDAR scans of Robbers Cave.
Lincoln, Nebraska*

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Increase Teamwork & Accountability

Due to COVID-19, we closed our sites to the public for four months while most staff worked from home. We faced two big challenges: How to work as a team while being physically separated, and how to engage the public from a distance.

Our staff rose creatively to the challenge. Videoconferencing by Zoom and using online file sharing and collaboration, we continued producing our publications, digitizing our collections, and developing the new online resources described in this report. The new Chimney Rock exhibit was installed during this period, and staff made plans for the safe reopening of our facilities.





*Paintings conservator
Kenneth Bé talks with an
NET Television crew at the
Gerald R. Ford Center.*

FINANCIAL REPORT

Fiscal Year
2020

Revenues

State Appropriations	51.82%	\$4,375,340.43
Earned Income & Membership	17.84%	\$1,506,137.15
Federal Grants & Contracts	13.30%	\$1,123,255.16
Foundation Support	14.06%	\$1,187,071.68
Donations, Grants & Special Events	2.99%	\$252,206.49

Total Revenues **\$8,444,010.91**

Expenditures

Administrative Services	14.05%	\$1,240,775.73
Museum & Historic Sites	37.35%	\$3,297,435.01
Collections	9.80%	\$864,892.32
Archeology	11.53%	\$1,017,615.04
Historic Preservation	16.31%	\$1,440,023.97
Conservation	5.96%	\$525,999.31
Research & Publications	5.01%	\$442,200.14

Total Expenditures **\$8,828,941.52**



VOLUNTEERS

Sharing their passion for history, volunteers with a wide range of skills are vital to our continued work. Students, retirees, and working adults contributed 1,139 recorded hours of service this past year. We appreciate the efforts of our volunteers and look forward to the time when we welcome them back for onsite work.

David Atkinson
Robert Bartee
Clark Bates
Cherrie Beam-Callaway
Missy Briardy
Lance Bristol
Ann Bruntz
Bridget Cannon
Dennis Clare
Beverly Cram
Dr. Sara Crook
Tom Curran
Donald Dingman
Kim Elder
Katherine Endacott
Cheryl Ferree
Steven Flader
Christy Hargesheimer
Timothy Heller

Richard Herink
Donna Hinkley
Sue Hodge
Dave Hohbein
Chuck Jones
Tom Kraus
Jerry Kromberg
Karin Lamkins
R.G. Lamkins
David Levy
Mary Lienemann
Marlen Luff
John Ludwickson
Mary Marchio
Garry Martin
Georgean McReynolds
Bruce Mellberg
John Montag
Marilyn Moore

Rose Mulbery
David Murphy
Dr. Ronald Naugle
John Nelson
Danny Nichols
Shannon Nolte
Lorelee Novak
Taylor Ortiz
Curt Peacock
Teri Perkins
Robert (Bob) Price
Richard Quinn
Bonnie Quinn
Fusun Sayood
Vickie Schaepler
Charles Schroeder
Royann Schroeder
Jay Shonerd
Pamela Snow
Beth Sparrow
Connie Spellman
Rod Steinacher
Marcia Stewart
Paula Stone
John Strope
Cindy Swanson
Kayla Henry-Griffin (Toney)
Justin Walker
Karen Windhusen
Eileen Wirth
Betty Wolff
Bryan Zimmer

Learn how you can
support the work we do:
history.nebraska.gov/get-involved



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