

2024-2025



Nebraska State
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT





Nebraska State HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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. 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 600 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 Nebraska's rich and complex history through library, archives, archeology, and 3D collections that document the lives and experiences of all who have called Nebraska home—stories that continue to inform and inspire researchers and communities today.

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.



The **Walk to the Rock at Chimney Rock** is owned by the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation and is free to all wishing to get a closer look at this amazing National Historic Landmark.

NEBRASKA HISTORY MUSEUM

Exhibits

The museum opened four new staff-designed exhibits. Two are long-term exhibits: New to View: Showcasing Sound, Screen, and Sports features recent acquisitions and materials never-before exhibited. Tactile History features a touchable 3-D model of the Pershing Center mural. The model was created in partnership with the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Pershing Mural Historic Preservation Committee.

New temporary exhibits: Frozen in Time focused on winter in Nebraska; American Craft: Nebraska Quilts for the Nation's 250th featured two quilts which have since been loaned to the Smithsonian Institution for America 250 exhibitions.

Work has begun on a series of new long-term exhibits that tell a comprehensive story of Nebraska history. The first of five planned exhibits will focus on Nebraska's journey to becoming a state and we hope to open in the fall of 2026.



Top Left: Glenn Fleischmann drawing from the “Frozen in Time” exhibit

Middle Left: Pershing Mural tactile model

Top Right: Grace Snyder quilt from the “American Craft” exhibit

Bottom: Film section of the “New to View” exhibit



The State Capitol Gift Shop entrance.

Visitor Services and Gift Stores

Now open: State Capitol Gift Shop. The NSHS reopened this popular location in partnership with The Nebraska Capitol Commission. It showcases uniquely Nebraska products created by local businesses and artists.

Partnerships:

- Blue Star Museums is a collaboration between the National Endowment for the Arts and Blue Star Families. It provides free admission to active-duty military personnel and their families, including members of the National Guard and Reserve.
- Museums for All is a national program offering free or reduced admission for those receiving food assistance. The Nebraska History Museum welcomed more than 130 visitors through this program.
- Grow Nebraska Foundation. By strengthening this partnership, the NSHS will sell its products on the Grow Nebraska wholesale website and source more Nebraska-made products for sale in our gift shops across the state.

Education

Three new educational programs, each aimed at new audiences: Scout Merit Badge Workshops; Homeschool Days; and Lunchbox Lectures.



Standing Structure Survey Coordinator **Jade Mendoza** presenting her July 2025 Lunchbox Lecture.



Family & Community Educator **Emma Reiner** working with a 2025 summer workshop learner.

The Nebraska History Museum (NHM) Education Team served a total of 16,957 learners this fiscal year.

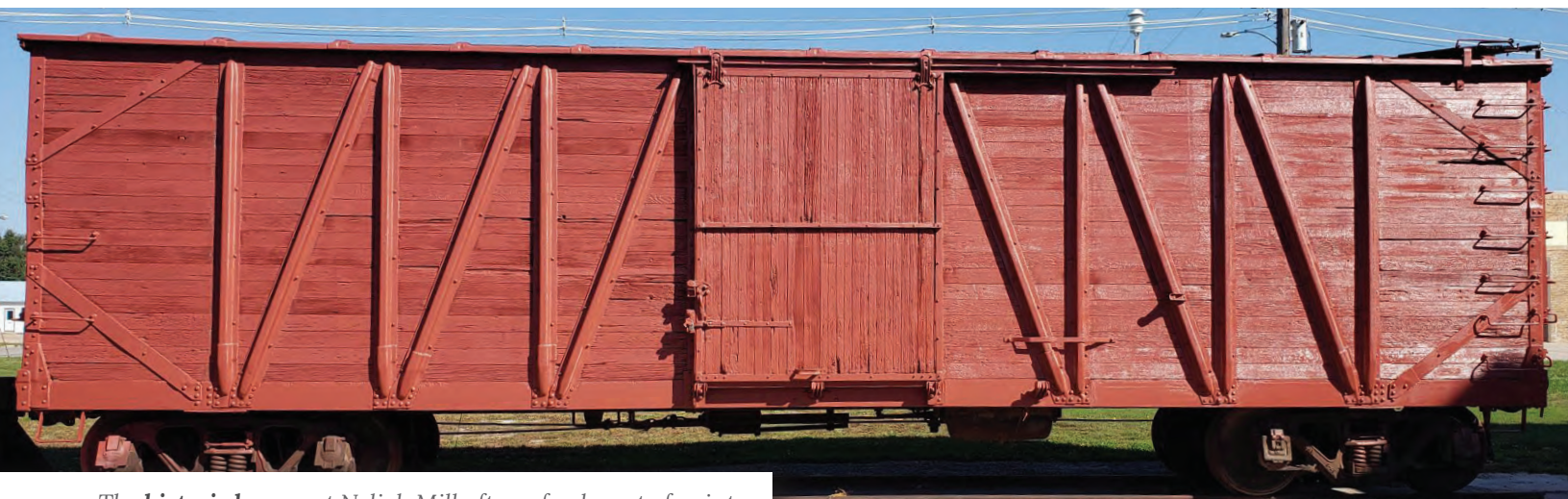
- **12,658 student learners**
 - 5,127 via virtual field trips
 - 6,081 at NHM for field trips and Homeschool Day events
 - 1,450 at summer workshops
- **4,299 family and community learners**
 - 3,012 at community outreach events
 - 863 at NHM events
 - 424 at other educational programming



Left: Paratroopers from the Nebraska Army National Guard during a training exercise conducted at Chimney Rock, August 2025.
Right: Chimney Rock Site Manager **Loren Pospisil** posing with his plaque recognizing 30 years of service at NSHS.



Left: Native American students participating in the 2025 Cultural Connections Summer Day Camp at the Neihardt Center.
Right: The Buffalo Soldiers of the American West performing a mounted exercise at Fort Robinson, July 2024.



The **historic boxcar** at Neligh Mill after a fresh coat of paint.

HISTORIC SITES

Chimney Rock, Bayard

Site Manager Loren Pospisil celebrated 30 years with NSHS. Loren's expertise, creativity, and devotion has served thousands (if not more than a million) Nebraskans and visitors from around the world. He continues to lead the way for new community relationships and partnerships.

Fort Robinson Museum, Crawford

Nearly 1,500 people attended three shows by the Buffalo Soldiers of the American West, who portray the all-Black 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments. The NSHS partnered with the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission on this event in recognition of the Fort's 150th anniversary.

John G. Neihardt Center, Bancroft

This year's John G. Neihardt Foundation spring conference was inspired by the 100th anniversary of the publication of *The Twilight of the Sioux*, which included the two long poems that would eventually conclude Neihardt's five-part epic, "A Cycle of the West". Speakers included Dr. Delphine Red Shirt of Stanford, Margaret Huettl of the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, Calvin Harlan of Omaha Tribe of Nebraska, and Sandra Wounded Arrow and Broc Anderson of the NSHS; the event was moderated by Nancy Gillis.

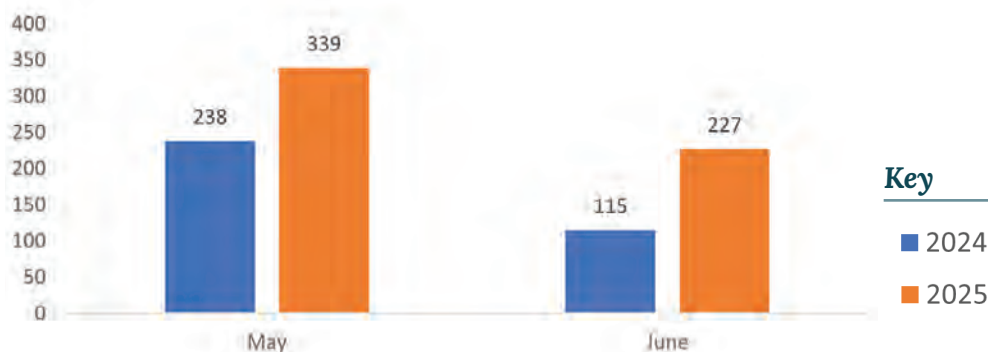
Neligh Mill, Neligh

Staff completed projects to preserve the building and update its exhibits. In partnership with the NSHS, the City of Neligh stepped up to preserve the historic boxcar that sits outside the mill. The boxcar then became a bonus part of the Visit Nebraska Passport in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the adjacent Cowboy Trail.

Senator George Norris State Historic Site, McCook

The Norris House was selected for the Visit Nebraska Passport starting May 1, 2025; by the end of the fiscal year the site was on track to double its summer visitation.

NORRIS HOUSE ATTENDANCE: PASSPORT PROGRAM IMPACT:



MEMBERSHIP

Membership supports the NSHS financially. Our current membership total is 1,719.

VOLUNTEERS

In addition to employees, we benefit from the work of volunteers. This fiscal year our volunteers contributed 2,294 hours of labor.

ARCHEOLOGY

Construction Projects

The State Archeology Office (SAO) conducted nearly \$900,000 worth of contract project review and survey work for the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT), the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, and a variety of environmental consulting firms and local governments. These efforts resulted in the review of over 275 total projects, and fieldwork conducted for nearly 90 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.

Sharp Homestead Excavation

Staff from the SAO's Highway Archeology Program spent seven weeks excavating a historic 1860s homestead in Stanton County ahead of highway expansion work conducted by the NDOT. The team excavated about 60 tons of dirt, and staff are sorting, washing, weighing, and cataloging the materials recovered. Analysis of these artifacts should shed light on early agricultural and domestic life in Stanton County. A blog post at history.nebraska.gov provides additional details. The project received press coverage from News Channel Nebraska, West Point News, and KTIV, among other outlets.

Ground-Penetrating Radar Surveys

Assistant State Archeologist Laura Crawford has spent time training with ground-penetrating radar (GPR) experts and conducting GPR surveys for clients in southeast Nebraska. GPR is a non-invasive technique to locate buried features, such as building foundations, grave shafts, and wagon ruts. (Learn more about "Technology in Archeology" at this history.nebraska.gov blog post.) GPR surveys were conducted at the Mormon Winter Quarters cemetery in Omaha, Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln, and Bloomingdale Cemetery in Otoe County, each to confirm the presence of marked and unmarked grave locations.

GERALD R. FORD CONSERVATION CENTER

The NSHS's Gerald Ford Conservation Center in Omaha continued to provide preservation services and care for numerous historical items and artwork throughout the year by delivering conservation services to a mixture of public and private clients. Our efforts have played a significant role in ensuring the longevity and accessibility of items for future generations, while encouraging an appreciation for cultural heritage.

Conservation projects included an extensive variety of projects. There were treatments of paintings from artists with connections to Nebraska such as Susette La Flesche Tibbles, Terence Duren, Kent Bellows, Miles Maryott, Elizabeth Dolan, and Thomas B. Johnson; treatments of a camera used by John Neihardt, Willa Cather's bird music box, and a cape worn during 1849 travel in a covered wagon across part of the United States. A few of our other treatments included work on a drum used during the War of 1812, a watercolor by Childe Hassam, a painter's handbook by Katsushika Hokusai, a surrealist painting by Enrico Donati, and a mixed media sculpture by Judy Ononfrio.



Left: Archeologist **Trent Carney** excavating around a brick cistern found at the Sharp Homestead archeological dig.

Right: Sharp Homestead Project Manager **Nolan Johnson** at one of the dig's excavation sites.



Left: Ford Conservation Center Objects Conservator **Rebecca Cashman** replacing hemp twine on a drum used in the War of 1812.

Right: Ford Conservation Center Manager **Vonnda Shaw** cleaning debris off the ceiling of Willa Cather's childhood home in Red Cloud, Nebraska.



April 2025 ceremony celebrating the **Kregel Windmill Factory Museum's** designation as a National Historic Landmark.



August 2024 dedication of the **Ponca Villages Historical Marker**.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

National Register and Historic Survey Efforts

The Nebraska SHPO added six properties to the National Register of Historic Places, representing all parts of Nebraska, plus a commercial historic district in Elkhorn. The state now has over 1,100 listings on the National Register.

Efforts to survey the state's historic resources continue, including completion of a massive effort to provide a Historic Context report for Nebraska's Agricultural Resources. This multi-year effort will inform future efforts to preserve these resources. A new survey effort was begun on the state's historic Green Book sites to be completed in FY26. Geographic Information System (GIS) efforts continue to be a priority with well over 3,500 points added or updated this past fiscal year.

Preservation at Work: Tax Incentives and Compliance Projects

The demand for Nebraska Historic Tax Incentive Programs to rehabilitate historic properties continues to be strong. The programs include Federal Historic Tax Credits, Nebraska Historic Tax Credits, and the Valuation Incentive Program. Legislative action in 2024 has improved outcomes for both urban and rural projects.

The Nebraska Historic Tax Credit Program (also known as the Job Creation and Mainstreet Revitalization Act) has received applications from 23 project sites in eight communities during the last fiscal year. The total economic impact from this program, 2015 to 2023, is \$447.0 million. The Federal Historic Tax Credit's economic impact in FY23 was \$81.3 million. The SHPO office has reviewed over 1,700 review-and-compliance projects, mostly a result of federal requirements under the National Historic Preservation Act.

Outreach and Grants

The Nebraska SHPO shares how historic places and preservation programs can be used for economic development. Staff attended conferences and trainings with county and economic development officials and with professionals involved in planning and zoning, development districts, and workplace and low-to-moderate income housing developers; SHPO also held three Rehab Roadshow events.

The Rural Nebraska Historic Preservation program wrapped up four grant projects, totalling \$350,000 this fiscal year: Washington County Frahm House Museum (Fort Calhoun); Ponca Community Building (Niobrara); Miner House (Red Cloud); Keystone Hotel (McCook). The Brick and Mortar Grant Program awarded two grants (Fremont and Chadron); funding for these projects was paused due to delays in Federal Funding allocations but should proceed during FY26.

Crete & Hebron Become Newest Certified Local Governments

After several town meetings, community visits, and approval by the National Park Service, Crete and Hebron have become Nebraska's 10th and 11th Certified Local Governments (CLG). This historic preservation assistance program helps villages, cities, and counties take charge of their preservation efforts. Benefits include eligibility for Historic Preservation Fund Grants only available to CLGs. Funding supports community projects such as walking tours, speaker series, building surveys, hands-on training, education opportunities, or even small-scale rehabilitation projects.

Historical Marker Programs

The NSHS Historical Marker Program ordered 28 historical markers during the past fiscal year. Roughly 20 markers were delivered, more than half of which have been installed; this now means over 600 markers are up state-wide. Themes include the history of education, nature and outdoorsmanship, Japanese Nebraskans, Ponca historical settlements, and the history of Grant County. Boosted by funding granted by the legislature in 2022, outreach for the program led to greater community engagement, with at least ten marker projects in development and more applications arriving monthly.

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.

COLLECTIONS

Assisting Researchers

Staff supported 2,352 distance reference requests and assisted 612 in-person researchers in the James E. Potter Research Room. Staff hosted class tours, a scavenger hunt, and provided in-depth research support—including reconstructing the historic stagecoach route between Tekamah and Omaha using digitized Nebraska Territory surveys and Post Office Site reports.



Reference Manager & Curator **Tracy Johnson** leading a tour of the James E. Potter Research Room with NE Cornhusker Girls State delegates.

Digitization

- Made over 800 3D object and archeological artifact records publicly accessible.
- Scanned nearly 12,000 pages of archival materials, many through partnership with the Lincoln-Lancaster County Genealogical Society.
- In collaboration with FamilySearch, digitized 313,862 pages of microfilm, bringing the project total to over 1 million pages of government records scanned.
- Repaired and digitized nearly two miles of 16mm news footage, contributing to a 36% increase in digitization requests for photo and audiovisual collections.



Collections staff preparing objects for the **Frozen in Time** exhibit.

NHPRC Grant

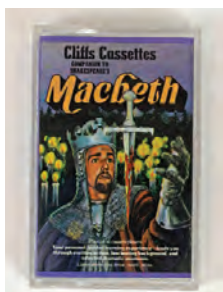
Staff successfully migrated data for over 2,500 collections into the ArchivesSpace database, a significant step toward enhancing consistency and improving searchability of our holdings. The project is funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

Collections Management

A total of 118 items from the NSHS collections were newly featured at the Nebraska History Museum, enriching multiple exhibits. In addition, NSHS supported broader public access and scholarship by loaning or renewing loans of collection items to 17 institutions. These included regional universities, the Stuhr Museum, the Nebraska National Guard Museum, and national organizations such as the Smithsonian’s Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C.

New to the Collections

Highlights from this year's new acquisitions:



Cassette and branded boxers from the CliffsNotes collection.



"Spirit of the Wind" Daniel Long Soldier
Currently part of the New to View exhibit.

- **Don Wright photo collection.** This KOLN photojournalist documented major Nebraska events 1953-1986. The collection also includes his camera from the execution of Charles Starkweather.
- **CliffsNotes collection.** A former employee of this Nebraska-based company (1958-98) donated a unique selection of materials, including the classic study guides, "Cliffs Cassettes," and promotional merchandise—including a pair of branded boxer shorts.
- **Jonas Rasmussen Wangberg collection.** Including handwritten and illustrated publications from an Omaha labor leader who organized local unions along the Union and Southern Pacific Railroads in 1919.
- **"Spirit of the Wind" print.** From Oglala Lakota artist Daniel Long Soldier (b. 1949) who grew up near Rushville and attended a reservation boarding school.
- **Roland Luedtke collection.** Two scrapbooks from a former lieutenant governor (1979-83) who also served as Deputy Secretary of State, Speaker of the Nebraska Legislature, and Mayor of Lincoln.
- **Supernovas Volleyball collection.** A game ball, jersey, and a variety of promotional materials from the inaugural championship season of Nebraska's first professional women's volleyball team.

GRANT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Nebraska
State Historical Society
Foundation

Connecting people with Nebraska history since 1942.

providing ongoing support for the paintings conservator position with the Paintings Conservator Endowment. Finally, NSHSF financed historical marker repair through its Special Projects Fund.

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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 nearly in whole with federal funds from the Historic Preservation Fund, administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior under Grant Numbers P21AC11701, P22AP01544-00, P23AF01076, and P24AF01925. 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.

Grant Acknowledgements (cont'd.)

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 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to:

Office of Equal Opportunity

National Park Service
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

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FINANCIAL REPORT

Nebraska State
Historical Society

Fiscal Year 2025

Jennifer Mai,
Finance Manager

Revenues

State Appropriations	62.14 %	\$ 5,726,983.72
309 Funds	3.51 %	\$ 323,304.85
Earned Income & Membership	19.80 %	\$ 1,824,599.46
Federal Grants & Contracts	11.62 %	\$ 1,070,473.73
Foundation Support	2.31 %	\$ 212,697.55
Donations, Grants & Special Events	.62 %	\$ 57,563.16
Total Revenues		\$9,215,622.47*

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

Expenditures

Administrative Services	18.69 %	\$ 1,489,150.85
Museum & Historic Sites	28.48 %	\$ 2,269,619.69
Collections	8.71 %	\$ 694,262.67
Archeology	16.58 %	\$ 1,321,601.10
Historic Preservation	14.11 %	\$ 1,124,507.71
Conservation	6.81 %	\$ 542,496.44
Research & Publications	6.62 %	\$ 527,983.84
Total Expenditures		\$7,969,622.30

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