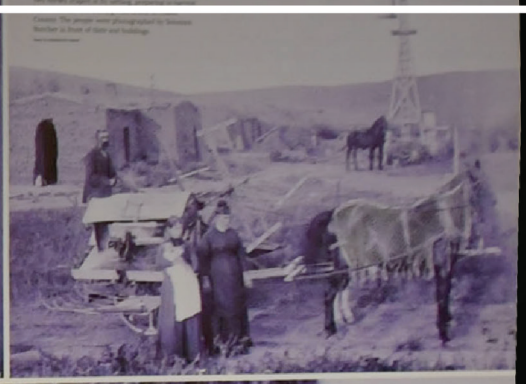
Nebraska State
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT

2025-26









Opening night at the Nebraska History Museum's newest exhibit, ***Our Nebraska: The Place, Its People and Their Impact.*** *June 2026.*

Nebraska State HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WHO WE ARE

The Nebraska State Historical Society 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.

NEBRASKA HISTORY MUSEUM

Exhibits

This year we opened our newest staff-developed exhibit, *Our Nebraska: The Place, Its People & Their Impact*. An opening event was attended by members, supporters, and Governor Jim Pillen.















Top: *Entrance to the exhibit* | **Middle Left:** *Swedish embroidered mittens* | **Middle Center:** *Vinyl backdrop install* **Middle Right:** *Danish wedding dress* | **Bottom Left:** *Exhibit opening* | **Bottom Right:** *Gov.* ***Jim Pillen*** *cutting the opening ribbon, with NSHS Director* ***Daryl Bohac****, Museum Director* ***Araceli Hernandez****, and Digital Educator* ***Evan Dodge***

Visitor Services and Gift Stores

The Capitol Gift Shop celebrated one year since its reopening in June 2025. During its first year, the shop hosted several book-signing events and community gatherings, forging new connections with local partners and vendors. A highlight of the year was the exclusive Cameron the Cat merchandise, which became incredibly popular among the public.

The Nebraska History Museum and Capitol Gift Shop were both selected as stops on the 2026 Nebraska Passport.





Left: Book signing event at the ***State Capitol Gift Shop****, featuring photographer* ***John Shaw*** *(right) and Cameron the Capitol Cat's caretaker,* ***Diane McGuiness*** *(left).* | *Right: Exclusive Cameron merchandise design.*

Education



Archeologist ***Rob Bozell*** *presenting his September 2026 Lunchbox Lecture on Pawnee architecture.*



Family and Community Educator ***Emma Reiner*** *working with students at the Feb. 2026 Homeschool Day.*

The Education team provided educational programs for 19,284 Nebraskans this year.

- 11,731 students participated in Nebraska History Museum field trips and virtual field trips.
- 754 learners attended our new Homeschool Days program.
- 987 children attended summer workshops.
- 5,812 Nebraskans joined us at lectures, community events, and other educational programs.

A new monthly program was introduced: Homeschool Days.

- 754 students participated.
- 17 communities were served.
- The program was runner-up for the 2026 EdCom Award from the Mountain-Plains Museum Association.





Left: *Nebraska State Poets* ***Jewel Rodgers*** *(left) and* ***Matt Mason*** *(back right) after performing at the Neihardt Center in March, 2026.*
Right: *Red Cloud Agency monument at Fort Robinson after the South Fork Fire in June, 2026.*



Statue of ***John D. Neligh*** *after its unveiling at the Neligh Mill, Jul. 2026.*



Above: ***Gracia T.*** *created the life-sized Oregon Trail game hosted at Chimney Rock, Jul. 2026.*
Below: *Sen. George Norris' great grandson,* ***Tim Doolittle*** *visited the Norris House, Mar. 2026.*



HISTORIC SITES

Chimney Rock, Bayard

The Chimney Rock visitor center is open year-round, with hands-on displays that fit the entire family. Staff also welcome school groups and lead online classes. This year's events included:

- A training exercise of the Airborne wing of the National Guard. Guard members made multiple parachute drops while hundreds of visitors watched from our site and vicinity.
- Hands-on demonstrations of things you might take on the Oregon Trail, such as hardtack, salted pork, beaver furs, traps, and flint and steel.
- Educational youth activities for visiting families.
- Hosting a full-sized interactive version of the iconic Oregon Trail computer game.

Fort Robinson Museum, Crawford

The South Fork Fire threatened the fort in June 2026. Removal of museum artifacts began the day after the fire started. When an evacuation order was given, the artifacts were taken to a safe location in Chadron. Once the fire was contained, NSHS employees restored the museum to its previous condition, reopening June 15 to the public and resuming summer programs.

Neligh Mill, Neligh

The Mill hosted field trips involving 433 students and staff from 16 schools in the region.

The Neligh-Oakdale High School Civics class made a promotional video about the mill for the Neligh Historic Preservation Committee.

The 1922 wooden boxcar outside the mill was sandblasted and repainted during the 2025 summer season, and the mill hosted the Operation LifeSaver Railroad Trailer in September.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership supports the NSHS financially. Our current membership total is 1,734.

VOLUNTEERS

In addition to employees, we benefit from the work of volunteers.
This fiscal year, our 33 volunteers contributed 2,099 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 nearly 130 total projects, with fieldwork conducted for many of those proposed construction projects across Nebraska.
- Additionally, the SAO provided background research results for more than 500 proposed construction projects statewide.

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

Following seven weeks of fieldwork in spring of 2025, the SAO's Highway Archeology Program team completed laboratory work and report write-up for this project in Stanton County for NDOT. From the 75 1-x-1-meter excavation units excavated, nearly 10,000 artifacts were cleaned, sorted, cataloged, and analyzed.

While some artifacts recovered were representative of the homestead's earliest occupation in the 1860s—including a 9mm Flobert copper cartridge case, English ironstone ceramic sherds, a ceramic marble, and a bone button—most of the materials date from the early to mid-twentieth century, representing a comprehensive record of farming life in rural Nebraska.

First Lego League Advising

SAO staff were contacted by numerous student groups across Nebraska and beyond who were participating in the annual FIRST LEGO League (FLL) challenge.

The FLL is an international STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) program designed for students ages 4-16 that asks kids to think innovatively to collaborate and solve problems. Each year, the FLL releases a science-themed challenge; the 2025-2026 theme was "UNEARTHED." Teams created solutions to archeological problems and built a LEGO robot to navigate an archeology-themed obstacle course.

The SAO team provided archeological guidance and assisted teams with design, development, and review. Among the 100-plus active FLL teams in Nebraska, three assisted by SAO staff performed exceptionally well, with two earning invitations to national competitions. https://www.firstlegoleague.org/

GERALD R. FORD CONSERVATION CENTER

This year, we proudly celebrated the Ford Center's 30th Anniversary of preserving the region's cultural heritage. Over the past three decades, the conservation center has remained committed to safeguarding history, and this year was no exception. Our team treated a diverse array of treasures, highlighted by the conservation of 400 pieces from the John Falter collection and the reinstallation of the notable Eugene Kingman mural at the new Omaha Central Library. Other accomplishments included the stabilization and conservation of a 1630 German Bible, several masonic lodge prints, and a group of historic French theatre posters.

Our conservators also applied their specialized expertise to other diverse fine art and artifacts. Projects included treating a painting by Siegfried Arno, the cleaning of a bust created by Mona Neihardt, and preserving a unique coconut carved to look like the head of President Harry Truman. These were complete alongside numerous other prints, watercolors, historic objects, sculptures, and paintings. Through every project, our center continues to ensure that these pieces of our collective material culture endure for future generations.

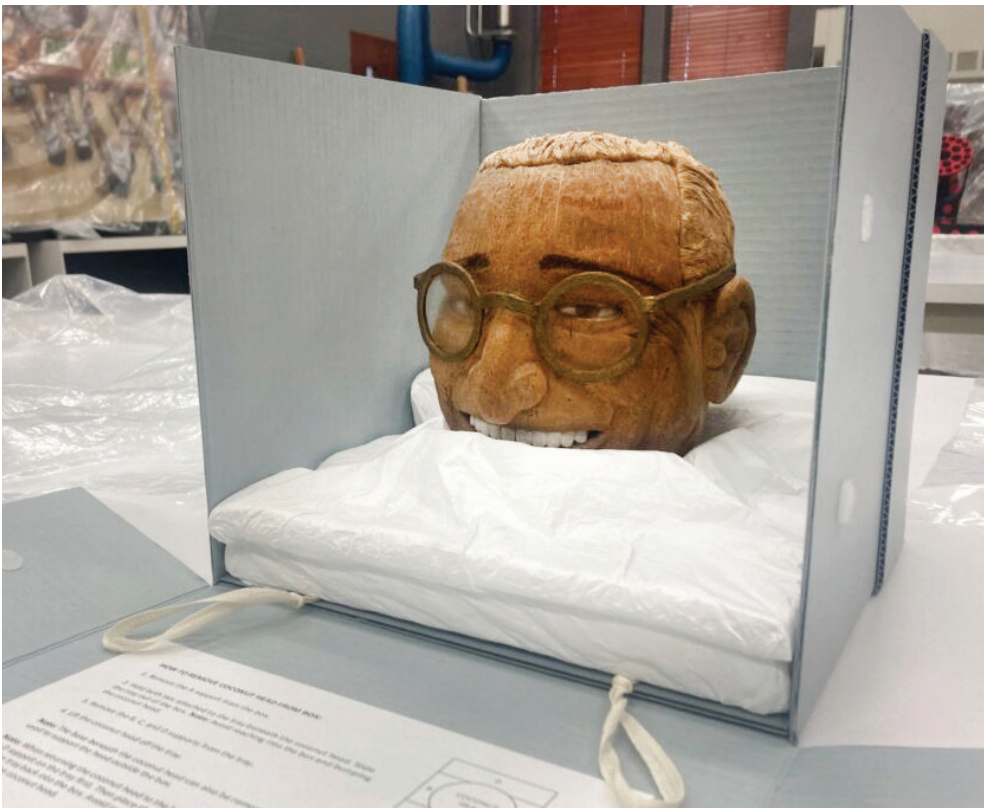






Left: *Archeologist* ***Nolan Johnson*** *displaying FIRST LEGO League trophies for the Irving Aardvarks team he assisted, Irving Elementary School, Lincoln.*

Above: *Select artifacts from Sharpe Homestead excavations. Clockwise, from upper left: 9mm Flobert copper cartridge case, ceramic Bennington marble, selection of buttons (bone button top row, second from left), and English ironstone ceramic with partial J.W. Pankhurst & Co. makers mark.*



Above: *After-treatment image of the* ***President Harry Truman Coconut*** *with its protective enclosure in progress.*

Right: *Objects conservator* ***Rebecca Cashman*** *with the* ***Eugene Kingman Mural*** *prior to reinstallation at the Omaha Central Library.*



STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

National Register and Historic Survey Efforts

Nebraska now has more than 1,100 listings on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), representing all parts of the state. The Nebraska SHPO has successfully added four individual properties to the NRHP, one multiple property cover sheet, and two nomination updates. Additionally, one residential historic district was added; it encompasses more than 600 properties in Omaha's Morton Meadows neighborhood. Two properties were delisted in the aftermath of storm-related events.

Efforts to survey the state's historic resources continue. This fiscal year staff surveyed historic sites related to the *Negro Motorist Green Book*; this will culminate in NRHP nominations.

SHPO was recently awarded a Federal Emergency Supplemental Historic Preservation Fund grant of about $1.7 million to assist with work related to disaster declarations in 2024. Over the next three fiscal years this project will fill data gaps to improve federal review and compliance activities and future preservation outcomes.

Data is key to preservation work. GIS and metadata efforts continue to be a priority. More than 85,000 data entries for standing structures now exist. In the recent fiscal year eight historic districts were modified, 2,810 points were modified, with 369 points added. Staff will develop data on linear resources such as levees and canals.



Omaha's ***Broadview Hotel*** *was added to the National Register of Historic Places in December 2025.*

Preservation at Work: Tax Incentives and Compliance Projects

Demand remains high for Historic Tax Incentive Programs, which are used to rehabilitate historic properties. They include the federal historic tax credit, Nebraska Historic Tax Credit, and the Valuation Incentive Program. These programs require significant investments from the private sector, partnerships which have 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 22 project sites in nine communities during the last fiscal year. Federal program reviews covered 14 project sites. Demand for the program from rural communities has been robust following the legislative changes that took effect in 2024.

SHPO has reviewed 1,300 review-and-compliance projects, mostly the result of federal requirements under the National Historic Preservation Act. We have reduced our response time per project submission, from a nine-day to a seven-day average.

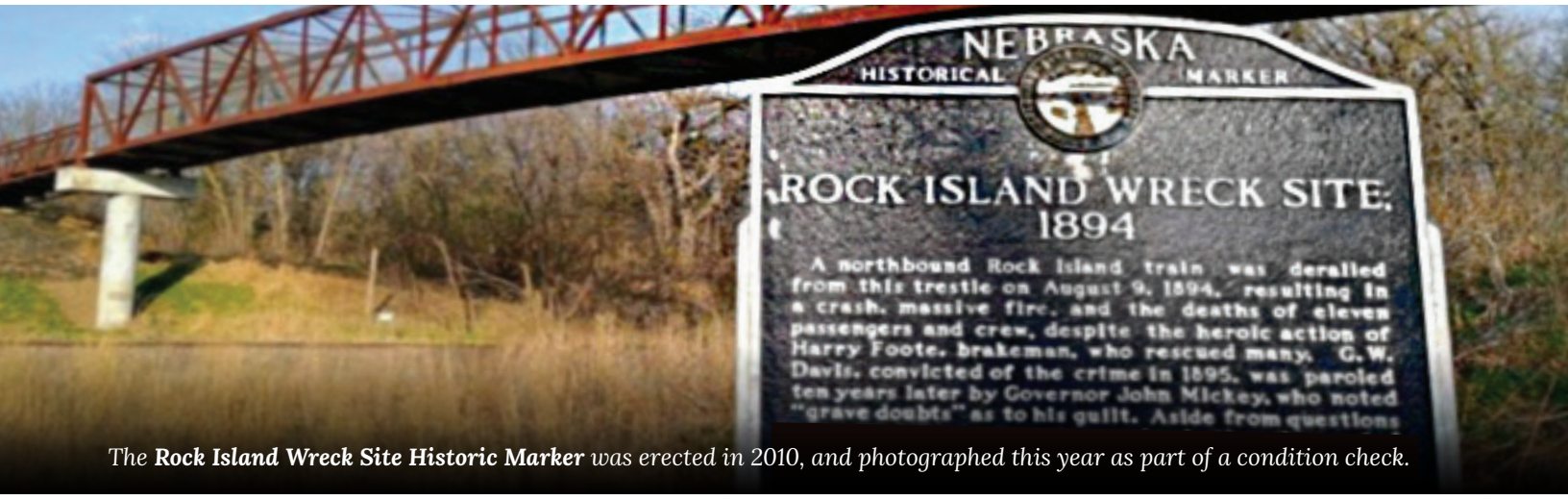
Outreach and Grants

The Nebraska SHPO often shares how the state's historic places and preservation programs can be used for economic development. Staff attended 32 public meetings, conferences, and training with economic development officials, county officials, planning and zoning officials, development districts, downtown business owners, and developers of low-to-moderate income housing. Staff talked about the National Register, historic tax incentives, Section 106 Review and Compliance, Certified Local Governments (CLG), and historic preservation easements.

The CLG program awarded $126,000 in state-aid sub-grants during the past fiscal year to assist communities with their preservation programs.

Ogallala Becomes Newest Certified Local Government

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.



*The **Rock Island Wreck Site Historic Marker** was erected in 2010, and photographed this year as part of a condition check.*

Historical Marker Programs

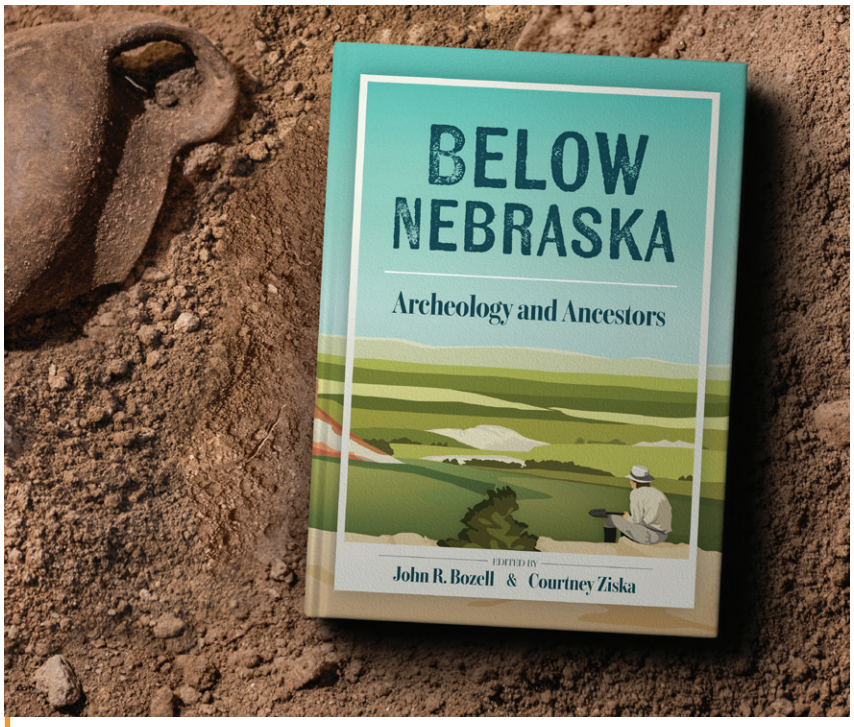
Nebraska now has more than 600 historical markers statewide. This fiscal year, the NSHS Historical Marker Program ordered 16 historical markers, with eight being delivered. State budgetary concerns resulted in several projects being paused after orders were placed.

These markers have a variety of historical themes, including rural education, historic homes, veteran housing, and Indigenous history. The program's focus is shifting to maintenance needs, with five markers being refinished during the fiscal year. We estimate another 60 markers need attention, with an estimated cost of $175,000. The Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation will be a partner in addressing this area of need.

PRINT MEDIA

We completed work on a new book, *Below Nebraska: Archeology and Ancestors*, edited by John R. Bozell and Courtney Ziska. With more than 100 photos and illustrations, *Below Nebraska* provides a non-technical introduction to Nebraska's 13,000+ years of human history and the ongoing process of discovery. The book is being published by the NSHS in 2026 and will be distributed by the University of Nebraska Press.

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.



Promotional image from the release of ***Below Nebraska*** *in Sept. 2026.*

COLLECTIONS

Assisting Researchers

Staff supported 2,617 distance reference requests and assisted 693 in-person researchers in the James E. Potter Research Room. Staff hosted class tours from Burwell and Ainsworth schools and provided in-depth research support, including retrieving documents to assist patrons with dual citizenship applications to countries such as Canada and Luxembourg.

Digitization

Staff and interns digitized 2,058 objects totaling 6,280 pages of content. The materials included government records, photographs, manuscripts, architectural drawings and bound volumes. Digitized collections include hundreds of images from the Nebraska I-80 Bicentennial Sculpture Corporation, correspondence from Nebraska Governor James Dawes, and Civil War-era records from the Nebraska Military Department. Other scanning/digitization projects included:

- 520,397 pages of microfilmed records digitized (in collaboration with FamilySearch)
- 9,355 items added to our public-access Preservica database, amounting to 752 GB of data
- 3.2 miles of film digitized, plus videotapes and sound recordings
- 375 3-D objects and 137 archeology entries created for our public-access PastPerfect database

New to Collections



Mary Evelyn Valentine *with puppy in POW-made wagon from the Mary Evelyn Valentine collection.*

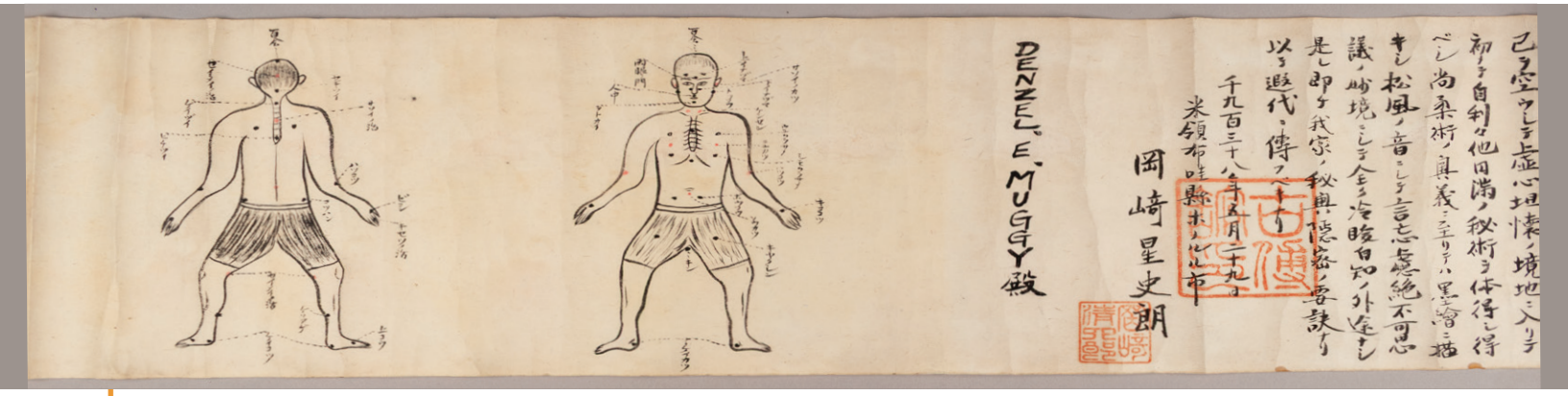
Highlights from this year's new acquisitions:

- ***Albert Beguin collection.*** Family home movies captured by Dr. Albert Beguin (1902-1970) of Rushville, including scenes from the state capitol and the UNL campus in the 1940s, plus the Sheridan County Fair in 1938.

- ***Olson family.*** Two photo albums capture daily life in Newman Grove, NE, including the Blizzard of 1949, a major local fire, tornado damage from the 1960s, and local people and institutions.

- ***South Lincoln Track Club.*** Founded in 1967 by Jerry McGinn (1938-2025), the club supported girls' sports before the passage of Title IX. More than 75,000 children participated in SLTC, winning 19 national championships during the club's 55 years of existence.

- ***Danzan Judo scroll given to Denzel Muggy.*** Born in Douglas, NE, Muggy served in the U.S. Navy during WWII. He received this 29' scroll upon becoming a master of Danzan Judo. While a prisoner of the Japanese, Muggy and his submarine crew endured the Bataan Death March, and he used this scroll to barter with Japanese officers before dying in camp. The scroll was later returned to his family. It is currently at the NSHS's Ford Conservation Center and is being translated thanks to a gift from the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation.



Danzan Judo Scroll *given to Denzel Muggy.*

- ***Mary Evelyn Valentine collection.*** Captain Edmund Valentine was stationed at the German prisoner of war camp in Indianola, NE in 1944-45. He lived at the camp with his wife and daughter. The collection includes photos and several items made by POWs for the family, including a gnome play set, a wagon, and wheelbarrow.



Star City Pride's ***Mr. Gay Pride '04*** *from the Born Digital Collections.*

- ***Otoe County District Court case files.*** Staff packed more than 10,000 case files (134 boxes) and drove them from the Unadilla Community Center to Lincoln.

- ***Manuscripts.*** Offutt Air Force Base: eight boxes of research files from a cultural resource survey; Fern Hubbard Ormen: papers relating to the life and political career of this former state senator and Lincoln City Council member.

- ***Born-Digital Collections.*** The Panic Bar collection includes some 7,000 digital files (1994-2012) documenting the history of the Panic Bar, its Star City Pride website, and the Human Chain around the Capitol. The diversity of long-obsolete file formats makes this collection a great testing ground for new software that helps us organize and migrate files to preservation formats.

National Historical Publications and Records Commission Grant

Staff finished this three-year project and migrated data for more than 3,000 archival collections into our ArchivesSpace database, greatly improving searchability.

The site is live and ready to be used: ***nebraska.lyrasistechnology.org***. This project was funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

GRANT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation

Connecting people with Nebraska history since 1942.

The Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation (NSHSF) supported NSHS in a number of ways to include statewide, all-sites free admission day through its Dr. Don R. Gerlach Education Fund and speaker's fees from the Abbott and Special Projects Funds. The Foundation continues to support maintenance and repairs at the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center through its Paxson Bequest Endowment as well providing ongoing support for the paintings conservator position with the Paintings Conservator Endowment. Finally, NSHSF financed historical marker repair through its Special Projects Fund. We would not be as successful as we are without the generous support of the Foundation.

The State Historic Preservation Office of the Nebraska State Historical Society functions are supported by federal funds from the Historic Preservation Fund, administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior under Grant Numbers P23AF01076, P24AF01925, and P25AF01996. 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.

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

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

Long-term curation of collections controlled by the Bureau of Reclamation/US Department of the Interior is funded in part by grant number R22AP00494.

Funding for the Library Archives and Collections divisions provided in part by grant # RC-103493-23 and RC-103493 from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

*Photo: 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 the National Historic Landmark.*

FINANCIAL REPORT

Nebraska State Historical Society

Fiscal Year 2026

Chris Goforth,
Director of Operations

Revenues

State Appropriations	60.29 %	$ 5,286,038.00
309 Funds	3.06 %	$ 268,420.75
Earned Income & Membership	20.68 %	$ 1,813,010.13
Federal Grants & Contracts	10.75 %	$ 942,390.64
Foundation Support	2.69 %	$ 235,730.62
Donations, Grants & Special Events	.27 %	$ 23,526.37
Cash Fund Transfers	2 %	$ 174,975.00
Trust Fund Investments	.26 %	$ 22,953.02
Total Revenues		**$8,767,044.53** [1]

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

Expenditures

Administrative Services	22.91 %	$ 2,134,593.70
Museum & Historic Sites	28.13 %	$ 2,621,528.74
Collections	8.34 %	$ 777,205.88
Archeology	14.66 %	$ 1,365,945.15
Historic Preservation	10.20 %	$ 950,121.47
Conservation	5.52 %	$ 513,933.46
Research & Publications	6.38 %	$ 594,660.39
Trust Fund Transfers [2]	1.88 %	$ 174,975.00
Cash Fund Transfers [3]	1.99 %	$ 185,000.00
Total Expenditures		**$9,317,963.79**

[2] *The Trust Fund transfers are from LB1072 (2026 Legislative Session).*
[3] *The Cash Fund transfers are from LB264 (2025 Legislative Session).*





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HISTORICAL SOCIETY
history.nebraska.gov

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