

N S H S

foundation news

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How a Wish Became Reality

Ten years ago the staff of the NSHS was asked to provide a wish list of items for their divisions. For Julie Reilly, director of the NSHS Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center in Omaha, a paintings conservation lab was at the top of her list. Such a lab would care for the wealth of important paintings in collections across this state and region.

Working hand-in-hand, the Nebraska State Historical Society and the NSHS Foundation began a quest to fund the lab and provide the paintings conservation expertise that is an essential—and often neglected—element of our cultural preservation. Thanks to a challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the overwhelming generosity of our donors, an endowment was established, and a wish became a reality.

A start-up challenge grant from the Peter Kiewit Foundation provided ready funds to hire the conservator and equip the lab, while the endowment funds earn drawdown revenues for the lab's future operation. Last fall, the Nebraska State Historical Society and the Foundation entered into a partnership with the University of Nebraska at Omaha to provide for the hiring of a professional paintings conservator.

Thanks to your support, the Ford Center now boasts the first paintings conservation lab in Nebraska, offering professional paintings conservation and preservation services by a world-class paintings conservator.

Kenneth Bé is a graduate of Yale University and the NYU conservation program, with over twenty-one years of experience in museum and private paintings conservation.

A recent arrival from Cleveland, Ohio, Mr. Bé will head the paintings conservation lab where he will direct and/or perform all painting conservation treatment and other preservation activities including outreach presentations, lectures, tours, and professional training. He brings his extensive experience and knowledge of paintings conservation, technology, and history to the region. The Nebraska State Historical Society and Foundation are extremely pleased to welcome Mr. Bé and the new Paintings Conservation Lab to the Ford Center.

This is just one example of what we can accomplish together and how your support can help assure that Nebraska's history will be preserved for future generations. If you would like more information on how you can support this and other important projects at the Nebraska State Historical Society, please contact our office. ☒



Using a flashlight held at an angle to provide raking light, paintings conservator Kenneth Bé examines a canvas by Nebraska artist Elizabeth Dolan in the collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society.

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