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Photographs / Images: James C Olson on camera in a 1954 broadcast of his weekly history program on KUON TV, the University of Nebraska's fledgling station

# James C. Olson, 1917–2005



Nebraskans may best remember Dr. James C. Olson, who died August 17, as the superintendent of the Nebraska State Historical Society (1946–56), as the author of the classic *History of Nebraska*, and for his leadership in acquiring a permanent home for the Society at 1500 R Street in Lincoln. But Olson's passion for Nebraska's past continues to inform Society programs nearly fifty years after his departure as superintendent.

Olson was named superintendent of the Society in 1944 while serving as a historian with the Army Air Corps. He assumed his duties in March 1946. He oversaw construction of the Society headquarters facing the state capitol at the north end of Fifteenth Street (now Centennial Mall) and initiated new statewide educational programs including museum field trips, educational leaflets, a filmstrip series,

**James C. Olson, former superintendent of the Nebraska State Historical Society, on camera in a 1954 broadcast of his weekly history program on KUON TV, the University of Nebraska's fledgling station. NSHS RG0014: 98-1**

audio tapes, radio lectures, and a weekly live television broadcast, "Yesterday in Nebraska" on the university's fledgling educational station.

His 1955 *History of Nebraska*, now in its third edition, is the standard history of the state. He began the Society's newsletter, distributed history newspaper columns, and opened the Society's first branch museum, at Fort Robinson. His decision to microfilm Nebraska newspapers preserved an important historical resource.

Leaving the Society in 1956, Olson taught at the University of Nebraska, later becoming dean of the graduate college and vice chancellor, but continued to serve on the Society board of trustees. He left Lincoln for the University of Missouri's Kansas City campus in 1968 and later became president of the University of Missouri system.

In 2003, the 125th anniversary of the Society and the 50th anniversary of the headquarters building, Olson received the Historical Society's Addison E. Sheldon Award for contributions to the preservation and interpretation of Nebraska history.