

## HISTORY MINUTE 001

### Nebraska Statehood

Nebraska was admitted to Statehood on March 1, 1867 by President Andrew Johnson, but only after a long wrangle with the Congress. At issue were voting rights for newly-freed slaves, and the right of states to determine for themselves who should be allowed to vote. The Nebraska state constitution, hurriedly drafted and passed in 1866, restricted the suffrage to white males. Nowhere in the country were women allowed to vote, but many in Congress were demanding Negro suffrage. Radicals on Capitol Hill amended Nebraska's statehood act to include the vote for blacks. President Johnson vetoed the bill, on the grounds that Congress had no right to dictate to any state what its constitution should be. The presidential veto was over-ridden, and President Johnson reluctantly proclaimed Nebraska to be a state. At the time of statehood, Nebraska's black population was almost nonexistent. But the right to vote was guaranteed for all males. It was not until the 1890s that the state constitution was amended to extend suffrage to all people.

## HISTORY MINUTE 002

### Buffaloes Come to Dinner

Thousands of buffalo still roamed Nebraska as late as 1875. As the prairie filled with homesteaders, conflict between man and beast was inevitable. One early account reported:

"... seven buffaloes were in town, having a red-hot time. One of them effected an entrance into the dining-room of Rumsey's hotel, and broke several chairs in attempting to sit down at the table to make a square meal of antelope steak. Getting his back up at the toughness of the steak, he overturned a table and smashed the crockery ware. Information had in the meantime been conveyed to Mr. James Rumsey, who was out on the warpath, and he returned to turn the intruder out, or else serve him up on the half shell. Just as Mr. R. entered one door, Mr. Buffalo ran out another. R. levelled his gun, but it would not go off, and the buffalo escaped and joined the remaining six, who then turned tail on the town, and cantered over the hills, and far away, after having smashed several windows, creating an intense excitement, and playing the deuce generally."

## HISTORY MINUTES 003

### Early Postal Service

When Nebraska territory opened to settlement in 1854, mail was delivered haphazardly. Anyone crossing the Missouri, usually on their own business, might be asked to carry the mail.

When there were enough settlers to justify the expense, a contract for mail service was awarded to John B. Bennet and his brother, William. The contract provided for mail to be carried from northeast Kansas to the mouth of the Iowa River, northwest of Sioux City. The Bennets received \$3500 a year for the service.

Settlements had their own postmasters--usually anyone responsible who could be convinced to bother with the duties. Pay depended on the number of stamps cancelled at the post office. 20 or 25 dollars a year was average.

Mail might be kept in a cigar box, or even an old hat. Once a month a long list of "uncalled for" letters would appear in the local paper. By the 1870s, many places had postmistresses. Few men wanted to bother with the position. But the job was ideal for women because they could locate the post office in their homes--often dugouts or soddies. No home delivery--everyone came to the post office to get the mail.

## HISTORY MINUTE 004

### Mormon Winter Quarters

This mild Nebraska winter makes it easy to forget how savage the season can be. But Mormon emigrants, camped in Winter Quarters near Florence, now a suburb of Omaha, experienced winter's ferocity first hand. Winter Quarters served as home to persecuted Mormons fleeing westward in the winter of 1846-47. For years afterwards it was an important outfitting point for Mormons bound for the Great Salt Lake.

In the summer of 1846, Mormons crossed the Missouri in great numbers. Some used a Mormon Ferry. Others came across on the ferry owned by noted fur trader Peter Sarpy.

By winter, more than 12,000 Mormons were camped along the river. Severe weather settled in, and with it the diseases and ailments common to the winter season. Over six hundred of the Mormon pioneers changed the name from "Missouri Bottoms" to "Misery Bottoms."

A lasting reminder of the Mormon's plight can be seen in the Mormon Cemetery, located in the Florence section of Omaha.

## HISTORY MINUTE 005

### Medicine Shows

Medicine shows travelled all over Nebraska in the late 1800s, offering cheap entertainment and bottled cure-alls.

Travelling by wagon, the show would arrive in town, set up large tents, and begin a two-week run. Shows consisted of vaudeville-like skits, songs, and dance numbers. Between each part of the program, salesmen traveled the aisles, selling the bottled medicine.

Some remedies claimed exotic origins. "Kickapoo Indian Sagawa" was supposedly an ancient cure of the Kickapoo Tribe. This rare and powerful remedy sold for the unbelievable low price of one dollar! Bottled medicine was also sold by fast-talking "snake-oil" peddlers. These shysters would hit town, park their wagon on a prominent corner, and start their spiel. Using high-pressure tactics, the medicine man would sell bottles so quickly that he couldn't make change. When he'd collected a fistful of money, but hadn't given back any change, his driver would take off and they'd high-tail it out of town. All the good citizens were left with was a useless potion, and the wisdom that comes from being taken in.

## HISTORY MINUTE 006

### Automobile license plates

License plates first appeared on Nebraska cars in 1906, following passage of a law that required each vehicle be registered with the Secretary of State.

Registration cost one dollar. A number was assigned to each owner, beginning with "one" and continuing in order of receipt at the Lincoln office. Each auto had to display its number "in Arabian numerals not less than three inches in height."

Every car owner manufactured his own license plate. Usually metal numerals were attached to a leather backing. The plates were supposed to be visible at all times. This was nearly impossible, since the road were dusty, rutted trails that became swamps when it rained.

The first year, 571 owners registered vehicles. By 1908, 4200 autos were registered. By 1916, there were over 100,000 vehicle registration. A new law in 1913 instructed the Secretary of State to issue a permanent registration number to each owner. This system of permanent numbers continues today.

## HISTORY MINUTE 007

### The Governor & the Legislature

As Nebraska's new Governor begins her four year term, she will face many serious and difficult issues. Early governors of Nebraska also faced tough questions. Indeed, they sometimes faced a combative, and downright cranky, legislature!

Nebraska's first governor was impeached by legislature, for appropriating some 16 thousand dollars of school funds for his own use. The Lieutenant Governor, William H. James, filled out the remainder of the term, and he too found the going tough! Relations were strained between the executive and legislative branches of government. Conditions in the young state were ripe for uncertainty and unrest.

On one occasion, the President of the Senate took advantage of the Acting Governor's absence to convene the legislature into special session--an act quickly revoked by Mr. James on his hurried return to Lincoln. Later, the Acting Governor attempted to discourage the legislature from meeting by shutting off the coal supply to the legislative chambers!

Today's Governor may have her disagreements with the Legislature, but we can assume that she won't turn off the heat!

## HISTORY MINUTE 008

### Influenza Epidemic of 1918

This flu season is nothing compared to the influenza epidemic of 1918. Cases of the "flu" appeared in Lincoln and Omaha as early as September, and rapidly spread across the state.

The disease came on suddenly, with a fever and profuse perspiration. Soon the victim was overcome by weakness. Death often came within 24 hours.

As the flu spread, doctors and nurses were in short supply. By October, the Nebraska State Board of Health issued an order closing public meetings, schools, churches, theaters, and all kinds of entertainment. Mail carriers continued on their rounds, but wore white face masks for protection.

After three weeks, the schools were reopened. Teachers and pupils were required to wear masks.

The epidemic was deadly. In Omaha alone there were 974 deaths between October 5 and December 31. Merchants sustained heavy losses from light Christmas trade.

The "Spanish influenza" of 1918 brought sorrow and suffering to almost every Nebraska community.



## HISTORY MINUTE 009

### Pioneer Winter Travel

Today snow and snowstorms can hopelessly snarl Nebraska's traffic, but in pioneer times snow added to the ease and pleasure of travel. A good coat of snow made farm hauling easier, and provided for one of the years's best entertainments--sleigh-riding. Early Nebraska newspapers frequently mentioned sleighing parties in their columns. The Brownville Advertiser of 1861 tells of such an event:

"On Saturday evening, a half dozen sleigh loads of 'young folks' went from this city to Rock Port, stopping at Cook's Hotel. They partook of an excellent supper, after which, together with friends of that place, they all joined hands and circled 'round, until the 'wee hours' admonished them to go home with the girls in the morning."

A horse-drawn bob-sled, its bed partially filled with hay, served as a luxurious conveyance for such an outing. The jingle of harness bells and the laughter of sleigh-riders could be heard for a long distance over the empty prairie on a crisp, still night--a marked contrast to the honking horns and spinning tires that accompany snow-clogged streets today.

## HISTORY MINUTE 010

### Frontier Gambling

Lotteries and gambling may be in the news in Nebraska, but they're certainly not new to the state. Many a Nebraska settler experienced gambling first-hand on the steamboat which brought him up the Missouri River. Nearly every boat carried a sharp-eyed, sharp-witted gentleman whose mission was to make sure the settler landed in Nebraska with as little money as possible. Card and dice games were played round the clock as the boat chugged up the Missouri.

A favorite game of chance involved dice and an oil cloth blocked off in numbered squares. Dice were \$.50 a throw, and there was a number on the cloth for each combination. Prizes were assigned each number was well. Most prizes were cheap junk. Just like today, the valuable prizes were nearly impossible to win.

Lotteries were often run to provide funds for public enterprises. The citizens of Brownville organized a lottery in 1857 in order to build a hotel. Tickets sold at \$5.00 each. Prizes ranged from 147 acres of land adjoining town, to \$.25 in cash. Then as now, the lure of getting something for nothing was strong.

## HISTORY MINUTE 011

### Missouri River Ice Bridge

When winter locked up the Missouri River in ice, the pioneers of territorial Nebraska lost an important outlet to the world...the steamboat. Yet at the same time, another outlet was opened, for only when the Big Muddy was frozen solid did Nebraska territory have a bridge to Iowa. Good use was made of this natural bridge, and at times a steady stream of wagons would be seen making their way between Nebraska and Iowa. Even the railroads ran trains over the ice bridge before completion of the Union Pacific bridge in 1873.

With all the ice travel, the condition of the ice was an important item of local news. The Brownville Advertiser of 1859 reported two persons' demise--their wagons broke through the ice, taking passengers and draft animals to their frigid deaths. The account closed with the warning, "The Missouri Bridge is rather dangerous just now. Be careful." The 1865 Nebraska City News informed its readers:

"The river presents a lively appearance at present. The continual crossing and re-crossing of teams, the working of the ice men, and the skating boys, all make "Old Muddy" very animated!"

## HISTORY MINUTE 012

### Territorial Legislature

As Nebraska's Unicameral undertakes its yearly deliberations, it's interesting to note how things have changed since the early days of state government. In 1856 the New York Times gave this description of the Legislature:

"It is a decidedly rich treat to visit the general assemble of Nebraska. You see a motley group in a small room, crowded to overflowing, some behind their little school-boy desks, some seated on top, some with feet perched on their neighbor's chair or desk, some whittling, half a dozen walking about. A lobbyist stalks inside the bar, and from one to the other he goes, talking the advantage of his bill. A fight starts up in the Secretary's room and away goes the honorable body to see the fun. Then a thirsty member moves an adjournment and in a few minutes the drinking saloons are well patronized."

Some cynical observers might wonder if the old adage is true, "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

## HISTORY MINUTE 013

### The First Boat!

For the Missouri River towns of Nebraska territory, the surest sign of spring was not the first robin, but the first steamboat churning its way up the river. At the first blast of the boat whistle, all normal activity ceased, and the entire population rushed down to greet captain, crew, and passengers. New stocks of food, clothing, dry goods, and liquor were quickly unloaded to replenish supplies depleted by the long winter.

Newspapers were quick to pick up on the hubbub. Under a heading which screamed, "The First Boat!! Immense Excitement!!" the Nebraska News gave this account:

"Our writings were disturbed last evening at 7 o'clock by the ringing of bells, the thrilling whistle of the engine and shouts of 'a boat!' 'a boat!'. The streets were filled with men and boys running to the wharf to meet the first boat of the season. It proved to be the Platte Valley. This is a new boat, her first trip--she made the trip from St. Louis in six days. Three cheers for the first boat of the season!!"

## HISTORY MINUTE 014

### The Tree Planter State

"GO TREE PLANTERS!" That's not a cheer anyone has heard recently around the State of Nebraska. But back in 1885, joint resolution of the legislature designated Nebraska the "Tree Planters State." In those days, the name had wide appeal. Nebraska needed to be a state of tree planters. Many settlers remarked on the barrenness of the treeless plains. One woman from Fillmore County wrote of picking plums on the Little Blue River in the mid 1870s. What made the excursion so exciting was that it marked the first time her three-year-old daughter had seen trees!

By 1874, Arbor Day, which originated in Nebraska, had become an official state holiday. School groups, ladies clubs, and civic organizations all over the state observed the day with tree planting.

Most of those trees took root and grew. And in time the motto "Tree Planters State" became less meaningful. In 1945, the name was officially changed to the "Cornhusker State."

## HISTORY MINUTE 015

### Pioneer Schools

The first school in the Nebraska area was established at Ft. Atkinson, in present-day Washington County, 1822. During the 1830s and 40s, missionary schools for Indians were developed in the Bellevue area. After 1854, the Nebraska schools required parent to pay a monthly sum for each child attending. The first such pay school was located on Walnut Creek, northwest of Nebraska City. Margaret Martin was the teacher, and she boarded with her students' families.

In 1857, the first public school in Nebraska opened in Omaha. It had five teachers by 1860, with 456 pupils enrolled. Nebraska City opened its first public school that same year, with five teachers and 273 students. Thirteen weeks later the Nebraska City school closed for lack of funds. Reports of the school commissioner for 1860-61 indicate that reading and spelling were the subjects taught to most students. Less than half took penmanship. Only one-third studied arithmetic.

School funding and school curriculum continue to be hotly-debated issues today. Looks like we have more in common with our pioneer forbearers than we might have thought!

## HISTORY MINUTE 016

### Robbing the State Treasury

The Nebraska State Capitol was the scene of a daring, and fatal, robbery attempt in 1885. The legislature was in session, so the capitol was crowded with visitors. At midday three hold-up men entered the state treasurer's office and demanded money. The clerk filled their grain sack with a few hundred dollars in gold and silver. The robbers then ran, heading for the one horse that was to carry all three of them in their get-away. Guards shouted for the bandits to halt, and then fired. One thief, Jim Griffin, was killed by the shotgun blast. The other two were soon captured.

The guards who foiled the robbery attempt received \$500 from a grateful legislature for their prompt action. Unfortunately, it was soon discovered that one of the guards had been in on the plot. He was convicted of manslaughter in the death of Griffin, and sentenced to imprisonment.



## HISTORY MINUTE 017

### Claimjumpers

Next to horse thieves, claimjumpers were the most despised wrongdoers in Nebraska territory. Claiming land was serious business, and before the establishment of law and order, it was difficult for claim-stakers to defend their rights. Stakes were pounded into the ground, listing the claimant's name. It was a simple, if dangerous, procedure for claimjumpers to replace the original stakes with their own.

Early settlers formed claim clubs, really vigilante committees which protected the rights of members. Claimjumpers were first strongly urged to get out of town. If the warning failed, more persuasive methods were used. A thorough dousing in a frigid river convinced all but the most thick-skinned claimjumpers to leave. Sometimes jumpers were given a brutal escort out of town.

Claim Clubs protected legitimate claims the only way they could. They took the law into their own hands and gave short shrift to claimjumpers, wherever they were found.

## HISTORY MINUTE 018

### Frontier Doctors

The 1854 Nebraska Territorial census listed only eleven men as physicians. Only two of them were known to have attended medical school. Most doctors received their medical education by studying with an established physician in the community. This method of education was known as "reading medicine." Medical practice was more a matter of tradition than of science.

By 1856, the number of physicians had grown to 25, although many of these doctors were better known as druggists. Census records indicate one m.d. was also a land speculator, while another combined medicine with politics.

Nebraska Citizens were fortunate to have the services of Dr. A. Bowen, who not only was a college man, but a physician well-known outside of Nebraska Territory for his medical expertise. Other Nebraskans were not so lucky, and had to heal themselves with whatever home remedies and common sense they could muster.

## HISTORY MINUTE 019

### Name That County!

Today many Nebraskans live in counties that were known by different names during the hustle and bustle of Nebraska's territorial years. The first eight counties in the state were Douglas, Cass, Dodge, Washington, Richardson, Burt, Forney, and Pierce. All were named for prominent political leaders. Six of these names remained unchanged, but Forney became Nemaha County, and Pierce became Otoe County. Douglas County incorporated an area once called Jones County, and Sarpy County annexed land that was called Omaha County. In 1855, five counties which no longer exist were set up--Greene, McNeale, Jackson, Izard, and Blackbird. Later we had a Calhoun County, a L'eau Qui Court County, and a Shorter County. And so it went in the early days of Nebraska--counties would come and counties would go. Finally we ended up with ninety-three permanently named counties. It's been years since any names have changed--but how many of the ninety-three can you name?

## HISTORY MINUTE 020

### Arbor Day

Arbor Day is the holiday Nebraska gave to the world. The first celebration of Arbor Day took place April 10, 1872. J. Sterling Morton, the holiday's founder, and the State Board of Agriculture offered as a prize, "a farm library of twenty five dollars worth of books to the person who, on that day, shall plant properly, in Nebraska, the greatest number of trees." Nearly a million trees were planted that first Arbor Day. The winner of the prize was one J.D. Smith, who planted an unbelievable 35,500 trees in one day.

In 1875, Governor Robert Furnas declared April 8th Arbor Day. Ten years later the legislature designated April 22, J. Sterling Morton's birthday, as Arbor Day. The day became a legal holiday that year. Arbor Day is now observed in nearly all the states and U.S. Territories, and has spread to foreign countries as well. It is a unique holiday because, in the words of its founder, "Other holidays repose upon the past; Arbor Day proposes for the future."

## HISTORY MINUTE 021

### Freighting in Nebraska

Overland freighting was a major business in the days of Nebraska territory. Gold-mining settlements in Colorado and Montana imported most of their goods via Nebraska, and were willing to pay high prices. No railroads had yet been built, so wagon trains hauled the freight. Special wagons were constructed for crossing the Plains. They were wide-tracked, heavy-tired, and used five or six yoke of oxen. A wagon load averaged about seven thousand pounds.

A freight train usually consisted of twenty-six wagons. Trains traveled an average of 17 or 18 miles a day.

Freight loads ranged from corn, to the cats miners desperately needed to control their mice population. Staples such as flour, sugar, salt, bacon, coffee, and whiskey made up the common loads. Enterprising freighters often manufactured their own liquor to supplement the load. Freighting remained an important part of the Nebraska economy until the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869.

## HISTORY MINUTE 022

### Horsecar Days

Horsecars were familiar sites in Nebraska towns in the 1860s. Towns like Omaha, Lincoln, Hastings, Red Cloud, Nebraska City, and Grand Island had horsecar lines.

The cars were typically 15 or 18 feet long, with six or seven windows on each side. Long wooden benches ran parallel to the sides of the car. A few hand straps hung from the ceiling. A jerky start would often send passengers tumbling.

Before 1890, the cars were unheated. Winter travel was chilling. At night colored discs placed over kerosene lamps indicated an approaching coach to pedestrians. In bigger towns, four horses hauled the cars on the rails. Routes were displayed on the front and sides of the vehicle. Accidents were common, and although runaways seldom hurt the passengers, property damage was considerable. By 1900, most horsecars were replaced by electric trollies, removing the first public transportation from the scene.

## HISTORY MINUTE 023

### Febold Feboldson

Nebraska history is filled with legendary characters like Wild Bill Hickok and Buffalo Bill--real people whose lives were embroidered to make a better story. Other characters from our past are totally fictitious. like Febold Feboldson. Febold made his appearance in the 1920s in the Gothenburg Times newspaper. Patterned after Paul Bunyan, Febold became known for his amazing exploits. For example, Febold was charged with responsibility for setting the boundary line between Kansas and Nebraska. Not content to use regular surveyor's tools. Febold bred special giant-sized bees. The bees were hitched to a plow, and then plowed a beeline for the state boundary.

Febold's appetite was also legendary. He once came down from his ranch on the Dismal River to trade at Plum Creek (present-day Lexington). Febold drank a half-gallon of "likker" and proceeded to eat everything in sight. He ate so much that the town had to go on starvation rations until the freight wagons could deliver fresh supplies.

Febold's adventures amused readers for decades--and served as positive proof that you can't believe everything you read in the paper!

## HISTORY MINUTE 024

### Sidney-Deadwood Trail

One of the famous and colorful wagon trails of the late 1880s was the Sidney-Deadwood, or Sidney-Black Hills Trail. The trail was the chief road to the Black Hills gold fields until the railroad went through in 1880. Sidney, a railroad stop and military post, was the starting point. The trail ran north and west to Deadwood, in what is now South Dakota. Two important stops were the Camp Clarke Bridge and the Red Cloud Station near Ft. Robinson.

The route carried gold-seekers, stage coach lines and freighting outfits. Gold was shipped out over the trail, and robberies were so common that Buffalo Bill recreated them for his Wild West Show! One stage coach line built an "armored" coach, and hauled out bullion in what they called "Old Ironsides". Six to eight armed guards went with the coach, which was robbed only once in three years of service. By 1880, the gold rush had dropped off, and rail service brought the colorful days of the Sidney-Deadwood trail to an end.



## HISTORY MINUTE 025

### The Sugar Palace

In 1880, the talk of Nebraska was the Grand Island Sugar Palace, erected to celebrate the state's sugar beet industry. Patterned after the Sioux City Corn Palace, the building housed an exposition devoted to sugar beet production and processing. Sugar beets were used extensively in decorating the interior, and much of the outside ornamentation depicted sugar in one form or another.

The Grand Island Independent described the sugar palace as "a building about 200 feet square, built in artistic design. The interior is fantastically fixed up. The different rooms represent the different kinds of grain and produce raised in Hall and adjoining counties. The designs are pretty and in keeping with all that is pleasing to the eye."

Newspapers all over the country covered the Sugar Palace dedication. Governor John Thayer officiated at the ceremonies. The railroads offered sugar palace excursion rates to passengers all over the west. The Sugar Palace stood as testimony to what could be produced in the so-called Great American desert!

## HISTORY MINUTE 026

### Highway 20 History

Driving Highway 20 from South Sioux City to the Wyoming line will take travelers through one of the most picturesque sections of Nebraska--in both landscape and history! In the east we have Comington, now part of South Sioux. This rough-and-tumble settlement included a gambling joint built right on the waterfront. A long chute extended from the gambling house to the river--poor losers were unceremoniously dumped on the chute and into the muddy Missouri!

Further west is O'Neill, named for General John O'Neill, who led an Irish military expedition to Canada to try to free it from British rule. Down the road a piece lies Bassett, once the stomping ground of the notorious Pony Boys, and their leaders, Doc Middleton and Kid Wade. Rushville's early guest list included Theodore Roosevelt, Buffalo Bill, and President Calvin Coolidge. At the western end of Highway 20, you'll find Ft. Robinson, where Crazy Horse was killed. It's an interesting trip across northern Nebraska--filled with beauty and some mighty fascinating history, too!

## HISTORY MINUTE 027

### The University Begins

The University of Nebraska, like many schools on the pioneer plains, got off to a slow start. Although the school was chartered in 1869, it took two years to hire faculty and construct a building to house classes. The Board of Regents pronounced the building well-constructed and suitably designed to fit the school's needs in 1871, and classes began that September.

Four professors were elected to fill the chairs of mathematics, English literature, ancient and modern languages, and natural sciences. But the Board of Regents felt these departments weren't enough, and voted to establish a College of Agriculture.

The most popular course of study at the University that first year wasn't a college-level course at all. The Latin School functioned like our high schools do today, providing students with preparation for college work. Of the 130 students at the University in 1871, 92 were enrolled in the Latin School. Many of these scholars quickly moved on to collegiate course, and the University's growth began.

## HISTORY MINUTE 028

### The Sower

The Sower, that heroic bronze statue atop the Nebraska State Capitol, has been greeting visitors since 1930. Designed by Lee Lawrie, a noted American sculptor, the Sower is nineteen feet tall and stands on a twelve foot pedestal. The figure and pedestal weigh about 18,000 pounds.

The Sower wears an Egyptian-style hood, and britches rolled above the knee. He carries a bag of seed. His bare feet stand on a pedestal comprised of a sheaf of wheat and shock of corn.

The figure is symbolic of Nebraska's founding industry--agriculture. His place on top of the capitol building reminds us that governments are founded to sow the seeds for better and nobler modes of life. The Sower faces northwest, toward the pioneer trails which brought farmers and settlers to the state.

When the Sower was shipped to Lincoln and hoisted into position, thousands of citizens came to watch. Film clips of this engineering feat can be viewed at the State Museum of History in Lincoln.

## HISTORY MINUTE 029

### Chicory in Nebraska

A checklist of Nebraska's farm products probably won't list chicory as a crop. But shortly before the turn of the century, there was great interest in growing chicory in northeast Nebraska.

The depression of the 1890s was compounded by drouth. Farmers felt chicory could be the answer to their problems. Like now, chicory was mixed with coffee or used as a coffee substitute. In the 1890s, most chicory was imported. Nebraska farmers decided to plant their own.

Chicory is a bulky crop, so processing needed to be done close to the fields. Factories were built at O'Neill, Fremont, and Omaha. Despite the high hopes, drouth, a bad crop year, and production difficulties spelled trouble. Better farm prices sent farmers back to their traditional crops.

The chicory processing factories were forced to close, or in the case of Fremont, to convert to sugar beet processing. By 1900, Nebraska's experience with chicory was over. The pale blue, spindly-stemmed flowers along our highways are the only legacy left behind.

## HISTORY MINUTE 030

### Neapolis--The Almost Capital

A number of Nebraska cities struggled for and lost the privilege of becoming the capital of the newly-formed state. Neapolis was one of the bidders that has since disappeared from the map.

Neapolis was located in present-day Saunders County. In one account it was described as being, "four miles northwest of the Pawnee Village south of the Platte," or three miles northeast of what's now Cedar Bluffs. The account continues, "In the above-named cities is a beautiful elevation, that appears more like an artificial mound than a work of nature." This rise, tagged Capital Hill, rose forty feet above the valley level, with a flat surface of four to six acres on its top.

Neapolis was named the unofficial capital by the territorial legislature in 1858. But in December of 1859, a prominent Fremont resident told a Congressional hearing that the fifteen Neapolitans had left the fledgling capital, taking their buildings with them. This testimony sounded the death knell for the "almost capital" Neapolis.

## HISTORY MINUTE 031

### School's Out!

Throughout the years, no one day of school has been quite so exciting as the last day. In pioneer times, the last day of school was a chance for children to demonstrate what they'd learned. In many instances there were no formal examinations. Instead, public examinations were held on the last day of school, with the county superintendent conducting the test and awarding prizes. Students were passed from one grade to the next based on teacher's reports, so these exams were held just to find out who was the prize scholar.

Excellence in spelling was determined by the "headmark" scheme. Pupils stood in a line, and those who spelled correctly were permitted to advance toward the head of the line, ahead of those who missed. The student at the head of the line at the end of the lesson was given a "headmark." Prizes were given on the last day of school to pupils who had earned the most headmarks.

Pioneer students also earned grades, but headmarks and prize scholar awards were the true marks of excellence!

## HISTORY MINUTE 032

### Bessey National Forest

Bessey National Forest was originally a forest without trees. It is the only forest in the national system that is planted, rather than natural. Dr. Charles Bessey, botanist at the University of Nebraska, believed the sandhills could grow trees. Bessey had seen trees successfully cultivated in the sand dune regions of his native Michigan. With his colleague Professor Bruner, he began planting trees in Holt County in 1891. Ten years passed. Bessey was sure the trees had died, but a government surveyor found them 18 to 20 feet high.

This success led to the establishment of forest reservations in Thomas and Cherry County the next year. Bessey National Forest is located between the Dismal and Middle Loup rivers, in an area once described as, "the worst portion of the hills." Trees are still planted, rather than propagating naturally, but Bessey's dream of a forest in the desert has come true.



## HISTORY MINUTE 033

### The Ballot Box That Went to Dinner

Early Nebraska elections weren't always the well-regulated events we've come to know. One election's outcome was determined by "the ballot box that went to dinner." During the 1866 referendum in which Nebraskans were deciding if the territory should become a state, both Republicans and Democrats campaigned strongly. The parties were evenly divided in the territory, and the election was quite close. In Rock Bluff, 107 votes were cast for the Democrats, 47 for the Republicans. These results were enough to put Cass County in the Democratic column. But the county canvassers threw out Rock Bluff precinct's votes, because an election official had taken the ballot box home at dinner time. This poor soul thought he was safeguarding the ballots, only to discover he himself invalidated the votes. Because of the nixed ballots, Cass County went Republican. Its representatives furnished the edge in the new state legislature that enabled the Republicans to elect Nebraska's first two U.S. senators. And all because the ballots went to dinner!

## HISTORY MINUTES 034

### Peru State College

Peru State College is Nebraska's oldest institution of higher learning, and the only one chartered in territorial days. Peru Seminary, an institution of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was chartered in 1860. The school existed in name only until 1865, when the Methodists of Peru obtained pledges for \$10,000 and 60 acres of land. The first cornerstone was laid in 1866, but building delays forced the first classes to be held in rented structures.

Peru's early days were filled with challenges. Many pledges were never paid, and funds were exhausted before the new building was roofed. New faculty and trustees tarred a makeshift roof themselves. They were better teachers than roofers: some sections of the roof leaked terribly, while other parts were blown away by strong winds. The trustees offered the school to the territory. An appropriation of \$3,000 finished the building, purchased equipment, and enabled Peru to open in 1867 as Nebraska's first state normal school.

## HISTORY MINUTE 035

### Gone Fishin'

Today's fishermen rely on regular stocking of lakes and streams to provide enough fish for all. but in old Nebraska, the fishing was fine--and no license was required.

Considerable ingenuity was used in catching fish. The seine was a favorite device, although scoops and baskets were used. One group of trappers, out of fresh food, fashioned a fishing line and hook from a bent safety pin and horse hair. They soon had a pan full of fresh fish, and plenty for future use.

One of the earliest Nebraska "fish stories" comes from the journals of Lewis and Clark. Just north of an Omaha village, they caught, "318 fish of different kind...pike, bass, salmon, perch, red horse, small cat, and silver fish." The next day their luck was even better, as they caught, "Upwards of 800 fine fish, 79 pike, 8 salmon resembling trout, 1 rock, 1 flat back, 127 buffalo & red horse, 4 bass, and 490 cats."

Even by 1804 standards, it seems safe to say Lewis & Clark caught their limit!

## HISTORY MINUTE 036

### Nebraska's Salt Deposits

The ample salt deposits found in the Lincoln area were a deciding factor in the city's location. From the 1830s on, the salt basins were known to white men who visited Nebraska. Salt was a major factor in attracting early settlers, and influenced the Capital Commission in selecting a site for the State's new headquarters. The commission believed the salt flats had great industrial potential.

Their faith was not, as it turned out, entirely justified. The salt-producing lands were granted to the state, which then leased the area from 1869 to 1885. During that time only \$375 in royalties were returned to the state. A test well sunk to find salt in commercial quantities failed, and salt production in Lancaster County ceased to be a viable business.

Though they were no commercial success, Lincoln's salt basins did influence community development. The city's business and industrial areas grew up near the salt licks, and residential areas were formed away from them.

## HISTORY MINUTE 037

### The Trans-Mississippi Exposition

The hottest summer entertainment ticket in Nebraska ninety years ago was the Trans-Mississippi Exposition. The Omaha fair was formally opened on June 1, 1898, by President William McKinley, who pushed a button in Washington, electrifying the exposition buildings. Visitors by the thousands came to view the wonders of art, mechanics, and electricity. Exhibit after exhibit gave proof positive the American west was America's breadbasket. Exotic attractions, including "the Streets of Cairo" and "The Chinese Village" beckoned visitors. Selected scenes from the Plains Indian wars were re-enacted by Wild West troupes.

Over one hundred thousand dollars was appropriated by the Nebraska Legislature for the Nebraska Building and its exhibits. Omaha architect Thomas R. Kimball designed numerous structures on the exposition grounds, which included fountains and reflecting pools. Other states and the federal government contributed funds for buildings along the great, gaudy concourse. Visitors were amazed at the spectacle, where fifty years earlier not a single building had stood.

## HISTORY MINUTE 038

### Graduation Day

These days, many high schools graduate seniors with a minimum of ceremony. But before the turn of the century, commencement was an elaborate affair, with most graduates actively participating. The North Platte High School Class of 1895 numbered thirteen--and each of the thirteen students delivered an essay painstakingly prepared for the occasion. Graduation exercises were held at Lloyd's Opera House. The program included two numbers by the Gordon Silver Cornet Band, a baritone solo, a piece by the K.P. Quartette, a violin solo by Professor A.E. Garlich, a vocal solo by Mrs. J.H. Hershey, and the thirteen essays.

Topics for the essays included "The Dignity of Labor," "The Verb 'To Be'," "Majesty of the Law," "Human Desires," and "Americanism." The class valedictorian reviewed the great things accomplished in the nineteenth century. The North Platte Telegraph reported, "It was remarked on from all sides that the essays were an improvement over last year." Diplomas were presented, and as the audience dispersed, "the Class of '96 gave the class yell a great deal of gusto as a parting salute."

## HISTORY MINUTE 039

### Nebraska Baseball Greats

Baseball has long been a favorite pastime for Nebraskans. Occasionally, the state has produced some baseball greats.

Grover Cleveland Alexander, known as "Old Pete", was the first Nebraskan to achieve national recognition on the diamond. A pitcher, Alexander won 28 games in his first year with the Philadelphia Phillies. His 1915-1917 seasons were even better--he pitched over 30 winners each year. Alexander's greatest moment in baseball came in 1926, when supposedly way passed his prime, he pitched the winning game of the World Series for the St. Louis Cardinals.

Clarence Mitchell was another Nebraska pitcher who made it in the big leagues. Mitchell grew up in Franklin and Aurora, and went on to play for Brooklyn, Detroit, New York, St. Louis, and Philadelphia. A consistently good player, Mitchell is best remembered for his worst day in baseball. In the 1920 World series, Mitchell made five outs in two times at bat! He batted into the only triple play in World Series history, and followed that by batting into a double play.

## HISTORY MINUTE 040

### Tornadoes

Tornado season can be deadly, even with our sophisticated radar and early warnings systems. In Nebraska's early days, tornadoes were even more lethal. Perhaps the earliest recorded twister struck Ft. Atkinson in the summer of 1825, completely destroying the post's saw mill. In 1866 the territorial town of Brownville was hit. Considerable damage resulted.

Five years later the town of Lone Tree, now Central City, was less fortunate. A family of five was swept up from the supper table to their deaths. Sometimes tornadoes seemed insistent on claiming victims. In 1903 a storm brewed near the town of Campbell. The Daniel McCurdy family saw the funnel approaching and took shelter. The tornado bypassed the farm, so the family returned to the house, where they'd been celebrating a birthday. The perverse twister reversed itself, and without warning destroyed the home, killing four family members.

The most deadly Nebraska tornado hit Omaha on Easter Sunday, 1913. One hundred and twenty-two died, and property damage exceeded six million dollars.



## HISTORY MINUTE 041

### The Rainmakers

Nebraska farmers can always be sure of one thing--either it will rain, or it won't. In the drought years of the 1890s, the rain refused to fall, and enterprising gents hit the road as rainmakers.

Nebraskans were so desperate for rain that even skeptics were inclined to let the rainmaker show his wares. Sometimes success was immediate. In Loup City in 1894, a rainmaker set up in a blacksmith shop at 9 a.m. Shortly before noon it began to rain, and continued in a steady downpour for an hour and half. Near Ravenna that same year, five out of seven rain-making experiments produced the desired results.

Not so in the Panhandle, where the "rain god association" formed to buy gunpowder and set it off at pre-arranged intervals from Long Pine to Harrison. Explosions there were aplenty, but not a drop of rain.

Rainmakers sometimes had trouble collecting their fees. Two men in O'Neill were offered \$10,000 if they could make it rain in a prescribed time. The deadline came and went--and a regular downpour fell a few hours later.

Nowadays the rainmaker has been replaced by the weatherman--whom we praise or curse depending on the rainfall.

## HISTORY MINUTE 042

### The Dreaded Suntan

With the advent of summer, many Nebraskans spend hours in search of the perfect tan. But there was a time when tanned skin was anything but a mark of beauty. Mollie Dorsey Sanford's diary from 1867 describes the problem and an unusual solution:

"About the only employment we have now outside our housework is to help to destroy the potato bugs that are eating up the vines. That, and playing in the creek to keep cool. We are tanned awfully and look a little rough I know. The little boys have been, for sport, besmearing their faces with the black mud that settles in the bottom of the creek. They discovered it took the tan and sunburn off. We hailed the discovery with delight for here was a cosmetic so available and cheap as dirt.

"So one day last week we donned our bathing suits and sneaked off to the creek. Doing our heads up in cotton handkerchiefs, we plastered our faces thickly over with the black mud. Although we have found ourselves a few shades whiter, I think we will not try it again soon."

## HISTORY MINUTE 043

### The South Platte Secedes--Or Tries To

In June of 1859, Nebraskans living south of the Platte River went to the polls to determine if they should secede from Nebraska Territory and annex themselves to Kansas. Rivalry between the North Platte and South Platte sections of the territory had been bitter. The North Platters had the territorial capitol in Omaha, and commanded a majority in the legislature. Many living south of the seemingly unbridgeable Platte thought they'd be better off to ally with Kansas.

Kansas was about to be admitted into the Union, so South Platters would obtain the advantages of statehood and rid themselves of North Platte domination. The June election allowed selection of delegates to the Kansas Constitutional Convention. The delegates were received and seated on the convention hall floor, but were not given a vote.

In the end, the Kansas convention rejected the proposal to extend their northern boundary to the Platte. The South Platters were stuck. Kansas didn't want them. Eventually, a bridge across the Platte, and location of the State Capital south of the river, put an end to these hostile sectional feelings.

## HISTORY MINUTE 044

### The Stagecoach Ride

If long vacation car-rides make you restless, consider early Nebraska stagecoach rides. An Omaha reporter gave this account of his 1877 trip to northwest Nebraska:

"To get into a coach with eight others, nearly all large men, when the utmost capacity was three on each of the seats, and start off for a ride of three hundred miles was entirely something new for me."

The day passed quickly enough, with passengers taking refreshment from "eight flasks of liquor, one bottle of wine, and my solitary bottle of iced tea."

"But when night came, oh, there was the rub... Our eyelids dropped, our heads were nodding, but a sudden jolt of the coach would wake us all up. Suddenly the coach would stop. Road agents? Indians? No. The driver was heard, 'Come boys, exercise yourselves.' We would walk four or five miles up a long hill through deep sand in the cold night air. Then back in the coach, nod a few minutes, get a few good bumps on the head, sing a song, then get out and walk to please the driver. So the long night passed, and morning dawned at last."

## HISTORY MINUTE 045

### The Barbecue

Summertime in Nebraska is barbecue time. Although there's some argument about whether the word barbecue is of Spanish or French origin, there's no quarrel about the popularity of the outdoor "sport." The editor of the Rushville Standard gave this account of a ranch country barbecue in 1898:

"Yesterday we attended our first barbecue, at the old Riggs ranch. A large crowd was estimated at from 4 to 5 hundred. The crowd was so large that for 'self protection' we at once proceeded to the 'barbecue pit' to ascertain the quantity of the feast. The fire was kindled in the bottom of the pit and at 6 a.m. the meat was put on, consisting of one yearling beef and five muttuns. Small poles served as support, and the meat was suspended over the fire. It was frequently turned, and at each turn was basted with a fluid of salt, pepper, and vinegar. At noon it was ready to serve. Those present had brought everything else necessary for a grand picnic, but we wish to say that this meat was the finest we ever tasted."

## HISTORY MINUTE 046

### Trade Wars

The success of foreign imports on the U.S. market has prompted talk of import quotas, tariffs, and trade embargoes. Similar comments were heard in Nebraska's early days. The Nebraska Trade Journal of 1896 reported:

"American manufacturers are now confronted with startling fact that Japan is invading this country with the products of her cheap labor, and is making such inroads on the commercial trade as to seriously threaten their very existence." Buttons, bicycles, matches, sashes, doors, blinds, clothing, watches, hardware, and notions were among the Japanese imports challenging American-made goods. The Journal went on to say, "The native genius and cunning of the Japanese make them the peer of any nation as artisans and mechanics, and they are just finding out their ability to build up the manufacturing interest of their country at the expense of the United States, and the salvation of the American laborer rests in a protective policy that will shut out the products of pauper labor countries." Ninety years later, trade with Japan continues to be a hotly debated foreign policy issue.

## HISTORY MINUTE 047

### The Road Ranch

Tourists whizzing down Interstate 80 in Nebraska are covering the same ground traveled by emigrants over a century ago. And just as modern-day visitors search for a spot to spend the night, so early travelers headed for the nearest road ranch. Spread twelve to fifteen miles apart--a good day's travel by ox team--the road ranches offered accommodation for both emigrants and their stock.

Road ranches usually consisted of a large stable, a ranch house of sorts where travelers could bed down, and possibly a blacksmith shop and saloon. Smaller ranches were simply private dwellings where travelers could squeeze in at the family supper table.

Some ranches were a cut above the usual grim way-station. The Boyd Ranch on the Oregon Trail in buffalo county was widely renowned for its brewery and ice house. Cheese Creek ranch on the old Nebraska City-Ft. Kearny trail was named for the cheese made and sold by the proprietors. A far cry from our modern Interstate rest ares, road ranches still provided valuable services to folks heading west.

## HISTORY MINUTE 048

### Grasshoppers

Every summer brings with it the potential of crop damage from grasshoppers. Yet as problematic as these voracious insects are, their effect is nothing compared to the grasshopper plagues of the 1870s.

1874 was the worst of the 'hopper years. Spring and early summer had been kind to crops, but one sunny day the sky darkened. This was no regular storm, but swarms of grasshoppers.

The insatiable creatures ate everything that was green. Root crops like onions and potatoes were eaten right down into the ground. Corn seemed to be the favorite food, and in no time the young corn fields were reduced to chewed-up, lifeless stalks.

Even the railroads suffered. Grasshopper swarms reduced visibility to zero, and the piles of insects on the tracks made forward progress impossible. Crews were sent to shovel the tracks clear of drifts of these tobacco-spitters. There was little settlers or railroaders could do but wait for the "storm" to pass, and wonder at this strange land where it rained grasshoppers.



## HISTORY MINUTE 049

### The First Fourth

The first recorded Fourth of July celebration in Nebraska was held in 1820 at Camp Council Bluffs, later known as Ft. Atkinson. The day before the celebration, the following order was issued:

"The regiment will be paraded on tomorrow at 8 o'clock for review. All daily duty men, officers, waiters, and other capable of appearing under arms in good order must compose the command. The commandant hopes that the usual exertions on the part of the officers to exhibit a soldierlike appearance on the occasion will not be found wanting."

Another order issued later in the day detailed the celebration, including word that each man was to be issued a ration of fresh beef and a half pint of whiskey. Owing to the sizeable whiskey ration, company commanders were urged to limit their permission to purchase additional liquor. Still, some soldiers celebrated to excess. On July 5, a sergeant was stripped of his rank because his "conduct was of such a reproach."

## HISTORY MINUTE 050

### Early Phone Service

After Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1876, its use rapidly spread across the country. In May 1879, the Omaha Electrical Company formed to operate a telephone exchange. In one month's time the company established an exchange and put up poles and wires along principal streets of the city. At first there were about 70 subscribers, but by 1882 the number had increased to 200. The company boasted 260 miles of wire in the city and 13 employees.

Fremont installed a few phones as early as 1880. Two years later there were 66 subscribers to the phone system in Hastings. Monthly rates were \$3.50 for business phones and \$2.50 for residential service.

Once local communities organized to meet their own needs, they combined efforts to provide long-distance service. In July of 1883 the American District Telephone Company was organized. This company ran toll lines, connecting many cities in southeastern Nebraska. Connections on these lines were hardly clear as a bell.

## HISTORY MINUTE 051

### One of Those Days

If you've had "one of those days," consider this from the 1875 Omaha Bee:

"Officer Hanlon went out this morning to repossess some property from a man named Wiggins. He arrived just as the morning hash was being dished up. The officer made his business known. Mrs. Wiggins, who was frying beefsteak, shrieked and fell fainting on a chair. Her great weight demoralized the chair, and a pan of hot grease was knocked over. The grease fell on an aged feline. The cat, in intense pain, went through the only pane of glass left in the window. On the way, the cat collided with a caster set in the hands of the oldest girl. She dropped the set on the dog's tail. The dog yelped, and bounced through the window after the cat. The dog and cat, knocking down the littlest Wiggins, frightened the chickens into the neighbor's yard. Seeing the invaders, the neighbor grabbed his shotgun and let fly. He missed the dog, wounded the cat, and killed three of his own chickens. He raised to fire again, when the Officer restored the peace, quieted the children, revived the Mrs., loaded up the property, and drove back into town. At last report the cat was doing as well as could be expected."

## HISTORY MINUTE 052

### The Safety Bicycle

In the 1890s, a new kind of bicycle appeared in Nebraska stores. The "safety bicycle" was different from the old high wheeler, because both front and rear wheels were the same size. Rubber tires inflated with air, and sprocket chain drives made the vehicles safer and easier to operate.

Bicycling became very popular. Cyclists could hop on their two-wheelers and quickly go precisely where they wanted to.

Bicycling clubs were numerous. Nebraska scholar Louise Pound became a member of the Century Road Club, a privilege earned by bikers riding one hundred miles in twelve hours or less. Pound covered 122 miles in the specified time. She went on to become the first Nebraska woman to receive a gold medal offered to cyclists riding over 5,000 miles.

Bikers faced the same dusty, rutted ungraded roads that were to make automobile travel such a challenge. But the safety bicycle offered an inexpensive and entertaining mode of personal transportation in the early days before the Model T.

## HISTORY MINUTE 053

### When Legislators Spit

Chewing tobacco was once as common as smoking tobacco is today. And just as today's smokers need ashtrays, yesterday's chewers needed a place to spit. Cuspidors, also known as spittoons, were found in all public buildings. Even the legislative chambers at the State Capitol boasted brass cuspidors.

When the 1897 legislature convened, members discovered that most of the cuspidors had been carried off by members at the close of the previous session. A merry debate ensued, with some legislators protesting that they were not guilty of pilfering, and other members demanding the names of those who were. Receipts for the cuspidors were read into the record, then ruled out of order, and on and on it went. Finally the discussion ended when one member reminded the group that it was costing the legislature one hundred dollars to resolve a fifteen dollar issue.

More cuspidors were ordered, at a cost of \$10.26 a dozen, and the matter was laid to rest.

## HISTORY MINUTE 054

### Ice, A Valuable Commodity

In the heat and dust of early Nebraska summers, ice was a welcome luxury. The first recorded use of ice was in the 1820s in Ft. Atkinson, where soldiers cut and stored ice from the Missouri River.

The first ice seller in Nebraska territory was John Gilman, who opened a butcher shop in Nebraska in the summer of 1856. He soon sold ice from his shop as well.

In 1857, Magnus Johnson built an ice house, and that winter cut and stored a supply of ice in Nebraska City. He and partner soon had ice houses up and down the Missouri, and were busy year-round cutting, putting up, and delivering ice.

Most Nebraska towns had at least one ice dealer. Some had many. Beatrice boasted five ice dealers in the 1870s.

River towns cut and stored river ice. Artificial ice makers brought relief to landlocked towns by 1883. Some still preferred "natural ice." As late as 1907, Loup City still cut its ice from the local pond.

## HISTORY MINUTE 055

### Ferryboats

Ferryboats provided early Nebraska travelers a means of crossing the shifting sands and changing currents of unbridged Plains rivers. The first ferryboat to operate in the region was at Ft. Atkinson in the 1820s. Early diary accounts document the operation of a ferry across the Missouri, probably as part of activities at the fort. Another early ferry line was run by Peter Sarpy from his Bellevue trading post.

In the late 1840s brisk ferry business was conducted across the Missouri at Nebraska City as gold-seekers headed west. The early ferrys were large flatboats propelled by sweeps. In the 1860s steam ferrys replaced many of the oldstyle boats.

In the settlement years, the ferry business was profitable. Standard rates were 75 cents for a wagon and horses, 40 cents for a horse and buggy, 5 cents for "footmen", 10 cents a head for cattle, horses, and mules, and 3 cents a head for swine and sheep.

By the 1880s, bridge-building had progressed. Even the unruly Platte had been spanned. Some ferryboats continued to operate into the 20th century, but most quietly faded from the scene.

## HISTORY MINUTE 056

### Early Nebraska Baseball

"Play ball!" That's a cry that's been heard in Nebraska for over a hundred years. As early as 1867 the papers reported, "the friends of athletic sports in Omaha and also Council Bluffs have organized baseball clubs, and have large and respectable memberships." Other towns soon followed suit. One editor wrote, "baseball will be more likely to benefit our young men, physically, than sitting with their feet higher than their heads in some 'loafer's heaven'."

Town clubs traveled sizeable distances to play other teams, and competition was intense. An 1871 contest between the Milford Blue Belts and the Seward team lasted over four hours. The Blue Belts blasted in six home runs before winning by a score of 97 to 25.

Injuries were numerous, and not surprising. Players competed without the benefit of backstops, masks, protectors, gloves, or any equipment save bat and ball. Broken fingers were a frequent occurrence until gloves were introduced in the 1880s.



## HISTORY MINUTE 057

### Letter from the Philippines

For many soldiers, the 1898 conflict with Spain was not the "splendid little war" touted in the newspapers. Members of the 1st Nebraska, stationed in the Philippines, had difficulty adjusting to the strange locale. One wrote home:

"The islands are nothing but a bunch of trouble gathered together on the western horizon of civilization. The climate is a combination of electrical charges, especially adapted to raising Cain. The soil is very fertile, producing insurrection and treachery. The inhabitants are quite industrious, their chief occupations being trench-building, cock-fighting, and stealing their diet, which consists of boiled rice, fried rice, and rice."

"Communication has been established between the several islands by substituting the mosquito for the carrier pigeon, the former being better able to stand the journey. The principal exports of the islands are rice, hemp, and war bulletins; the imports are American soldiers, arms, ammunition, and alcoholic drinks. 'Beeno' is the principal drink of Manila. It is made, I should think, of chain lightning, barb wire, and few tacks, and limburger cheese.

Well, come over; perhaps you will like the place, but I don't."

## HISTORY MINUTE 058

### "Tall Corn"

This year promises to produce a good corn crop, but it's doubtful we'll have the kind of crop early Nebraska farmers bragged about. 1881 was a good year for corn--so good, in fact, that one farmer complained his corn was growing too fast. The continual rustle at night was keeping his family awake. And he didn't know how he'd bring in the harvest without a ladder at least eighteen feet high.

During the hard times of the 90s, prices were so bad that many farmers burned corn for fuel. Bad prices didn't mean a bad crop, however. One paper reported that the ears of corn were too big to fit into the stove, and that many people were forced to saw up the cobs to get them in the fire box.

But these problems were nothing compared to those of a Fremont farmer, who went to court to get an injunction against the telephone company to keep it from nailing cross pieces to his corn "trees." He hadn't minded them using the stalks for poles, but he was afraid wires and crossbars would interfere with the ladders he'd have to use for harvest!

## HISTORY MINUTE 059

### The Soldiers' Reunion

Reunions of all types are a common summer occurrence, but few gatherings could compete with the week-long Northwest Nebraska Soldiers Association reunion. Held yearly at Bordeaux, a hamlet east of Chadron, the event featured music, speeches, balloon ascensions, and even a steam-powered merry-go-round. The Chadron Journal noted that the 1902 reunion attendance exceeded 2,000. "208 tents were placed in the grove, while many occupied covered wagons and private tents adjoining the grounds." Many Chadron residents came out daily on the train, and "almost the entire population of Hay Springs, Rushville, and Gordon camped on the grounds for the week."

The reunion grounds were like a small town. A moving picture entertainment was very popular. Oscar Oleson conducted a photograph gallery,, and James Simpson offered "a first-class barber chair."

Nearly all the old soldiers were Union vets, but Confederate vets were allowed to attend. Despite a gracious reception, an old reb from McCook said he "always felt like a skunk at a Sunday school picnic."

## HISTORY MINUTE 060

### Traffic on the Trails

If you find yourself caught in heavy traffic along Interstate 80 this summer, be grateful you weren't traveling the route in the 1850s. Tens of thousands of travelers followed the Oregon and Mormon trails west along the Platte Valley. The necessity of crossing the mountains before the first snows caused immigrants to head out at the same time. Traffic at Missouri river ferries was always backed up. Once across the river, immigrant groups had more room to spread out. The Platte Valley at night was dotted with the campfires of wagon trains.

One traveller reported seeing over 200 wagons in one day, each drawn by five or six yoke of oxen. "From the time we crossed the South Platte," he wrote, "we have met teams almost hourly and it seemed as if Missouri would be totally drained of oxen."

Not all travel was by wagon. Five Mormon companies crossed Nebraska in 1856, pushing their belongings ahead of them in handcarts. The last group included nearly six hundred people who joined the dusty, noisy throng on the road west.

## HISTORY MINUTE 061

### The First Indian Council

The first American council with the Indians in what is now Nebraska took place on August 3, 1804. The American representatives were Meriwether Lewis and William Clark; Indians present were of the Oto and Missouri tribes. The site was "Council Bluff" near the present town of Ft. Calhoun.

Lewis and Clark first encountered the Indians on the evening of August 2. They set up a council for the next day, and offered gifts of roast meat, flour, and corn meal. The Indians responded with a gift of watermelons.

The next morning Lewis and Clark paraded their forces before the Indians, and delivered long speeches explaining what the U.S. government had to offer. The Oto and Missouri chiefs responded with speeches of their own, expressing satisfaction that they now "had fathers which might be depended on."

More gifts followed, including a canister of powder, a bottle of whiskey, some paint, and a few peace medals. Then Captain Lewis fired a few shots in the air with his gun, much to the amazement of those assembled. Their business accomplished, the Lewis & Clark expedition headed upriver.

## HISTORY MINUTE 062

### The Minden House

One of the many hotels luring Nebraska travelers in 1885 was the Minden House, operated in Minden by E.W. Morse. To set his place apart from the run-of-the-mill hostelry, Morse advertised facilities which can only be described as unique. Each guest was promised the best room, the best seat in the dining hall, and the best waiter in the house.

The staff was always ready to serve. "The office clerk has been directed to please everybody, and can unite in prayers, play poker, shake drinks, play billiards, dance a good waltz, amuse the children, and will flirt with any young lady."

Youngsters were given special consideration. "Children will be welcomed with delight, and will be requested to bring hoop sticks to bang the carved rosewood furniture. They will be allowed to pound the piano at all hours, carry away dessert enough for a small family, and make themselves as disagreeable as the fondest mother can desire."

Best of all was the menu, which included cross-eyed herring, locusts on the half-shell, and boiled flies with corn cob salad. The game menu featured keno, old maid, and Presbyterian billiards. And for desert? Leather pies with door jam.

## HISTORY MINUTE 063

### The Plum Creek Massacre

On August 7 or 8, 1864, organized Indian attacks against white settlements and wagon trains were carried out along the Platte River from Ft. Kearny to Julesburg, Colorado. One of the bloodiest of these was a confrontation near Plum Creek Station in what is now Phelps County.

A train of freight wagons bound for Denver, belonging to Thomas Morton of Sidney, Iowa, had barely gotten underway when it was attacked by a large party of hostile Indians. Mrs. Morton, wife of the train owner, was one of two survivors. She recalled that the attack occurred without warning, leaving the freighters no time to organize their defense. The wagons were plundered and burned, and Mrs. Morton was carried off into captivity. Reports of the number killed vary, but probably twelve or more lives were lost. The incident became known as the Plum Creek Massacre. Word of the attack was sent to other settlements by telegraph. This advance warning may account for the smaller loss of life in other attacks made that same day. The tragic and violent clash of Indian and white cultures was to continue for almost 30 years.

## HISTORY MINUTE 064

### Soda Water

The recent popularity of mineral water, seltzer, and soda water brings back the days when nearly every local drugstore had a soda fountain. Here thirsty Nebraskans could escape the summer heat and refresh themselves. Some fountains were humble affairs, but in 1908 Harley Drug Company of Lincoln boasted, "A new 20th century soda fountain of L'art Nouveau design, over 20 feet in length, exceedingly elaborate. Massive onyx columns support a structure of mahogany, encrusted with iridescent art glass and inlaid mosaic. The large bevelled French plate mirror is the largest one-piece mirror in the west." The fountain's new dispensers were pure aluminum, so "anyone who drinks soda water at Harley's will have the satisfaction of knowing that it is pure and free from death-dealing microbes."

Soda water was the trendy drink of 1908. One newspaper admonished its readers, "Judge not the soda water of a few years ago with the modern, mystical potation, the divine exhilaration of today. Soda water is no longer a drink confined to women and children--it's the national beverage. Soda, dear old soda, is the safest tipples of them all and truthfully it may be termed, the 'jagless juice of joy.'"



## HISTORY MINUTE 065

### Bierstadt and the Buffalo

Albert Bierstadt, the great painter of Western landscapes, visited Nebraska in 1863. His intent was to make sketches he could later use in his paintings. While visiting in Nuckolls County, Bierstadt expressed his desire to draw "an enraged buffalo." His host, E.S. Comstock, was happy to oblige. A large bull was separated from the herd, and then wounded. Bierstadt, seated at a temporary table to sketch the scene, found the bull not too ferocious. He asked to have him wounded again.

This time the bull, "infuriated with pain and bleeding at the nostrils, charged the artist. Bierstadt took to his heels. The bull struck the table, shattering it and strewing the artist's utensils far and wide. The fleeing artist, frightened nearly out of his wits, was making the best time of his life. The bison, bellowing terrifically, had so nearly overtaken the artist that he snorted blood and foam upon him. A fatal shot saved Bierstadt from a terrible death."

When he recovered his breath, Bierstadt panted, "No more buffalo for me." His later paintings of buffalo are noted for their remarkable realism.

## HISTORY MINUTE 066

### Summer in the City

The summer of 1898 was a hot one, but sweltering Omahans had many amusements available to take their minds off the heat. The biggest show in town was the Trans-Mississippi Exposition. A cool gondola ride on the exposition grounds lagoon cost 25 cents. Automobile rides were 10 cents for a half mile.

Water activities abounded. Boats on Carter Lake rented for a dollar a day. Steamboat excursions up the Missouri from downtown Omaha to Florence included music and dancing, and the promise of a cooling river breeze.

Bicycle clubs were busy on cooler days. One group met weekly at the Post Office, rode their bikes down the long flight of front steps, and headed off to the city water works. All-day excursions went to Millard and back.

Ball parks were located all over the city, and most had good street car connections. Fare on the double-section street cars could be had for a nickel. Clearly, the coolest pastime in town was taking in a show at the Palm Theatre at 14th and Douglas. Large electric fans blew air across huge cakes of ice near the stage. The cooling breeze only reached the first few rows of seats, so late-comers got the hot seats.

## HISTORY MINUTE 067

### Visit from the Spaniards

Among the earliest, and most unlucky, visitors to what is now Nebraska were the Spanish soldiers under command of Lt. Colonel Don Pedro de Villasur. In the summer of 1720 Villasur, some 40 Spanish troops, and about 60 Pueblo Indians headed north out of Santa Fe. Their destination: the Platte River (or as they referred to it, the Rio de Jesus Maria.)

The Spaniards were concerned about inroads made by French fur-traders in the area. We're not certain what the goal of expedition was, but Villasur brought along farming implements, construction tools, domestic animals, and trade goods.

Arriving in the Platte valley the first week of August, the expedition followed the river to the Loup, near present-day Columbus. Villasur made numerous attempts to contact the Pawnee, but they were clearly not receiving. Villasur and his men set up camp on a grassy plain between the two rivers. At daybreak on August 14, the Pawnee paid a call, wiping out all but 4 or 5 survivors who eventually straggled back to Santa Fe. Another attempt to establish Spanish influence had failed.

## HISTORY MINUTE 068

### School for Teachers

In the days before formal teacher training, many teachers improved their skills by attending the County Normal Institute. Held from one to three weeks every August, the Normal Institute featured the best lecturers and instructors available. Demonstration classes were taught to give teachers pointers on classroom techniques.

Some County Institutes went beyond 'readin', 'ritin', and 'rithmetic. Professor J.H. Miller of Johnson County introduced a new philosophy "for the purpose of elevating the professional spirit of teachers. More time is given to the lives and works of prominent educators, to literature, and to discussion."

The institute in Thayer County was divided into two departments, one for beginning teachers and one for veteran teachers and patrons in regard to the schools."

The County Normal Institute was also a social event, including receptions, band music, and appropriate speeches. These institutes provided the lone teacher in the one-room school with a valuable link to the larger world of public education.

## HISTORY MINUTE 069

### The Death of Sergeant Floyd

The only fatality on the entire transcontinental expedition of Lewis and Clark was that of Sergeant Charles Floyd, who died along the Nebraska shore of the Missouri, August 20, 1804. Sergeant Floyd was one of the most trusted members of the party, and his death was a great loss.

On August 19, Clark noted in his diary:

"Sergeant Floyd is taken very bad all at once with a bilious colic. We attempt to relieve him without success as yet, he gets worst and we are much alarmed at his situation."

The next day's entry reads, "Sergeant Floyd much weaker and no better..." and then, "Sergeant Floyd died with a great deal of composure. We buried him on the top of the bluff 1/2 mile below a small river to which we gave his name. He was buried with honors of war, much lamented. This man at all times gave us proofs of his firmness and determined resolution to do service to his country."

Considering the hazards of a two-year trip across uncharted territory, the fact that Floyd was the only fatality is truly remarkable. A monument in his memory was erected near Sioux City, Iowa in 1901.

## HISTORY MINUTE 070

### Mark Twain's Request

J. Sterling Morton is perhaps best known to Nebraskans as the founder of Arbor Day, but he also served as Secretary of Agriculture under President Grover Cleveland. While secretary, he received the following interesting letter:

"Dear Sir: Your petitioner Mark Twain, a poor farmer of Connecticut, desires a few choice breeds of seed corn. To speak by the card, I want these things to carry to Italy to an English lady. She is a neighbor of mine outside Florence, and has a great garden, and thinks she could raise corn for her table if she had the right ammunition. I myself feel a warm interest in this enterprise, both on patriotic grounds and because I have a key to that garden, which I got made from a wax impression. I think she could raise enough corn for one table, and I am in a position to select that table. P.S. A handful of watermelon seeds would pleasantly add to the lady's employments and give my table a corresponding lift."

Morton sent the corn seeds to Mark Twain, along with his hope "that this delicious food may be popularized among the deluded consumers of macaroni." He also included watermelon seeds guaranteed "to inspire larceny."

## HISTORY MINUTE 071

### The Bicycle Brigade

A bicycle built for soldiers? Believe it or not, this unlikely form of transportation was tried out by the cavalry stationed at Ft. Robinson in the 1890s.

Although the cavalrymen were trained in all aspects of military horsemanship, few on the post in 1895 could ride bicycles. Only three answered the call to take part in the experimental bicycle tests.

These three intrepid cyclists were mounted on high-wheeled Columbia Wheel cycles, and were given a rugged test of their ability to compete with cavalry troops in the field.

Reports indicate the cyclists had "great difficulty" in keeping up with the mounted troops over rough terrain. On smooth and rolling ground, however, the cyclists outdistanced the horsemen.

Bicycles were not a practical alternative to the horse, although one soldier did use his bike to map out the grounds of Ft. Robinson. Bikes were not the solution, but it was just a matter of time before mechanized transportation put the horse cavalry permanently out to pasture.

## HISTORY MINUTE 072

### Preparing for College

As Nebraska college students pack up clothes, CD players, and computers for the trip to college, consider the preparations of George Streeter in the 1880s. He wrote:

"I paid a six month feed bill in advance for my horse, rented a room for myself with fuel and light furnished, where I could do my own cooking, paying six months' rent. I purchased 185 bread tickets, 185 milk tickets, good for one quart each, a 100-pound barrel of oatmeal, 100 pounds of sugar, 200 pounds of potatoes, and a \$10.00 coupon book. The hundred pounds of sugar was mostly for my horse. I visited him frequently and always took him some bread and sugar, or a bottle of beer, of which he was very fond.

"By going to a haberdashery I found what the college boys were wearing and outfitted myself with appropriate clothes. These included, among other things, a tall silk hat, a swallow-tailed coat, and white spats."

George participated in college sports, with the exception of football. "It was too rough a game for me...for up to that time I had never done anything more dangerous than fighting a mad bull, bulldogging a wild steer, or riding an outlaw horse. I was afraid I would not be able to hold my own in a football skirmish."



## HISTORY MINUTE 073

### The Battle of Ash Hollow

September 3rd marks the anniversary of one of the most unjustified conflicts between the U.S. Army and the Sioux--the Battle of Ash Hollow. General William S. Harney was enroute from Ft. Leavenworth to Ft. Laramie in the fall of 1855 with 1,200 men. The purpose of the trek was to enforce order, provide security for travellers on the Overland Trail, and impress Indian groups with the Army's power. Harney and many of his men, however, had their own agenda--avenging the 1854 deaths of Lt. John Grattan and his men.

A band of Brule Sioux under the leadership of Little Thunder was camped on the north side of the Platte, on land guaranteed them by the Ft. Laramie Treaty. General Harney's troops camped across the river as Ash Hollow, while the General professed interest in a peace parlay.

Although Little Thunder's band was not involved in the Grattan massacre, Harney's troops destroyed the village, killed 136 Brule, and dragged captives to Ft. Laramie in chains.

Harney's viciousness brought peace to the trail, but only for a short while.

## HISTORY MINUTE 074

### The First Fair

Nebraska's first fair was held in September of 1859. Though it was a far cry from the extravaganza we know today, the first fair was still unique. Not only was it the first fair of its kind in Nebraska, it was the first territorial fair to be held in the United States.

Nebraska City hosted the fair, because citizens of Otoe County pledged to enclose a ten-acre tract and provide "all the necessary stalls for stock, a floral hall, sheds for agricultural and other implements, and a first class show ground."

Premiums ranged from \$20 for the best ten yoke of working oxen, to 50 cents for the best pair of woolen fringed mittens. J. Sterling Morton, then secretary of the territory, was the featured fair speaker.

Despite the organizers' best efforts, the fair was a modest success. Many settlers were still recovering from the financial panic of 1857 and could not afford to attend. Premiums were paid in territorial warrants, which many considered worthless. The next fair was not held until 1869.

## HISTORY MINUTE 075

### The Death of Crazy Horse

On September 5, 1877, the great Oglala Sioux war chief Crazy Horse was killed at Ft. Robinson. His death was the result of yet another series of misunderstandings between white soldiers and Indian leaders. Commanders at Ft. Robinson were concerned that Crazy Horse was planning a return to the warpath, and sought his arrest. The chief came to the Fort on September 5, assuming he would meet in council with the officers and explain the situation.

Instead of a council room, Crazy Horse was escorted to the guard house. Seeing he was to be imprisoned, the Sioux chief resisted, and was bayoneted by a guard. When the camp bugler played taps, "it brought back to Crazy Horse the old battles; he struggled to arise, and there came from his lips his old rallying cry, 'A good day to fight, a good day to die!' Then his voice ceased, the lights went out, and the last sleep came."

With the death of Crazy Horse, Sioux resistance came to an end. The Oglala were placed on reservation land in South Dakota later in 1877. A monument to Crazy Horse was dedicated at Ft. Robinson in 1934.

## HISTORY MINUTE 076

### Labor Day

For most of us, Labor Day marks the end of the summer. but the holiday once had much more serious meaning. Labor Day was first a celebration for workers, originating in New York City in 1882. The idea quickly spread, and in 1889 the Nebraska legislature passed an act designating the first Monday in September as Labor Day.

The first observance of the holiday was a grand one. Omaha held a gigantic parade, which included hundreds. "The Omaha Guard band, members of the Central Labor Union, bricklayers, plasterers, typographers, carpenters, Patriarch's militant band, a special brigade of German carpenters, iron machinists, plumbers, gas fitters, painters, a group of blacksmiths." The Hibernian band, tanners, sheet iron workers, cornice makers, cigar makers, the colored barbers union, and the Swedish cornet band and 800 knights of labor rounded out the procession.

The 8-hour workday was the focus of the day. Banners, signs, and orators echoed the theme, "8 hours for work, 8 hours for recreation and education, 8 hours for rest."

## HISTORY MINUTE 077

### A Report from the School Commissioner

As thousands of Nebraska students head back to school, it's interesting to consider the state of education in 1860. W.E. Harvey, Commissioner of Common Schools for Nebraska territory reported there were a total of 108 public and 23 private schools in operation. Nearly 3,000 pupils were enrolled, 139 teachers were employed, and their combined wages totalled a whopping \$4,772.19!

Harvey's chief concern was the quality of school buildings. He wrote:

"In the construction of a school house of the most primitive material and style--of logs, perhaps--there is no reason that the first great essentials of good school architecture be neglected. How many cases of consumption, bronchial affections, scrofula, and "sore-eyes" can be directly traced to badly lighted, unventilated and confined schoolrooms."

Harvey also championed good libraries as an essential tool for education, and chastised the legislature for repealing laws providing for book purchases.

## HISTORY MINUTE 078

### Horse-Drawn Days

Many of us have a close relationship with our automobile. (When it runs well, the family car is a family friend. Some car owners go so far as to nickname their vehicles.)

In the days of horse-drawn transportation, the relationship between driver and horse-power was much more personal, and sometimes made the papers.

The death of a horse brought sympathy: "H.S. Fuller's old gray mare died last Saturday. She was a family pet and her loss is keenly felt."

Mistreatment of horses provoked public comment:

"The owners of the teams which were left standing on Maine avenue during the severe rain and hail storm last Friday have hearts no larger than peas, and the next time animals are thus left, there will doubtless be more business for the marshall and the police judge."

Joy-riding was a problem even in horse-drawn days. "Gus Fuhrer's horse and buggy mysteriously disappeared last Sunday while its owner was attending services. It was concluded somebody borrowed the rig and forgot to return it. The buggy was a brand new one, Mr. Fuhrer having purchased it only last Monday."

## HISTORY MINUTE 079

### The Early Days of Football

One hundred years ago, football at the University of Nebraska didn't exist. But by 1889, the University's civil engineering students laid out a field for their own amusement, and the medical students organized a team. In 1890, Dr. Langdon Frothingham of Harvard University joined the NU faculty to teach agriculture and bacteriology. He also agreed to coach the university's first varsity team.

On Thanksgiving Day, 1890, before a crowd of more than 500, the 12-man University of Nebraska made its debut. The "Old Gold Knights" as they were called, defeated their first opponent, the Omaha YMCA, by the score of 10 to 0.

The next game wasn't arranged until February 3, 1891. The University team traveled to Crete to beat Doane college.

The University club was left without a coach for the 91-92 season.

In 1882, with the hiring of coach J.S. Williams, football became a permanent part of the University of Nebraska.

## HISTORY MINUTE 080

### Lt. Warren Looks at the Sandhills

Lt. G.K. Warren conducted an exploration of Nebraska's sandhills in September of 1855. His account influenced perceptions of the regions for over twenty years. He wrote:

"The scenery is exceedingly solitary, silent, and desolate, and depressing to one's spirits. Antelope, and at some times, buffalo, are numerous. This is the common war ground for the Dakotas, Crows, Omaha, Poncas, and Pawnee. The character of the country is well calculated to cover a stealthy approach. Two parties may pass close without being aware of each other's presence, and I consider it hopeless to attempt to capture any who sought refuge in the sandhills. Further west, I am told, these hills increase in height and are impossible for horses."

Lt. Warren's pessimistic conclusion was:

"Only a small portion is susceptible to cultivation...it must long remain an Indian country."

In the 1870's the accidental discovery of the Sandhills' cattle-raising potential disproved Lt. Warren's dismal view and changed perceptions of the region.



## HISTORY MINUTE 081

### The Stage to Phelps Center

A traveler (who called himself "Eyes") sent the local paper the following account of his 1883 trip from Kearney to Phelps Center, then the Phelps county seat. He was not impressed with the vehicle:

"There were four wheels to begin on; these were connected by sticks running crosswise and lengthwise, and on these was mounted that which passed for a seat."

On the trip, this so-called "stagecoach" stopped at Williamsburg. "Here we found postoffice, hotel, store, private residence, and general lounging place, all under one roof; in fact, the whole town was under one roof, and it was not a large roof, either. The establishment was dirty in the front, dirtier in the rear, and the dirtiest in the centre."

He was similarly unimpressed by settlers' dogs. "They were a sure index of the financial state of the residents. If the people were poor, they had a yellow dog; if they were very poor, a black dog; if exceedingly poor, both a yellow and black dog would rush from the dooryard as if to devour us on the spot."

## HISTORY MINUTE 082

### Nebraska's Nine Senators

Historically, Nebraska senators have served for years and years. But from 1951 to 1954, our state was represented by no less than nine individuals. The rapid change began in 1951 with the unexpected death of Senator Kenneth Wherry. Governor Val Peterson appointed Fred Seaton to take Wherry's place. Seaton served until November 1952. He did not file for re-election, and his place was filled by Dwight Griswold. Griswold died early in 1954. Governor Bob Crosby appointed Mrs. Eva Bowring to fill the seat vacated by Wherry, Seaton, and Griswold.

Mrs. Bowring also did not file for re-election. Mrs. Hazel Abel of Lincoln was elected, to the short term seat. Carl Curtis then filled the seat vacated by Wherry, Seaton, Griswold, Bowring, and Abel.

To add to the confusion, Hugh Butler, who held the other Senate seat, died in July of 1954. His place was filled by Samuel Reynolds. Roman Hruska was elected to fill the Butler-Reynolds vacancy, bringing the rapid changes to an end.

## HISTORY MINUTE 083

### The Founding of Ft. Kearny

Ft. Kearny, near the present-day city of Kearney, was founded in September of 1848. Yet this early military outpost was not the first Ft. Kearny in Nebraska. Two years earlier, the original Ft. Kearney had been located on the Missouri, in what is now downtown Nebraska City.

The first fort had as its purpose the protection of traffic on the overland trail. Soon most of that traffic bypassed the Missouri location, so a new site was selected some 97 miles further west.

The new Ft. Kearny rapidly developed into one of the most important stops on the way West. Literally thousands of emigrants passed by it each year. Ft. Kearny was viewed as the jumping-off place to the great unknown. The route to the east was fairly safe and settled, but west of the Fort lay Indian country, and the geographic wonders of the West.

By 1871, railroad lines connected the country, and the Indian troubles had moved further west. Ft. Kearny was abandoned, having served its purpose well.

## HISTORY MINUTE 084

### We're All Immigrants

In one way or another, everyone now living in Nebraska came from somewhere else. Ten thousand years ago, the nomadic forebearers of today's Indians first came into the Great Plains region. Two hundred and fifty years ago, European fur traders and trappers explored and hunted in what is now Nebraska. White settlement began in earnest after 1865. Nebraska's greatest growth occurred between the Civil War and World War I.

During that time, roughly half the new settlers came directly from foreign homes. The largest group--almost a third of the foreign-born in Nebraska--were German. Czechs accounted for 12 percent of the foreign-born group, and the Swedes 12 percent. Danish, Irish, German-Russian, Polish, British, Norwegian, Canadian, Russian, Italian, and Greek immigrants came to call Nebraska their home.

Of course, many Nebraska settlers were "Yankees." moving west from the Eastern United States. But even these so-called "Americans" were the descendants of immigrants. So in a real sense, none of us here are natives. We're all immigrants to this place called Nebraska.

## HISTORY MINUTE 085

### The First Columbus Day

October 12, Columbus Day, became a legal holiday in 1911. The bill creating the holiday caused little comment in the legislature, but not everyone was happy about the new observance. Although banks and public offices were to be closed, in Omaha "the Board of Education failed to discover any reason why it should quit business because Columbus went out on a cruise 408 years ago and sighted land."

Other observers say the new holiday as a threat. "The banking and post office and public office businesses are clearly imperiled by this holiday movement. We must save them."

Some went so far as to suggest the holiday was downright un-American. "Americans are not holiday lovers. A week without a holiday is a failure in countries where people take more time to enjoy life than we do, but in this country an extra day off is an irritation."

Even Columbus, Nebraska, the town which bears the explorer's name, was unenthusiastic about the first Columbus day. Although the newspaper reported that Italians in Lincoln gathered to commemorate the day, no observance took place in Columbus itself. Columbus Day was quite an occasion in other parts of the country, but in Nebraska it was just another day.

## HISTORY MINUTE 086

### Fashion's Follies and Vices

Major H.T. Brooks of Pearl Harbor, New York, was the featured guest speaker for the 1868 State Board of Agriculture Meeting. His topic was allegedly agriculture, but after a few obligatory remarks about corn, weeds, fruits, and fences, Major Brooks launched into a sermon on the evils of fashion. He contended:

"Socially, our older communities are demoralized and enslaved. The fashion plates are consulted ten times as often as the laws, and are treated with far greater deference than the decisions of the Supreme Court. Dress, if constantly varied, absorbs much attention. I am not surprised that those who plunge deepest into the vortex of fashion find little time for anything else. Their hearts soon become as empty as their skirts, their understandings as contracted as their boots their moral and intellectual faculties approximate the dressed monkey of the circus."

Major Brooks advised, "Don't let a few shallow-plated autocrats of Paris and new York dictate what you shall wear. Get up a western style. Let it be plain, serviceable, elegant, and everlasting. Copy the Quakers if you copy anybody."

We can only guess how Major Brooks might react today to the Nebraska "uniform" of bib overalls and seed cap.

## HISTORY MINUTE 087

### The State and the Stadium

Nebraska's passion for pigskin has prompted commentary from natives and "foreigners" alike. Sometimes outside observers are more accurate than we'd like to admit.

A New York journalist wrote,

"The pride of Nebraska is her gangling university on the flats of Lincoln, and the chief business of the university is the manufacture of championship football teams. To the outlander it may seem impious to emphasize the university stadium at the expense of a George Norris or a Willa Cather, but it is vital because it takes the ranch-hand from Cherry County, the sugar-beet laborer from the panhandle, and the packing-house boy from South Omaha and for three months each fall makes them a crusading host for Nebraska honor. A peculiar system of logic enables the gridiron addict to equate his university with Harvard, Oxford, and Cambridge. But the Nebraskan's pride does not touch his purse. He continues to complain like a stuck pig at the burden of the university appropriation, and to applaud the legislature for heroically keeping the salary scale of teachers below that of almost any other recognized university in the country."

If you'd like to argue with these impressions--you're too late. These contemporary sounding comments appeared fifty five years ago--in 1932!

## HISTORY MINUTE 088

### Corn Shucking

Harvest time brings to mind the bad old days, when the corn crop was picked and shucked by hand. One expert on the subject described it this way in 1886:

"Corn Shucking. Well, what about it? Not very much, only you'll never catch corn shucking itself. Left to itself, it will stay in the field til the next Fourth of July. No, we must shuck it ourselves, with only the aid of a hired man and a shucking pin. We must grasp each ear firmly with one hand, quietly but quickly peel off the shucks, toss it into the wagon, and make a jump for the next ear, with the determination of a man who has a family depending on him and winter bearing down at the rate of five degrees a week on the thermometer.

There is a great difference in corn shuckers in the amount they can gather in a day. It ranges from thirty to a hundred bushels depending on the amount of practice, the quality of the corn, the weather, and the natural ability of the man as a liar. Fifty bushels is enough to make the average man sleep so soundly that an earthquake would scarcely wake him. There's something about corn shucking which exercises every muscle, and causes one to sleep as sound as an Egyptian mummy."



## HISTORY MINUTE 089

### Recruiting for Nebraska

Recruiters courting new industries and corporations for Nebraska in the 1980s are not the first to tout the wonders of this place. Perhaps our modern-day salesman could try this 1855 pitch:

"It has been remarked that the people of Nebraska, its actual residents, possess in a higher degree than in any other new community, the elements of a great people. They have hands, heads, hearts, and they know how to use them. Labor here is respected. It is a necessity, yet it is pursued with cheerfulness and brings its own reward. Brethren of the East, send us no more speculators to monopolize our best timber and farming lands, send us no more operators and politicians to gorge themselves upon our fatness and then return to their old homes. But send us more of your industrious, intelligent, active working men, more of the faithful sons of toil. We will join hand and heart to welcome, and they will reap rich rewards as the results of their enterprise and labor. Work has been commenced by true and earnest men, and we want more of them."

## HISTORY MINUTE 090

### The Mighty Platte

Nebraskans who have canoed, or attempted to canoe, the Platte river, will be amused by this 1856 view of the river:

"The Platte River will furnish a channel at all seasons for a class of steamers such as run between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati; the navigation of the river will soon improve its channels. It is supposed by some that the Platte river is not navigable. I grant that a large Missouri river boat could not navigate it, but there has not been a steamboat up to Omaha this season that could not run up the Platte River over one hundred miles."

This cock-eyed optimist even proposed commercial freighting on the Platte. "I hope our Eastern Capitalists will see the importance of exploring the Platte Valley. This can be done by steamboats. Let a company be formed, and traverse the river, mark out and select town sites, and then soon will come settlers along the entire length of the distance, and the business would soon furnish trade for about a dozen steamers."

Those of us who know the Platte could more easily agree with Mark Twain's assessment. He opined, "It's the sorriest excuse for a river I've ever seen."

## HISTORY MINUTE 091

### Pioneer Prescriptions

Nebraska pioneers had to rely on their own ingenuity to cure their illnesses and injuries. Some help came in the form of medical recipe books, such as Dr. Chase's *Recipes of Information for Everyone*. One of the good doctor's more unusual nostrums was Toad Ointment "good for sprains, strains, lame-back, rheumatism. Good sized toads, 4 in number; put into boiling water and cook until very soft, then take them out, boil the water down to 1/2 pint, and add fresh-churned butter--one pound. Simmer together, then add two ounces tincture or arnica. Some persons might think this hard on toads, but you could not kill them quicker in any other way."

Other cures were made from plants. A typical formula called for poke, mandrake, yellow duck, sassafras, blue flag, and sweet elder flowers. A quart of alcohol and 4 pounds of sugar were added, and the tonic could be used "in most inveterate diseases of long standing, syphilis not excepted."

The simplest cure of all was for fever sores. "Scrape a fresh turnip. Apply every four hours night and day until healed."

## HISTORY MINUTE 092

### Hay Baling Contests

Nowadays, October's the time for championship baseball. But in the 1920s, the town of Stuart played host to the Hay Baling Championship of the World. The first competition, in 1924, was won by a crew which baled two tons of hay in twenty-one minutes. And just like in penmanship class, neatness counted. Extra points were earned by the crew with the greatest number of perfect bales of uniform weight. The following year's contest attracted nationwide attention. Governor Adam McMullen was on hand to award first prize, and several companies sent cameramen to record the ballyhoo.

The next two years saw even bigger contests. But the Tri-County Improvement Association, sponsor of the event, couldn't leave well enough alone. One faction decided a cow-milking contest would be the thing, while the hay-baling proponents were sure a milking contest would be an utter failure. In the midst of all the arguments, the Hay Baling World Championship fell by the wayside. This year once again sports fans will have to content themselves with the World Series.

## HISTORY MINUTE 093

### Mrs. Bloomer Speaks on Women's Rights

Amelia Bloomer, an early advocate of women's rights, addressed the Nebraska Territorial Legislature in 1856. Her topic was the vote for women, and although her subject was not popular, Mrs. Bloomer was well-received. Many in attendance commented on her attire--the billowy divided skirt which came to be known as "Bloomers." Some actually listened to her arguments, and reported that her eloquence was such "a man could not have beat it." One newspaper said "she was very much a gentleman."

Not every listener was convinced. One commentator wrote, "We most heartily endorse the sentiments of her lecture--that women should not be looked upon as dolls or playthings--but the rugged duties of life belong to a man, and him alone."

Not all remarks were so positive. The Nebraska City Paper opined, "Lady orators are wont to plume themselves on their large audiences, as if public interest was in the subject, or in the oratrix as a person of eloquence, when in fact simple curiosity is the motive which draws men and women to hear a hen crow."

## HISTORY MINUTE 094

### The Talking Wires

Before Nebraska was even a state, communication with both coasts was possible via the telegraph. In 1858 the Butterfield stage carried messages from the Missouri River to the West Coast in 25 days. In 1860, the Pony Express cut the time to nine days. But in October of 1861, completion of the Pacific Telegraph Line made communication almost instantaneous.

Edward Creighton, who had built the telegraph line from St. Louis to Omaha, headed west in 1860 to survey a route to the Pacific. Western Union, the California State Telegraph Company, and Brigham Young were all involved in the project. Construction went ahead rapidly. The line reached Ft. Kearny in time to carry news of Abraham Lincoln's presidential victory. During the spring of 1861 the line was as far west as Julesburg, and by October the crew met the line coming in from the west at Salt Lake City.

The talking wires were not trouble-free. Poles were cut down, sections of wire were cut away, and telegraph stations were attacked by still-hostile Indians. Keeping the lines open became a perpetual battle, but in theory Nebraska was only moments away from the coasts.

## HISTORY MINUTE 095

### FDR Versus Big Red

Fall means football in Nebraska, and has for years. No one, not even the President of the United States, is unaffected by the pervasive grip of the gridiron. Organizers of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's re-election campaign had to take Nebraska football into consideration. A 1936 account reported:

"Democratic leaders concede that President Roosevelt will have strong competition of an unusual sort here Saturday. The President is expected to make a brief talk on the steps of the capitol, just when a large number of football addicts will be wanting to tune in the Nebraska-Minnesota game. The democrats have their quota of football filberts just as do the republicans, union party members, farmer-laborites, Townsendites, socialists, and communists. As a concession to the gridiron fans, arrangements are being made for reception of the game through the public address system at the capitol prior to the president's speech."

It's probably not a coincidence that FDR's speech was scheduled for mid-afternoon--just about half-time of the Nebraska-Minnesota game!

## HISTORY MINUTE 096

### He Talked Too Much

Chicago may have been home to Al Capone, but in the 1920s and 30s, Nebraska was not without its gangsters. One of them, Gene Livingston, was gunned down in 1930. The report read, "He is dead because he talked too much. Had he followed the gangster's rule of silence, he probably would be alive today. But Livingston talked. He secured too much publicity, after charging a certain Omaha police officer with extortion. The publicity reflected on the police department.

There are many theories advanced as to the killing of Livingston. Which theory is the right one, we may never know. But there is no reason that an underworld should exist in Omaha any more than a sore should be allowed to fester on a human body. It is a sad commentary on the police department that permits bribery and the operation of beer joints such as the one where Livingston met his death.

The effect of his death, whether caused by a fellow gangster or part of a political plot, will be the same. The police department will shortly undergo a wide-sweeping reorganization.



## HISTORY MINUTE 097

### Championship Cornhusking

West Point, Nebraska, seems an unlikely location for "America's biggest sporting event," but that's how the 1933 National Cornhusking championship was billed. Nearly 70,000 people invaded the Ben Stalp farm near West Point for what was called, "The Cornfield Derby."

NBC provided live radio coverage, and movie newsreel cameras recorded the event. Concession stands hawked food and souvenirs. Brass bands, Omaha Indian dancers, drill teams, and vocal groups performed. Racer Barney Oldfield drove an Allis-Chalmers tractor at the amazing speed of 62 miles per hour.

But what about the cornhusking? Two men from Nebraska, South Dakota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio worked their way down the cornrows. Yield was carefully measured, with penalties levied for husks left on the ears and ears left in the field. The winner, a Nebraskan, husked 27 bushels in 80 minutes.

Mechanical corn pickers and World War II ended championship cornhusking. Now the only field that attracts 70,000 is the football field.

## HISTORY MINUTE 098

### Nebraska Cigars

Time was when cigar smokers could indulge in their favorite vice and still "Buy Nebraskan." Although the state never rivalled Cuba's reputation for cigar making, a number of successful Nebraska businesses "rolled their own." As early as 1858 the papers reported, "Mr. Philip Dueser has commenced the manufacture of Segars in this city. We speak experimentally when we say Mr. Dueser's Segars are as nice as any we are in the habit of 'puffing'."

The Omaha firm of West and Fristcher was the largest cigar manufacture west of the Mississippi.

Fremont and Lincoln both boasted cigar factories until World War I. The Fremont firm of Saeger & Sons employed "twenty-five to thirty hands at the factory and in the year 1903 over 1 million cigars were the result of their skill and labor." One of the Saeger's most popular cigars sported a pretty young lady on the box label. And the cigar's name? Nebraska Girl.

## HISTORY MINUTE 099

### Armistice Day

When the "war to end all wars" ended, Nebraskans joined people the world over in celebration. News that the 1918 armistice had been signed reached Nebraska in the middle of the night. The folks in North Platte who were awake didn't wait til daybreak to spread the news. At 4 a.m. 40 pounds of dynamite were set off in the city park, starting a party that lasted til midnight.

Noise was the order of the day. Cannon were fired, church bells rung, locomotive whistles blown, guns shot--the louder the better. And what's a celebration without food? Loup City businessmen raised \$300 by 9 a.m. for a shindig that included 3,000 biscuits, 500 pounds of beef, 40 loaves of bread and hundred of gallons of coffee.

Not every celebration was boisterous. Valentine, like many Nebraska towns, was caught in the grip of the influenza epidemic. Those few who could get out drove wagons up and down Main Street, yelling and firing guns into the air. November 11 now is Veteran's Day, but the holiday still retains the hope for peace that marked the first Armistice Day.

## HISTORY MINUTE 100

### You Call This Postal Service?

Postal service in Nebraska's early days was a sometimes thing. And since the mails were the principal means of communication, the on-again, off-again delivery was a real problem to some. A newspaper editor wrote this tirade in 1859:

"We are indebted to some thievish postmaster, scoundrelly clerk, or lazy and drunken booby of a driver for late and valuable papers--one about eight months, the other five months on its way to this city. The reason is obvious. There are a parcel of deaf, dumb, blind, illiterate postmasters who can neither read, write, spell, taste, think, feel, or speak the English language. They are generally asleep when the mail passes, or are drunk. As for mail contractors, they are no more fit for the office than to drive a stage for Russel, Majors and Waddell. In this latter capacity they would be instantly discharged on the grounds of mental imbecility and physical incompetency. Is it to be wondered that half our letters are lost, and our papers come in five months, not five days?"

## HISTORY MINUTE 101

### Early Automobiles

Turn-of-the-century advertisements show us the wide variety of automobiles which were available to Nebraskans. But a look at vehicle registrations shows us what early motorists actually drove, and who the pioneers of the highways were. Oldsmobiles, Fords, and Cadillacs are among the familiar makes listed. Reos, and Maxwells were also favorites with Nebraskans, along with Jeffreys and Ramblers. Some cars were "do-it-yourself" projects built from mail-order kits. Leslie Cushman of Lincoln registered a 1 & 1/2 horse power car of his own make in 1907. He would have been blown off the road by Gould Dietz's 40 horse power Thomas, purchased direct from the factory for 3,000 dollars. Nebraska doctors were among the earliest auto enthusiasts. Dr. D.H. Shall of Berlin was typical of these modern physicians as he motored to his housecalls in his shiny Locomobile.

Surprisingly, many early car owners had two-car families. The second, usually smaller vehicle was registered in the wife's name. Frank Young of Broken Bow drove the twelve horsepower Stanley Steamer, while his wife buzzed around town in a 4 1/2 horsepower Olds.

## HISTORY MINUTE 102

### Galvanized Yankees

One of the most unusual military units to serve in Nebraska during the Indian Wars were the "galvanized Yankees." Also known as "white-washed rebs," these soldiers were Confederate prisoners recruited from Union prison camps who were sent West. The first regiment of galvanized Yankees arrived on the Plains in 1864. Serving at Ft. Kearny and Ft. McPherson in Nebraska Territory, these soldiers escorted supply trains and stagecoaches, guarded survey parties for the railroad, rebuilt miles of telegraph lines, and fought an occasional skirmish with Indian bands.

Officially known as the "U.S. Volunteers," the soldiers served in Minnesota, the Dakotas, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah, in addition to Nebraska. A few deserted, but most proved good soldiers, despite the fact that they were serving the government they had, as Confederates, vowed to destroy. And though military life on the Plains was no bed of roses, it was a vast improvement over life in the Union P.O.W. camps. The volunteers were discharged at the end of their terms of service. The last units were mustered out from Ft. Kearny in November, 1866.

## HISTORY MINUTE 103

### The Holdup

Stage coach robberies were a frequent occurrence on the route from the Black Hills gold fields to Sidney, Nebraska. But not all the hold-ups could be called run of the mill. In one 1877 robbery, a passenger shot the driver, and promised to kill everyone who didn't cooperate. The passengers were relieved of their gold dust, money, jewelry and weapons. A strong box containing gold dust was blown open, and although the blast was a neat one, the front of the stage was set on fire.

Things just weren't going well. The robbers said they didn't mean to shoot the driver, and gave him \$30 and a passenger's gold watch for his trouble. Another passenger was allowed to retain his keepsake revolver, and a third young man was given back his heirloom gold watch. Before riding off, the road agents gave each victim ten dollars in cash.

The bandits could easily afford this generosity. The gold dust they rode off with was valued at eleven thousand dollars.

## HISTORY MINUTE 104

### Senator Cody

William F. Cody, better known as Buffalo Bill, was famed for his exploits as a buffalo hunter, scout and showman. Few have heard of his political career, probably because it was short and unsuccessful.

In 1872, some of Cody's friends secured his nomination as the Democratic candidate for the Nebraska Legislature. Cody was running for the 26th district seat, which included Lincoln, Cheyenne, Dawson, Buffalo, Kearney, Franklin, and Harlan counties. Democratic candidates were largely losers in the very Republican 26th district, but the Cody name was a powerful draw. Buffalo Bill won the election by a 44 vote margin.

D. T. Ashburn, the Republican candidate, filed a protest, charging the election results were incomplete. He was right; the Harlan County clerk sent his election returns to Lincoln, Nebraska rather than Lincoln county. The new tally showed Ashburn the winner. Cody was in New York for his first theatrical production, and did not contest the results. He later wrote he cared very little about it, and made no effort whatever to secure the election.



## HISTORY MINUTE 105

### The Lake Monster

During the early 1920, Alkali Lake near Gordon was the reputed residence of a sea monster. Reports of the giant creature said, "Its head was like an oil barrel, shiny black in the moonlight." "When it rears and flips its powerful tail, the farmers are made seasick." "It eats a dozen calves when it comes ashore and flattens the cornfields." An Omaha man who saw the creature said, "the monster was 300 feet long and its mouth large enough to hold the Woodmen of the World Building."

In 1923, the Hay Springs News called for an investigation of the lake, proposing to drag the lake and capture the monster. A few months later, the paper reported, "The Hay Springs Investigating Association has, after due consideration, practically given up the idea of dragging the Lake in an effort to locate the monster. Land owners want 4,000 dollars for three mont's lease, and certain percent of exhibition money if the animal is found. Considered excessive, the Association concluded to go no further." Newspaperman John Maher, known for his hoaxes, was probably responsible for this tall tale, too.

## HISTORY MINUTE 106

### Thanksgiving Cooking

For most of us, preparing the Thanksgiving meal is a fairly simple proposition. We stuff the bird, stuff it in the oven, and wait for the timer to pop out. In settlement days, Thanksgiving was not such an easy task. Consider these instructions:

"Select a young Turkey, remove all the feathers carefully, singe it over a burning newspaper on the top of the stove; then draw it nicely, being careful not to break any of the internal organs, remove the crop carefully, cut off the head, rinse, wipe dry, and stuff. Set it in the oven and baste often." Lucky pioneer cooks could roast their bird in a wood-burning stove. Those on the treeless plains had to stoke the stove with cow chips or bundles of twisted hay.

In the good times, pumpkin or mincemeat pies would bake along with the turkey. Rhubarb, green tomato, dried apple, or vinegar pie graced the table when the traditional fixin's were scarce. And if worse came to worse, the ingenious pioneer cook could concoct "Poorman's Pie,"--crumbled biscuits & cream baked in a crust.

## HISTORY MINUTE 107

### The U.S.S. Nebraska

From 1907 to 1923, one of the battleships in the U.S. Navy's Fleet was the U.S.S. Nebraska. Constructed in Seattle and commissioned in 1907, the Nebraska engaged in convoy duty on the Atlantic during World War I. Nebraskans took an active interest in the ship's construction. Governor Ezra Savage drove the first rivet into the ship's keel in 1902. Two years later, Governor John Mickey and his daughter Mary christened the ship.

In 1905, the Nebraska Legislature appropriated funds to purchase a silver service to be presented to the ship. The Reichenberg-Smith Company of Omaha submitted the winning design for the 25-piece sterling silver service. Over 1300 ounces of silver were used to create ornate trays, coffee service, punch bowl, and other pieces.

The U.S.S. Nebraska was de-commissioned in 1920, and was sold for scrap in 1923. Although several pieces are missing, the remaining silver service may be seen at the Nebraska Governor's Mansion, where it enjoys frequent use.

## HISTORY MINUTE 108

### The Cudahy-Crowe Case

One of the most interesting criminal cases in Nebraska history is the 1900 kidnapping of 16-year-old Eddie Cudahy, son of the prominent Omaha meat packer. A ransom of \$25,000 in gold was paid for Eddie's safe return. Police named Pat Crowe as the principal suspect in the case. Crowe, a petty criminal and former butcher, had been fired by Cudahy for stealing company funds. Despite his wrong-doing, Pat Crowe led something of a charmed life. After confessing his crime in a letter to his hometown priest, Crowe wounded an Omaha police officer while making good his escape. Four years later, he turned himself in, saying a message from God had told him to do so. Standing trial, Crowe was first acquitted of shooting the policeman. Then, because there was no law against kidnapping, Crowe stood trial for the "robbery" of Eddie Cudahy. The prosecution called 96 witnesses and used Crowe's two confessions. The defense called no witnesses, not even Crowe himself. Amazingly, Crowe was acquitted of the kidnapping as well. In Pat Crowe's case, crime did pay, and rather handsomely at that.

## HISTORY MINUTE 109

### Making Sugar

Sweeteners were a scarcity in Nebraska's early days. Lack of trees not only meant no tree-sap to collect, but no habitat for bees as well. Sugar could be shipped in, but freight costs sent the prices sky high.

Some folks began to grow their own sugar. As early as 1856, molasses was being produced from sorghum grown on Nebraska farms. Known as "Chinese sugar cane" the crop survived Nebraska's sometimes harsh growing conditions. Milling the cane to extract syrup could be done simply, by running the cane through two rollers. More elaborate mills relied on vertical rollers worked by a horse-drawn sweep. Sorghum continued to be grown into this century, until it was supplanted by a new sweet crop--the sugar beet. Ideally suited to the climate of central and western Nebraska, the sugar beet had only one drawback. Its cultivation was incredibly labor intensive. German-Russian, Japanese, and Mexican-American farm laborers worked long hours thinning, hoeing, cultivating, and harvesting beets. Today the process is largely mechanized, and huge western Nebraska sugar factories have replaced the home-made sugar mill.

## HISTORY MINUTE 110

### The Salvation Army Hotel

The Salvation Army has always helped those who were down and out. To inform readers about the Army's work in Omaha, a reporter disguised himself as a hobo in December of 1908. He wrote:

"We headed for the Workingmen's Hotel, a haven for the unemployed who were honestly looking for a job. Beds were available for 15 cents a night. Admittance was contingent on taking a bath at 8 p.m. and turning in by 10. While we showered, clothing was fumigated by sulphur. The attendant issued towels and clean nightshirts. Then to bed, with shoes, the most important part of the hobo's wardrobe, tucked safely under the pillow."

The next morning the reporter went looking for work. He took the advice of a veteran hobo, and let the wind blow the sulphur from his clothes. "The last time," the hobo said, "I went right to the saloon and stood by the stove. Soon everybody was coughing and sneezing and the bouncer threw me out."

Despite the fumigation, the reporter concluded, "the Workingman's hotel affords an opportunity for regaining a hold on oneself, on life, and on the bread problem."

## HISTORY MINUTE 111

### The Delivery Truck

At the turn of the century, delivery trucks began to replace horses and wagons for short-haul transportation of freight. A 1911 observer touted the many advantages of mechanical horsepower:

"A number of firms have now abandoned the horse as a factor in the delivery business and have purchased auto delivery vehicles. We believe the number will constantly increase. A horse delivery wagon requires 144 square feet. On the other hand, a motor wagon carrying like capacity takes up only 60 square feet, whether on the street or in the stable."

"In New York, over 140,000 horses are used daily in trucking. Were this army of quadrupeds harnessed tandem fashion to a vehicle, the first animal would enter the city of Scranton, Pennsylvania before the wheels of the vehicle turned out of New York City. Probably the majority of horses could be entirely dispensed with by a substitution of the motor vehicle. What such an elimination of the horse, and its co-partner the fly, would mean to the health of the community is almost beyond record."

## HISTORY MINUTE 112

### Lumbering on the Niobrara

Lumbering in Nebraska seems like a fairly unlikely business. Floating logs down a Nebraska river seems even more improbable. But in 1859, a group of optimistic lumbermen eyed the trees in Long Pine Canyon, and the Niobrara River, as the site for Nebraska's lumber industry. Twenty years later, one of their number recalled:

"We struck out for the pinery and reached the destination in good time, good order, and good condition. On arrival, only a minority of the men still favored going ahead with the experiment. Soon, however, 53 logs were cut and snaked to Long Pine Creek by teamster William Lamont. The logs were floated the short distance down to the Niobrara, but then there was trouble. Twenty rather cross Indians of the Two Kettle band of Sioux claimed the logs as their own. They had already taken possession of our luggage, arms, et cetera. We managed to retrieve our goods, but recognizing the futility of the project under the circumstances, we engaged in a masterly retreat."

Later attempts were defeated by the Niobrara's rocks and sandbars, and the plan was eventually abandoned.



## HISTORY MINUTE 113

### Nebraska Winters

If Nebraska winters seem long to you, consider the season a hundred years ago. No television or radio to ward off cabin fever--just chores that had to be done, regardless of the weather. A farmer near Gibbon wrote these accounts back home to New York:

"December, 1887--Dear Brother and Sister: Today we are enjoying a genuine Nebraska blizzard. Not as bad as I have seen, but enough to make staying indoors by a hot stove quite enjoyable. Last year we had an old fashioned western blizzard with a capital B. The snow piled up and covered everything and blew into every crevice. My pig was buried up and when I went out the next morning I could see one ear sticking through the snow, but he was all right after shaking off the snow. There were a good many hogs and cattle lost about here. This year we have three cows and a calf to take care of.

Mary is ironing today. She irons on the dining room table and fetches the irons from the gasoline stove in the kitchen. A gasoline blaze beats coal or wood to heat flat irons. Besides, the town is out of coal; many have nothing to burn but corn cobs."

## HISTORY MINUTE 114

### Trenton's Christmas Tree

Christmas decorations are so common in Nebraska towns we take them for granted. But there was a time when community decorations were rare. "Decking the halls" was a tough order in many parts of Nebraska, where trees of any sort were scarce. Cottonwood branches and tumbleweeds replaced Christmas trees at home, but a tree for the center of town was harder to fashion.

Enter the young men of Trenton. On Christmas Eve, 1890, a group of these enterprising homesteaders dragged a windmill tower to the main intersection of town. A few pine and cedar boughs were attached to the tower, along with a number of barn lanterns. Local merchants were tapped for donations, and after dark the lanterns were lit and the town's children were assembled. While the tykes gazed in wonder at the makeshift tree, bags of goodies were distributed. And while one observer commented, "There was probably quite a bit of liquor mixed up in it," another said, "It was quite an ornament to the street, and no doubt the recipients were grateful."

## HISTORY MINUTE 115

### Blind Boone

John William Boone, known as Blind Boone, was a black pianist known and loved by Nebraskans for 40 years. Boone criss-crossed Nebraska repeatedly, playing in opera houses, schools, and churches from Omaha to Ft. Robinson. His programs included a variety of vocal and piano music, both popular and classical. Newspapers referred to him as "a prodigy, the wonder of the musical world."

Born in Missouri, Boone was blinded at the age of six months. As a child he showed remarkable musical talent, first on the tin whistle, then on the harmonica. At the St. Louis School for the Blind, he learned to play piano, and added the ragtime numbers he heard in St. Louis bordellos to his repertoire. His piano imitations of the calliope, banjo, fiddle, music box, guitar, fife and drum, were great favorites with his audiences.

Boone became prosperous and ponderous, weighing over 250 pounds. He was well known for his charity, and is said to have put "more roofs on churches than any other man." But by the 1920s, Boone was out of style, and he died a poor man.

## HISTORY MINUTE 116

### Weddings in Early Nebraska

Holiday time is often wedding time, and so it was in Nebraska's early days. Weddings varied depending on the circumstances of the couple involved, and how settled their part of Nebraska was. Couples were married by clergymen in churches or church parsonages if available, but many had civil ceremonies. The nearest justice of the peace or judge officiated, and the ceremony might take place in private offices, local hotels, gospel tents, or labor halls. Home weddings were common, and sometimes attended by "as many as could get into the house or look through the windows from the outside."

Wedding attire varied greatly. The bride's wedding dress often served double duty as her "Sunday-go-to-meetin'" dress. Some papers made mention of the clothing worn, but often the phrase, "the bride was modestly and daintily attired," comprised the wedding's fashion notes.

Gifts were often simple and practical, but lists of gifts and donors were sometimes published in the paper. A December, 1878 list included: silver cake dish, pickle dish, castor, soup ladle, napkin ring, butter dish, and a costly set of cameo jewelry."

## HISTORY MINUTE 117

### Butchering on the Farm

Before the days of grocery store meat counters, butchering meat, especially hogs, was a winter-time neighborhood project. Families joined together, pooled their tools and equipment, and dressed their meat together.

On the day of butchering, each neighbor brought two or three fat porkers to the appointed farm. Older children were kept home from school to help, but the little ones were sent off to keep them from getting underfoot.

While water heated for scalding, the hogs were killed, bled, and quartered. The men scalded the sections, and cut them into more manageable pieces. Soon everyone was busy, cutting meat, cooking down lard, preparing hams and bacon to cure, grinding meat for sausage. The work took place outdoors, in Mother Nature's deep-freeze, and the women kept the coffee pots full. By mid-afternoon, the major work was done, and the families gathered for a huge feed. Cracklings, crisp bits left over when the lard was rendered, were a special treat on the butchering day table. Each family packed up its meat, to continue the process of smoking and canning at home.

## HISTORY MINUTE 118

### Ft. Robinson Yuletides

Seventy-three holiday season were celebrated at Ft. Robinson while soldiers were stationed there--some years filled with joy, others with tragedy and drama. Christmas in 1887 contained both. The diary of Captain August Corliss reports, "December 24--In the evening we had a Christmas tree at which gathered all the children up & down the officers' line. Each one got a present of some kind. Bob & Cricket, being general favorites, had many presents. I gave my wife a silver-plated soup tureen. I got Holly's Operation of War, a standard English book."

On Christmas day, the entry reads, "At home most of the day reading & writing. 1st Sergeant Emmanuel Stance, Troop F, 9th Cavalry, was murdered between the Post & Crawford last evening, probably by men of his own troop."

Three years later, a similar mix of happiness and sorrow occurred. The paper reported, "A dance at Ft. Robinson was interrupted by a fire at the home of Sergeant Voyer. The furnace had evidently been stoked with a large amount of coal, resulting in an explosion. Damage was estimated at \$2,000."

## HISTORY MINUTE 119

### Wounded Knee

On December 29, 1890, one final tragic confrontation between the Sioux and the U.S. Army brought the Indian Wars to an end. A party of about 400 Sioux, under the leadership of Big Foot, were on their way to the Pine Ridge reservation. Big Foot's band were followers of the Ghost Dance, a new movement that prophesied the restoration of the Indians' land and lifestyle. Tension was high, because whites feared the Ghost Dance would cause a general uprising.

Colonel John Forsyth of the 7th Cavalry stopped Big Foot's group, and demanded they give up their guns. While firearms were being collected, someone fired a shot. One shot led to another. When the smoke cleared, 32 soldiers and 156 Indians, many women and children, lay dead.

Soldiers from Ft. Robinson were hurried to the Pine Ridge reservation to patrol. The Nebraska militia was called out to guard the state's northern border, but the feared uprising never took place. The so-called Battle of Wounded Knee, like so many Indian-White conflicts, was the result of misunderstanding, over-reaction and fear.

## HISTORY MINUTE 120

### Welcoming the New Year

New Year's Eve was cause for celebration in Nebraska's past. Dances, masquerade balls, and "watch parties" were typical in settled areas during prosperous times. On the frontier, things sometimes got boisterous. In 1874 one paper reported, "On New Year's Eve Frank Janousek, proprietor of the saloon, amused his friends with lager beer. Late in the evening, they amused him with shouts of laughter, bonfires before his saloon, shooting firearms, and going home on a shutter."

New Year's Day gatherings were also quite common. Paying calls and leaving calling cards was customary in towns large enough to care about etiquette. In bigger towns, there was some rivalry in finding out who made or received the most calls on the occasion. One woman recalled, "the beautiful homes had many carriages lined up at one time in front, with callers who met at these homes, and chatted for a few moments while enjoying a glass of old port and a slice of Christmas cake."

Banquets on New Year's night included abundant food and drink, and usually signalled an end to the holiday season.



## HISTORY MINUTE 121

### The Almanac

With the coming of the New Year, many of us are throwing out old calendars and hanging new ones. But time was in Nebraska when New Year's signalled time to hang a new almanac.

Almanacs are of ancient origin. These calendar-like handbooks were a standard piece of literature in most rural Nebraska homes in the last century. Many read The Old Farmer's Almanac, which had been in continuous publication since 1792. A compendium of odd bits of knowledge, the almanac offered weather forecasts, planting dates, advice for housewives, and logarithm charts.

In 1902, one Nebraska writer penned this nostalgic tribute to the almanacs of his youth: Father got the almanac at the drugstore. He put in his order early in December. I remember when it hung in its place of honor over the woodbox behind the kitchen stove. There it hung from January 1 to January 1. There were jokes at the bottom of the pages. They were durable jokes. They lasted a whole year. Somehow they do not make such jokes today. Sometimes I yearn for the happy days of the old almanacs!"

## HISTORY MINUTE 122

### Electing Senators

Every January the Nebraska Legislature convenes for another session of legal wrangling. Weeks of debate, bargaining, and compromises are sometime required before any action is taken. But even at its worst, our modern Unicameral legislature can hardly compete with the legislative knock-down drag-out of 1901.

The legislature was then composed of a house and a senate. In addition to passing laws, these two bodies were charged with electing Nebraska's representatives to the U.S. Senate.

Selecting the senators should have been a fairly straightforward task--but it wasn't. There were 10 Republican candidates alone. And the Democrats and the Populists each had their favorite candidates. The balloting began on January 5, and went on, and on, and on. Finally, on March 29 the legislature settled on a compromise--Charles H. Dietrich, a Hastings banker. The only problem with Dietrich was that he'd been elected governor and had just assumed office. Lieutenant Governor Ezra Savage stepped in to become governor, Dietrich went to Washington, and after 3 months the legislature finally got down to business!

## HISTORY MINUTE 123

### Neihardt's Birthday

John G. Neihardt, Nebraska's only poet laureate, was born in Sharpsburg, Illinois on January 8, 1881. His childhood was filled with a wide variety of experiences--from life in his grandparents' sod house in Kansas to the big city lights of Kansas City. But it was Nebraska which had the greatest influence on Neihardt. His parents moved to the young town of Wayne in 1891. Neihardt graduated from the Nebraska Normal College there at the age of 16. After teaching country school for two terms, Neihardt moved to Bancroft where he worked as an Indian trader among the Omahas. Here his lifelong fascination with Native American culture began.

Although he began writing poetry at the age of twelve, it was not until he was thirty-one that Neihardt began his magnum opus, "A Cycle of the West." Nine short years later, in 1921, his reputation caused the Nebraska legislature to appoint him "Nebraska's poet laureate." It was a position he held for fifty two years, until his death in 1973.

## HISTORY MINUTE 124

### Nebraska As It Is--Sort of

In its early days of settlement, Nebraska had many boosters. None was more enthusiastic than John Burch, whose book, "Nebraska As It Is" touted every virtue the state possessed--as well as a few it didn't. As you shiver through another Nebraska winter, consider Mr. Birch's description of the season: "The Nebraska winter, as compared to the rigorous, snowy, frost-bound winter of New England, is a very mild and pleasant season. Nine-tenths of the cold season is made up of bright, dry, mild weather. The snowfall is light and rarely lies upon the ground more than a week. February and March give an occasional severe storm of short duration. The cold winds are the only unpleasant feature of the cold season, but the settler easily gets accustomed to these and they are known to be most effective conservators of health. It is but simple justice to Nebraska to say, that it is a poor country for doctors and comes very near to being a paradise for invalids.

## HISTORY MINUTE 125

### The Blizzard of 88

One hundred years ago, January 12th was a breath of spring come early. The sun shone warmly. Men worked in the fields in shirtsleeves. Schoolchildren romped outside at recess time.

Then, without warning, the weather made a sudden and lethal change for the worse. Just about the time the children were heading home from school, a fierce north wind whipped heavy snow into a blinding swirl. The thermometer plummeted to far below zero.

The infamous Blizzard of 88 may not have been the worst storm in Nebraska's past, but it was plenty bad. Over 100 people died in the storm, many of them children on their way home from school.

When the storm finally cleared, the full extent of the damage became known. So did the many stories of survivors' heroism and pluck. One young teacher, Minnie Freeman, tied her thirteen pupils together and safely delivered them to the nearest farmstead. Her exploits were recorded in the popular Victorian parlor song, "Thirteen were Saved, or Nebraska's Fearless Maid."

## HISTORY MINUTE 126

### Prohibition in Nebraska

On January 16, 1919 the Nebraska Legislature ratified the Prohibition Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Nebraska was the 36th state to vote "aye" on the amendment, and was the last state needed for the amendment to become law. But Nebraska's anti-alcohol history goes back much further than 1919.

One of the first acts of Nebraska's territorial legislature was to outlaw the "manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages." Although it was never enforced, the law remained on the books from 1855-1858. Prohibitionist sentiment grew with the state. By 1881 the Slocumb Act had been passed, which set \$500 minimum liquor license fee. Members of the Prohibitionist party, reasoned that if you can't get rid of evil, you can use it to raise tax dollars. Eventually the Republican and Democratic parties added prohibition to their platforms. And by 1916, despite a heavy population of beer-drinking Germans and Czechs, Nebraska state law outlawed alcoholic beverages.

## HISTORY MINUTE 127

### Overland Freighting

Before completion of the railroad west, Nebraskans did a thriving and lucrative business hauling freight overland. Some of the hauling was done by large firms like Russell, Majors, and Waddell. But a lot of the freight work went to enterprising independents who scraped together animals and a vehicle and headed west.

A surprising amount of freighting went on in the wintertime. After gold was discovered in Colorado, there was good money to be made trucking foodstuffs to hungry miners. Wagon loads of eggs, packed in oats, could be sold off for a dollar an egg. Butter, hogs, sausage, and lard were easily preserved by nature's refrigerator. A wagon-load of apples sold for \$20 a bushel. And one pair of Germans, made their fortunes hauling oysters. The inventive duo filled their wagon bed with fresh oysters, poured on water and let the whole mess freeze into a solid lump. They set up shop west of Julesburg, Colorado, and pocketed \$10 per gallon of oysters for their trouble.

Heading west by wagon in winter had its risk, but it also promised great rewards.

## HISTORY MINUTE 128

### A Nebraska Land Lottery

Establishment of a state lottery continues to be a hotly debated issue in Nebraska, but lotteries weren't unknown in the past. In 1913, over 76,000 people registered for 640 acre plots to be given away in a Nebraska land lottery. The land came from two sources--the Ft. Niobrara military reservation, which had been abandoned by the army--and some U.S. forest reserve land.

The lottery was hyped by railroad advertising. Drawings were held at Valentine, Broken Bow, and North Platte amid great excitement. There was also an active trade in "lucky numbers", as many who didn't really want land sold their chances to would-be farmers and ranchers.

By today's standards, odds of winning were pretty good. About one in every 38 land-seekers was successful.

Once on the land, success wasn't so easy. The wet years and high prices of the World War One--era were replaced by the low prices of the 20s and the dry years of the 30s. many lottery winners sold out to neighboring ranchers, and moved on.



## HISTORY MINUTE 129

### The State of the Territory, 1855

Each January our Governor delivers "The State of the State" address outlining current conditions and future plans. No such tradition existed in Nebraska territory, but a look at the newspapers of 1855 gives us a sense of "the State of the Territory."

The government was hardly popular, and the decision to place the territorial capital in Omaha made the governor less so. The Nebraska Palladium editor wrote, "All the political renegades from every state, are by a brotherly affection collected around the governor. By his aid they are hoisted upon the people as Nebraska men, and are constituted law-makers in Nebraska."

But there were words of encouragement as well, "The long-delayed work of building up this place has begun at last. A steam saw mill will be on the ground early in the spring. Brick-making and other business will then begin in earnest."

And the fact that the territory was still Indian country is evidenced by this: "An Omaha was killed and eight horses stolen at Bellevue last Thursday night by the Sioux, not the Caws as had been supposed."

## HISTORY MINUTE 130

### You're Only Chilly as you Feel

Some of us start to shiver the minute the calendar reads "winter." But some observers of Nebraska life insist that winters here aren't so bad, once you get used to them. One such believer was Dr. Samuel B. McPheeters, a young Virginian stationed at Ft. Robinson. In letters home, McPheeters sang the praises of Nebraska in winter:

We are having zero weather here; or rather, the thermometer has registered zero and has been between that and 10 degrees above for some days. One would never know it, however, unless he saw a thermometer. A strong wind blows down the valley and your ears and hands register a low temperature. But when the breeze lets up you scarcely notice the cold.

The next day McPheeters wrote, "I had a glorious ride this afternoon on one of Captain Paxton's horses. I covered ten miles. I did not wear an overcoat and felt warm as toast. The climate is wonderful."

So next time you feel an icy blast from the north, think of Dr. McPheeters and remember: you're only as chilly as you feel.

## HISTORY MINUTE 131

### Rural Mail Delivery

Regular delivery of mail, even to Nebraska's remotest farms and ranches, is something we now take for granted. But not all that long ago, the idea of "rural free delivery" was controversial. One editorial writer in 1898 fumed:

The senate acted wisely in putting an extinguisher upon the postal rural delivery nonsense. The population of the farms is too much scattered to justify any such service on the part of the government. Furthermore, it deprives the rural family of about the only break in the monotony of its lonely life, that comes from a visit to the postoffice once or twice a week. The visit is a good thing. It enables neighbors to meet without the reproach that they are gadding about for gossip's sake. The farmers have never asked for the rural delivery as they felt themselves entirely competent to mount a horse occasionally and take a little recreation in going to the postoffice and having a chat. They know the whole business is a humbug."

This opinion to the contrary, it was not long before regular mail delivery provided farm families with an important link to the larger world.

## HISTORY MINUTE 132

### Save the Buffalo

For many of us, the buffalo is a symbol of life in Nebraska's earliest days. But that symbol very nearly became extinct, rubbed out by government policy and the railroad's hired guns. An early voice of protest was sounded in this 1874 editorial in the Daily State Journal:

"There is no law for the protection of the buffalo. The consequence is that these animals are being slaughtered at such a wholesale rate as will insure their total destruction within a very few years. The extent to which this slaughter is carried on is incredible. In the western portion of this state, their carcasses are so thickly strewn that a gentleman informs us he could stand at any point and count five hundred carcasses. That a terrible warfare is being waged against these poor brutes is certain from the fact that one firm on the U.P. railroad has been shipping their hides at a rate of 500 a day...It would be a burning shame if the buffalo should be wiped from the face of the earth. Let us have a law to protect the buffalo."

Sadly for the buffalo, this writer was decades ahead of his time.

## HISTORY MINUTE 133

### The 1897 UFO

Most of us think of UFOs--unidentified flying objects--as thoroughly modern phenomena. But in 1897, residents all over south-central Nebraska reported mysterious sightings in the night sky. It started with this February 2nd account in the Hastings paper:

"Several Hastings people report that an air ship, or something of the kind, has been sailing around west of this city. At first sight it has the appearance of an immense star, but the powerful light shows by its color to be artificial. The light was seen to circle around for a few minutes, then take a northerly direction, circling as it traveled at a most remarkable speed."

The report was greeted with great skepticism. "It would be interesting to know just what brand of liquor the Hastings correspondent drinks, that enables him to see airships carrying powerful lights gyrating through the atmosphere." And yet in the next three months, nearly 200 sightings of the mysterious light were reported, most coming from "sober and industrious" citizens. The true nature of this strange "air ship" remains to be explained, ninety-one years later!

## HISTORY MINUTE 134

### Indian Sledding

Sledding down the ice-and snow-covered hills of eastern Nebraska was a favorite pastime of Omaha Indian children. Though they had no sleds or toboggans as we know them, wood and animal bones were sometimes combined to form a sled of sorts. But the best ride came from ice cakes.

A rope or rawhide thong was fastened to the front of the ice cake, to give the rider something to hang on to, as well as to pull the makeshift sled to the top of the hill.

The ride down was a swift and thrilling experience, according to white pioneer onlookers. Often the ice cake crumbled to bits midway in the descent. The rider was sent head over heels, or finished the ride on his backside. A few minutes work was all that was needed to fashion a new sled, and the fun could begin again.

Playing in the snow was a major wintertime amusement for Indian and white children both. To paraphrase the old phrase, "if you can't beat it, roll in it!"

## HISTORY MINUTE 135

### Robert Ball Anderson, Black Rancher

Robert Ball Anderson was like a lot of pioneers in Western Nebraska. He started out by staking a claim on government land near Hemingford. Like many of his neighbors, he proved up on his claim, worked hard, and hung on during the hard times. Like other successful ranchers, he gradually built up his holdings, buying out neighbors who went broke or quit. When he died in 1930 at the age of 87, Robert Ball Anderson left behind a large herd of cattle and horses, and a 2,000 acre ranch. In some ways, Robert Anderson was a typical pioneer. But in one important way, he was different. Robert Anderson was born a slave in Green County Kentucky. During the Civil War he escaped and joined the Union Army. Coming to Nebraska in 1879, Anderson faced the myriad of challenges all settlers encountered. His determination and perseverance enabled him to meet those challenges, and become a respected member of the Hemingford community. At the time of his death, Robert Anderson was the largest black landholder in Nebraska.

## HISTORY MINUTE 136

### The Lynching of Kid Wade

On the Nebraska frontier, settlers didn't always wait for the establishment of a formal system of law and order to protect them. Sometimes they simply took the law into their own hands. Vigilantes tracked down and captured suspected wrong-doers, and served as judge, jury, and sometimes executioner. No long delays or courtroom appeals in these cases. Justice was swift, even if it wasn't particularly just.

One such case was the lynching of Kid Wade. Albert or "Kid" Wade and his Pony Boys did a big business in stolen horses along the Niobrara River. Caught once and sent to prison, Wade continued his life of crime. In 1884, he was apprehended by vigilantes in Iowa. Curiously, various groups hauled Wade around northeast Nebraska for almost two weeks before he was finally turned over to the Holt County Sheriff. Wade's journey to O'Neill to stand trial was interrupted. On February 8, travelers on the eastbound train out of Bassett were treated to the grisly sight of Wade hanging from a railroad whistling post.

The coroner ruled, "death caused by persons unknown," and that was that.



## HISTORY MINUTE 137

### The Missouri River Submarine

In 1915, the war in Europe extended to the north Atlantic, and everyone had submarines on the brain. That may, in part, explain this item from Florence, Nebraska, on the Missouri River:

"W. B. Vreeland went forth to fish Friday, but somebody rocked the boat. Vreeland managed to mount the upturned boat and sit astraddle of it. Thus he rode in the direction of New Orleans. The strange craft soon arrived opposite Florence. A great crowd gathered on the bank.

Vreeland was out so far no one recognized him. Someone said, "It's a feller from the fort tryin' out a new submarine." "Lookut him waving his arms." "Gosh, he's doin' some signallin'."

Indeed, the shipwrecked fisherman was doing some signaling. While his fellow townsmen calmly gazed, he turbulently drifted, muttering words which fortunately were not heard from ashore, for there were women present.

Downriver, near the railroad bridge, Vreeland attracted the attention of a man in a boat who rowed out and rescued him.

## HISTORY MINUTE 138

### Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day is supposed to be a time for expressing heart-felt sentiment and genuine tokens of affection. But fashions in Valentines, like everything else, change with the times.

The rollicking, roaring 1920s were hardly the time for sweet and romantic verses. Much more typical was this bit of doggerel:

I never sausage eyes as thine  
And if you'd butcher hand in mine  
And liver round me every day  
We'd seek some ham-let far away  
We'd meat life's frown with life's caress  
And cleaver road to happiness.

For those favoring an even more direct approach, there was a card showing a young man being booted off the front porch. Underneath the drawing, the card read, "Say, valentine, I'd ride your dad's toe every night, to hear you breathe, "turn out the light."

Still, earnest feelings were sometimes expressed in 1920s valentines. Who can doubt the sincerity of the gallant swain who wrote at the bottom of his valentine, "Can pen or ink or paper show My pure and fixed affection? No!"

## HISTORY MINUTE 139

### The First Faculty

One hundred and nineteen years ago, the University of Nebraska was chartered by unanimous vote of the state legislature. The February 15 vote followed years of debate--arguments about where the school should be located, how it should be financed, even whether the state should be in the university business. After all this acrimony, great care was exercised in selecting members of the first faculty. The last thing the fledgling institution needed was more controversy.

Allen Benton of Ohio was chosen as the first chancellor. He was paid a salary of \$4,000. Benton also served as professor of "intellectual and moral science."

The other four faculty members were paid \$2,000 each. They taught ancient languages, mathematics, English literature, and natural sciences. These four men also represented different religious denominations, to allay fears that the University would become too closely tied to the church.

Despite these precautions, the literature professor, Reverend O.C. Dake frequently became embroiled in religious debates that went beyond the classroom, into the newspapers.

## HISTORY MINUTE 140

### The Farm Holiday

February is a month of holidays--Lincoln's birthday, Valentine's, Washington's birthday, Ash Wednesday. But in 1933, many Nebraskan's observed a holiday of a different sort--the farm holiday.

Low prices, high interest rates, and drought combined to spell disaster for Nebraska farmers in the early 30s. Pushed to the limit, farmers organized the holiday movement, and urged each other to "take a rest" by boycotting Midwest markets. In some cases roadblocks were set up to insure that no produce or livestock found their way to market.

The boycott had little impact on prices, and farm foreclosures continued at a swift pace. Farm holiday organizers went a step further, and organized a march on the state capitol.

Three thousand marchers braved the cold on February 15, 1933, to demand a law preventing farm foreclosures. They threatened to bring thousands more if the government did not act. Two days later, Governor Charles Bryan called a special session of the legislature. The laws passed eventually provided some relief.

## HISTORY MINUTE 141

### Fire Fighting

Fire was a major threat to Nebraska's pioneer communities. Wooden buildings dried by sun and wind could burn rapidly. Some towns lost whole blocks of businesses and homes to fire.

Informal bucket brigades were soon replaced by hook and ladder companies in many Nebraska towns. The first of these was the Otoe Hook & Ladder Company, organized in Nebraska City in 1856.

Fire fighting required teamwork. Pumps, hose carts, and hook-and-ladder carts were pulled to the fire by teams of men. These same hardy souls manned the pumpers to keep a steady stream of water on the flames. When steam-powered engines appeared, engineers were needed to fire the boilers and keep up the pressure during the siege.

Skill in fire fighting developed into competition between fire companies. Races and other challenges were popular. One of the first acts of the State Fireman's Association in 1883 was to develop rules for a state tournament. This same competitive spirit fuels inter-departmental water fights even today.

## HISTORY MINUTE 142

### The Athlete, Louise Pound

Louise Pound was a scholar, teacher, author, folklorist, and sports enthusiast. And in the days when it was hardly fashionable for women, she was an athlete. Encumbered by ankle-length skirts, she became an expert figure skater, and learned to waltz and two-step on the frozen ponds around Lincoln. Long before female bicyclists could wear pants, Dr. Pound won the Century Road Club bar for bicycling one hundred miles in a day.

On the tennis courts, Louise Pound was a figure to be reckoned with. Not only did she win the women's state singles championships in 1891 and 92--she won the men's title as well. In Chicago in 1897, Pound won the Women's Western Championship, defeating the national champion in straight sets. On the golf links, Louise Pound was again a winner. Both the city and state women's championships were hers in 1917.

At the University, Dr. Pound coached the women's basketball team, until critics ruled that women were "too easily upset" to compete in athletic sports.

In honor of her athletic achievement, Louise Pound became the first female member of the Nebraska Sports Hall of Fame. She was elected in February, 1954.

## HISTORY MINUTE 143

### Washington's Birthday Ball

These days, Washington's and Lincoln's birthdays are lumped together for the all-purpose "Presidents' Day" observance. But years ago, these holidays prompted some interesting activities. Consider this from 1895:

"On the eve before Washington's birthday, the 370 patients of the hospital for the insane, at Lincoln, enjoyed a masked ball. Sixty or seventy were in fancy dress and masked. The promenade to music was an imposing feature. As many patients as could possibly be allowed sat around the amusement hall, lit up by incandescent electric lights, which were surrounded by Chinese variegated paper lanterns. The stage recess was decorated with red, white, & blue bunting, and over the harmonium was displayed the U.S. flag. A full orchestra with Mr. Seidell as leader and caller gave zest to the dancing. Visitors from the city and neighbors living nearby looked on and mingled in the dances. The costumes were superb and the characters they portrayed were well sustained."

## HISTORY MINUTE 144

February 26 is the birthday of one of the most flamboyant Nebraskans of all time--William F. Cody. The famed "Buffalo Bill" was born in 1846 and died in 1917. Volumes have been written about his exploits, both real and imagined. Separating the truth from the fiction about Buffalo Bill is no easy task.

Even going straight to the source was of little help. One author wrote, "It is no derogation of his many substantial qualities to say that he was an untrustworthy chronicler of events. He dealt with the facts in a large, free way, and he had a tendency to make himself the central figure in each episode. Most of his statements are inaccurate; many are preposterous; and he sanctioned on the part of his publicity agents a gross indulgence of fiction."

Although many facts about Buffalo Bill are disputed, he's generally credited with originating the first rodeo, near his Scout's Rest Range in North Platte. His Wild West Show attracted great throngs in the East and in Europe, and began a style of western entertainment that continues to the present day.



## HISTORY MINUTE 145

### The Timber Culture Act

Lack of timber was one of Nebraska's biggest drawbacks in settlement days. No trees meant no wood for fuel or building, no shade and no break from the incessant wind. To encourage settlement as well as tree-raising, the U.S. Senate passed the Timber Culture Act. Introduced by Phineas Hitchcock of Omaha, the bill allowed homesteaders to claim an additional 160 acres of land, providing they set out 40 acres of trees and cared for them for ten years.

The Timber Culture Act became law March 3, 1873. Hitchcock hoped the law would attract more settlers and turn them into tree-planters. The new stands of timber were expected not only to supply needed wood, but to temper climatic extremes and even increase rainfall.

Senator Hitchcock was to be disappointed. Like many previous land laws, the Timber Culture Act benefitted land speculators more than actual settlers. Abuse was so widespread the law was repealed in 1891. And although two and a half million acres of land in Nebraska came under the act, little permanent tree growth resulted.

## HISTORY MINUTE 146

### Voting Reform

The spirit of reform prevailed in Nebraska's populist-controlled legislature in 1891. One of the most important issues addressed was voting procedures. Elections weren't always the orderly, honest affairs we enjoy today. Ballotbox stuffing, intimidation, and fraud were too often seen.

To clean up elections, the legislature passed an act authorizing the use of the Australian, or secret ballot. The new ballots were to be printed and distributed at public expense in order to avoid phonies.

These reforms were quickly followed by an attempt to extend suffrage to women--not in all elections, but merely municipal ones. On March 6, suffragists packed the chamber floor and galleries. One paper reported, "After wasting more than two hours of time, roll call on the bill commenced. Once the bill was defeated, the legislature could get down to solid work."

Those voting against the measure explained that with the secret ballot, letting women vote only in municipal elections would cause "untold mischief." Of course, no one suggested women should vote in all elections. That right was still thirty years away.

## HISTORY MINUTE 147

### The People of Nebraska

Nebraska's people have always been one of the state's greatest resources. One early Nebraska promoter, L.D. Burch, had this to say about our citizenry in 1878:

"The people of Nebraska represent the best intelligence, working power, faith, and ambition of the country. If any easterner fancies these people a race of stupidities, living a sort of semi-barbarous life on the confines of the 'Great American Desert' a six week's tour of this beautiful prairie State will effectually take the conceit out of him."

"The whole State is settled by strong, self-asserting men who know the value of opportunity. If they give less consequence to conventional etiquette, gold and empty pretense, and have a higher appreciation for character, action and working power than their Eastern friends, the difference is clearly in their favor. It is the Western habit to measure men by what they do rather than by what they were before they came here. The superficial man stands no chance among this people of quick, clear perceptions and close discrimination.

Taken as a whole, the average Nebraskan leads a much more rational and satisfactory life than his friends of the older states."

## HISTORY MINUTE 148

### The Other Blizzard of 88

Mention the Blizzard of '88 and Nebraskans will think of the January 12th storm, also known as "the school children's blizzard." But there was another Blizzard of '88 that struck exactly three months later. Instead of howling across the Plains, this storm roared up the East Coast and struck New York City.

As in Nebraska, the day before the blizzard was balmy, with the promise of spring in the air. By 6 a.m. on March 12, the temperature plunged, winds blew up to 84 miles an hour, and the first of 20 inches of snow fell.

Hundreds of horses and up to one hundred people perished in the New York area. Another hundred persons were lost at sea, victims of high winds and raging waves. Unlike Nebraskans, New Yorkers were faced with miles of streets to clear.

Twelve million cartloads of snow were dumped into the river, cartloads which had been shoveled by hand. Snow lay piled up in shaded areas til June. Survivors of both the Nebraska and New York storms felt they'd experienced something remarkable, and formed clubs. "The Blizzard Men of '88" met annually in New York until 1969. Nebraska's Blizzard of '88 club will hold its final meeting this year.

## HISTORY MINUTE 149

### The Dust Storm

Nebraska's past is filled with tales of extreme weather and spectacular storms. Among the most awesome of the phenomena were the dust storms of 1935. Drought and poor soil conservation techniques, coupled with strong winds, produced these amazing storms.

The first dust storm struck the evening of March 15. The day was warm and dry, and when a cloud appeared in the evening sky, many hoped for rain. The cloud was filled with dust, not rain. Driven by sixty mile-an-hour winds, the dust reduced visibility to zero, stalled cars on the highways, and filtered into the tightest of buildings. In Trenton, shovels were needed to clear the sidewalks. In other areas, snowplows were used to blast through dust drifts on the railroad tracks.

More storms were to come. In the week from March 21 to 28, 1935, dust settled on the city of Lincoln in the amount of 3 million pounds per square mile. And Lincoln was far from the hardest hit regions of the state.

Through it all, Nebraskans hunkered down, and kept smiling. One farmer reported seeing prairie dogs fifty feet in the air, and that they were digging!

## HISTORY MINUTE 150

### St. Patrick's Day

St. Patrick's Day, originally a religious "holy day," has long been inscribed on Nebraska's holiday calendar. Although the state's Irish population has always been small, St. Paddy's Day has been widely observed.

The 1876, the local Mulligan Guards rehearsed for six weeks before presenting an extravaganza to the town of West Point. Theatrical pieces included "Paddy Miles," "The Limerick Boy," and "We're All Teetotalers Here." Lovers of "the terpsichorean art" were invited to "trip the light fantastic until the dawn of day." The plays and dance were open to all, not just the Irish--and it was a good thing, too. Names of the organizers included Zajicek, Stevenson, Meyers, Kryger, and Bortz, about as un-Irish a collection as you could get!

A more genuinely Irish celebration was held in Lincoln in 1888. The Ladies of the Irish National League sponsored a program featuring many certifiable sons of the Old Sod. Here the names sounded right--Flanagan and Flynn, Corcoran and Coyle.

Irish or not, many Nebraskans continue to use March 17 as an excuse for a "bit o'fun."

## HISTORY MINUTE 151

### Billy's Birthday

William Jennings Bryan, perhaps Nebraska's greatest statesman, was born in March 19, 1860, in Salem, Illinois. Schooled at Illinois College and Chicago's Union College of Law, Bryan moved to Lincoln in 1887 to practice. Bryan's intelligence and eloquence were soon noticed, and in 1890 he was the first Democratic congressman to be elected from Nebraska. By 1896, Bryan's progressive notions of currency and railroad reform were part of the Democratic national platform. At 36, Bryan became the youngest Democrat ever nominated for the Presidency. Defeated by McKinley, Bryan continued an active political life, including two more unsuccessful presidential bids.

Despite his defeats, Bryan had a significant influence on national policy and on public opinion. A champion of the common man, Bryan lectured across the nation. His audiences were held spellbound by his vibrant, baritone voice. As secretary of state under President Woodrow Wilson, Bryan tried to keep the U.S. out of World War I. Unable to do so, he resigned his post, and lectured on peace and religious issues until his death in 1925.

## HISTORY MINUTE 152

### Oscar Wilde Visits Nebraska

In the spring of 1882, Oscar Wilde, poet and self-styled aesthete, visited the unpolished state of Nebraska. Wilde believed that the pursuit of beauty should dominate man's intellectual ventures, and lectured widely on his theories.

Appearing at Boyd's Opera House in Omaha on March 21, Wilde wore "a suit of black velvet with knee-breeches." The cow-town audience was well behaved, and Mr. Wilde was "given the most respectful and undivided attention, and was enthusiastically applauded." One reviewer wrote, "Mr. Wilde speaks rapidly, is eloquent, and a poet in prose in his word painting."

Lincoln reviewers weren't as generous. Perhaps Wilde's criticism of the University's "miserable" architecture hit a sore point, or maybe these writers were more honest. At any rate, Wilde's delivery was judged "the most uninteresting we have ever listened to, and his closing sentence brought a sigh of relief." Another wag wrote, "Oscar Wilde came yesterday/to weep with us in his sad way. He couldn't stay, he had to go--our cast iron stoves depressed him so."



## HISTORY MINUTE 153

### The Easter Tornado

Easter came early in 1913. March 23 was Easter Sunday, and the day promised spring-like weather. But spring in Nebraska is also tornado season, and the storm which brewed that Easter day proved to be one of the most deadly in our history. Cass and Saunders Counties were struck first. Thirty-eight people were killed all told, in the towns of Yutan, Mead, Berlin, Rock Bluffs, DeSoto, Nehawka, and Craig.

By late afternoon, the storm system was headed for Omaha, There was little advance warning, and the effect was deadly. A tornado funnel struck smack in the middle of the city and cut a swath half a mile wide through the residential section of town. Crossing the Missouri River, the twister turned south into Council Bluffs.

When the storm moved on, Omaha looked like a war zone. One hundred and twenty-two people were dead, and over four hundred were injured. Homes and businesses lay in ruins. Property damage totaled over 6 million dollars.

Omahans slowly picked up the pieces and rebuilt their homes and their lives, little realizing the scene would be repeated in the future.

## HISTORY MINUTES 154

### What a Ride!

The freezing and thawing at the end of Nebraska winters can make driving a challenge--as it did in the days before automobiles. Stagecoach driver George Streeter recalled this wild ride:

"One day I had a large fat man as passenger, who became violently seasick from the swaying of the stage. Thinking fresh air might make him better, I invited him to ride on top with me. All went well til we hit Break Neck Hill. There was snow on the ground, so I knew my brake would do no good. I got out to put the rough-lock on, but to my horror it wasn't there. I took the desperate chance of going down the hill without a brake. My team was not able to hold the heavy rig, so we found ourselves gaining speed every second. I lashed the leaders with all my might to keep them out of the way.

At the bottom of the hill was a small stream only partly frozen over. The front wheels broke through and held fast. The abrupt stop caused us both to sail through the air for fifty feet. We landed without serious injury, rescued the team from a clump of willows, and reached the station on time."

## HISTORY MINUTES 155

### The 1881 Floods

Snowfall in the winter of 1880-81 was unusually heavy. When the spring thaw came, it came with a vengeance. The last week of March saw creeks and rivers bank-full to overflowing. Torrents of water carried huge ice floes downstream, tearing away everything in their path. Most of the creek bridges were washed away, and scarcely a bridge over the Platte, the Elkhorn, or the Blue survived.

Nebraska bore not only the brunt of its own snow, but run-off from its neighbors as well. The same quick thaw hit the Dakotas, raising the level of the Missouri far above flood stage.

On March 29th, the town of Niobrara flooded. Houses were filled with two feet of water and muck. Even as the water was receding, citizens began making plans to move the town 20 feet above the flood plain the following summer.

Further downstream, the people of Green Island were warned to seek higher ground. On March 30th the water began to rise, and the next day, in a period of two hours, every house but one was swept away. Cattle, horses, and furnishings rushed downstream for St. Louis, but miraculously, no human lives were lost.

## HISTORY MINUTE 156

### Weeping Potatoes

For Nebraska gardeners, March is the beginning of the growing season. Many green-thumb types are making plans and starting seeds, and some continue the old tradition of planting potatoes on Good Friday.

Despite the early starts and high hopes, Nebraska gardens don't always do well. All too often, the severity of the summer takes its toil. But here, from the Florence Tattler of 1915, comes a suggestion for getting a good crop, even in the dry years.

"Henry Behrman has discovered a way of watering his potatoes during any dry season that may come. 'You see,' said Mr. Behrman, 'I plant a row of onions between every row of potatoes. Just about the time the ground is in need of rain, the onions will make the eyes of the potatoes water, thus moistening the soil as much as necessary. This will cause both the onions and potatoes to grow rapidly'."

"Mr. Behrman has not patented the process," the paper reported, "but will make a gift of his discovery to the world. It has NOT been reported to the United States Department of Agriculture."

Near as we can tell, the USDA still doesn't know about it, seventy years later!

## HISTORY MINUTE 157

### The Fort Omaha Balloon School

Nebraska played a significant, if little-known role in the air war of World War I as home to the Fort Omaha Balloon School. Captive balloons, used for observation of enemy troop movements, were used extensively in "the war to end all wars."

A variety of balloon skills were taught at Fort Omaha and the adjoining Florence Field. Aerial location of enemy artillery, aerial photographs, parachuting, communication and balloon care were stressed for officers who went up in balloons. Ground crews were trained in balloon inflation, control techniques and bedding balloons down.

Ballooning was exciting, risky business. Hydrogen used to inflate the balloons was highly flammable. Static electricity from clothing or hair could cause balloons to ignite into raging infernos. Captive balloons were like sitting ducks, so observers had to learn to parachute. Sometimes these early chutes worked. Sometimes they didn't.

Thirteen of the seventeen balloon companies sent to the European front were trained at Ft. Omaha. But advances in aviation spelled the end for military ballooning.

## HISTORY MINUTE 158

### Happy Birthday, Doc

Harold E. Edgerton, scientist, inventor, professor emeritus at MIT, adventurer and author, was born in Aurora, Nebraska on April 6, 1904. Edgerton is best known for his development of the strobe, the high-speed electronic light used in photography. "Doc," as he is affectionately known, traces part of his fascination with light to the awesome electrical storms he witnessed as a boy.

Lightning flashes are similar to the high-speed strobe, and Edgerton says, "We must acknowledge the Creator as the inventor of the electronic flash."

When "Doc" Edgerton was 10 years old, he built a primitive searchlight on the roof of his home in Aurora with a one-gallon tin can mounted on a wood post. His later strobe lights enabled the Allies to track enemy movements at night during World War II, and were used to photograph the first atomic tests. Edgerton's photographs of movement, such as a man hitting a golf ball, and a bullet piercing an apple, have blurred the distinction between science and art.

"The crazy old professor," as he calls himself, is a member of the Nebraska Hall of Fame.

## HISTORY MINUTE 159

### Keeping Kosher

Newcomers to Nebraska faced many challenges as they adapted themselves to new food, new weather extremes, and a new environment. Mrs. Milly Wayne, who moved to Valentine with her husband and two children in 1910 tackled an even greater problem--keeping kosher.

Orthodox Jews like herself were non-existent in the Sandhills, so Mrs. Wayne had to develop a way to cook kosher food on her own. Keeping meat and dairy foods separate was critical, so Mrs. Wayne made special arrangements with the local butcher, and milked her own cow.

In time, a few other Orthodox Jews staked claims in the area, and a small colony formed. Morris Abrahams, Milly Wayne's brother, became a "Yiddish cowboy" and lived in the area for many years.

The isolation of Valentine eventually proved too much for the Waynes, and they moved back to Cleveland. Still, Mrs. Wayne felt a sense of accomplishment. If you can keep a kosher house in Valentine, you can do it anywhere, she concluded.

## HISTORY MINUTE 160

### The Flying Savidges

The Savidge brothers--George, John, Joe, Dave, Phillip, Louis, and Matt--were among the plucky group of Nebraska's aviation pioneers. George was the first brother to consider flying. One day, while loading a hayrack in a high wind, George tried to take off his sheepskin coat. The wind caught him with his arms outstretched and lifted him off the hay.

With this inspiration, the brothers began by observing hawks, and then built model gliders. Their first test-pilot was the farmyard cat.

Next they built a man-sized glider. Then came their first plane, with wood ribs, muslin-covered wings, and a mowing machine seat for the pilot.

Their first public flight was made near Ewing in 1911. For the next five years, they barnstormed across the Plains, flying at county fairs and other events. Brother Matt even figured out how to write his name in the sky with smoke candles tied to the plane.

In the spring of 1916, while on a test flight, Matt crashed the plane and was killed. The rest of the Savidges gave up flying after this tragedy.



## HISTORY MINUTE 161

### Otoe City

Otoe City, located seven miles north of Nebraska City, was a river town founded with high hopes, although it was destined for obscurity. Gideon Bennett, a ferry operator, was the first citizen of the town, arriving in 1853. By 1857 a sawmill had been established, and the community was growing.

Otoe City's most exciting moment probably came in 1859. On election day, the town constable attempted to arrest first citizen Bennett. Bennett resisted, and the marshall called for help. A Dr. Renner of Nebraska City complied.

Bennett was released later the same day, and retaliated by attacking the doctor with a club. The doctor, in turn, shot Bennett in the leg.

This time Dr. Renner was arrested, but soon he too was released. Citizens in town for the election favored Bennett, and a plot arose to lynch the doctor.

Dr. Renner learned of the plot, and hid behind a store in an empty lard barrel until the mob passed. He was then able to escape on horseback.

Perhaps if the good citizens of Otoe City had spent more energy working together, the town might have thrived.

## HISTORY MINUTE 162

### The Figgites

The Figgites, followers of Gretna citizen Louis Figg, were a small, but noisy religious sect which flourished in the 1890s. The Figgites allegedly heard the Holy Ghost speak directly to them, and he instructed them to disrupt services at other churches. One Sunday a Methodist congregation near Gretna received some Figgite visitors. The newspaper reports, "One of the most zealous Figgite sisters sprang to her feet and began a scathing denunciation of Methodism. The pastor struck up a hymn, in which the congregation joined.

"After the song, another Figgite sister rose and made known her opinion of the singing down process. Confusion now reigned supreme. Uncomplimentary epithets were hurled through the air like hot shot. The meeting was then dismissed for dinner, but members of the two faiths indulged in recrimination and mutual reproaches during the meal."

Eventually the Figgites succeeded in bringing the meeting to an early close. The disruptive tactics continued for several years, and then the Figgites faded into obscurity, at least as far as the public record goes.

## HISTORY MINUTE 163

### The Pacemaker

The bicycling boom of the 1890s prompted publication of The Pacemaker, "A Journal Devoted to Cycling and Kindred Sports in the Midwest." Printed in Lincoln, The Pacemaker included reports from correspondents in Fairmont, Geneva, Minden, Central City, and York.

The latest in bicycling technology was reported, and The Pacemaker chronicled advances in gears designed by C.W. Corum of Havelock. The magazine also stated that foreign imports posed no threats, citing "The 12 dollar Japanese "wheel" is an inferior product from which American manufacturers have little to fear."

To promote cycling and magazine sales, The Pacemaker sponsored a contest. A \$100 "wheel" as bikes were called, would be given to the person making the fastest time between Lincoln and Beatrice. Contestants were instructed to deposit 25 cents at the starting point to pay for telegraphing the starting time to the other end of the route.

Lady cyclists, called cycliennes, were lauded in poetry, like this verse:

She was in the act of mounting  
Yet she seemed to hesitate  
Then she asked with old-time vigor  
Are my bloomers on quite straight?

## HISTORY MINUTE 164

### Egalitarian Trees

J. Sterling Morton, the founder of Arbor Day, was a tireless advocate of tree-planting. Trees offered spiritual as well as physical benefits to people, Morton wrote.

"Trees grow in time. The poorest landowner in Nebraska has just as large a fortune of time secured to him as the richest. The poor man's trees will grow just as grandly and beautifully as those planted by the opulent. There is no aristocracy in trees. They are not haughty. They will thrive near the humblest cabin just as well as in the shadow of the king's palace. The wealthiest and most powerful potentate on earth cannot hire a tree to speed its growth or bear its fruit before its time.

There is a true triumph in the unswerving integrity and genuine democracy of trees, for they refuse to be influenced by money or social position, and thus tower morally, as well as physically, high above Congressmen and many other patriots of this dollaring age."

## HISTORY MINUTE 165

### The High Cost of High Living

In the 1870s, hunting wild game on the Great Plains was a trendy bit of adventure for European aristocrats. Creature comforts weren't always easy to come by, as this report attests:

"The hunting party, one of whom was a young Irish lord, left Ft. McPherson for a buffalo hunt. Part of their supplies was a keg of whiskey, but in the rough drive the cork became unloosened and the liquor all leaked out. They were sixty miles from the Fort, and the Irish lord said whiskey must be had.

He appealed to Colonel Cody, who remembered a settler's shack where he'd been given a drink the week before.

Cody and the lord rode the dozen miles to the shack. "Any booze left?" the Colonel asked when the arrived.

"About five gallons, but the ranch goes with the liquor. Price of the ranch is \$500." was the reply.

"The Colonel said he wouldn't pay that price, but the Irish lord produced a roll and skinned off \$500. Taking the keg, Cody said he'd call for the ranch deed the next day. Needless to say, he never did."

## HISTORY MINUTE 166

### The First Telegraph

As telegraph lines moved west, settlers greeted this link with the East with great enthusiasm. Brownville was the first town in Nebraska territory to be on the wire. In 1860, the citizens of Brownville sent this first message: "Brownville sends greetings to the States." Citizens participated in general jollification to celebrate the great event. "It was decidedly the liveliest time ever gotten up in this city. Bonfires, illuminations, fire balls, music, burning gunpowder, speeches and toasts were the order of the evening."

The New York Times took a somewhat cynical view of the technological advance: "Considering the novelty of the occasion, Nebraskans must be pardoned if they are a little vain of their advantage. They have actually come into possession of a magnetic battery with all its paraphernalia of pots and acids; they possess miles of copper wire and a telegraph office, and probably an operator who is not more stupid than the average of such functionaries, and who will commit no more blunders than he can possibly help so as not to vex the righteous soul of the Nebraska Community beyond endurance."

## HISTORY MINUTE 167

### Nebraska's Drawbacks

In his 1878 book, "Nebraska As It Is," author L.D. Burch devoted 163 pages to the wonders of our state. Not wanting to mislead anyone, he also discussed Nebraska's drawbacks--in two paragraphs. He wrote:

In the early years, when a season of drouth and grasshoppers added to the uncertainty, there was among the settlers the usual degree of discontent that attends the opening of every new region. Nebraska has had its share of drawbacks, but today the spirit of content among the people of this State is as widespread and profound as anywhere upon the green earth. The people of this great state are not living like nomads, but are building pretty, permanent houses like people who believe in a land of promise.

Occasionally one will stumble upon a forlorn group of grumblers and nomads and is surprised to know how they can "ply their vocation" in a land where there is so little to find fault with. Neither of these classes could remain long in the Garden of Eden, for it would be too small for the roving habits of the nomads and too fair and peaceful for the cynical temper of the grumblers. This tribe did immeasurable harm to Nebraska by howling about its drawbacks, but happily the State is now nearly rid of them."

## The State Tree

The Cottonwood is Nebraska's official state tree. Long before it was so designated, noted author Mari Sandoz wrote this accolade:

"In my eyes the cottonwood can have no rival. To the Indian the cottonwood was firewood and winter feed for his pony. To the early fur hunters it was a landmark, and wood and shelter, too. To the Overlander it was cheer and shade, while the hollow of its trunk was the trail postoffice where letters could be left to be picked up by travelers going the other way. Treaties were signed in the shade of the cottonwood, soldier stockades built of its logs, and frozen feet warmed by its fire.

To the early settler the cottonwood was a promise that here was water. Its wood fed his campfires, built his loghouses, furnished ridge poles for his soddies, cradles for his babies and coffins for his dead.

The cottonwood grows anywhere in our region. In the summer evenings the leaves will rustle a drowsy song for you. And even before the winter ice breaks in the rivers, you will see a yellowing glow in the tips, a promise of spring, and another good year to come."



## HISTORY MINUTE 169

### The Pioneer Mother

In honor of all our mothers, here's a tribute to the pioneer mother, written in 1923:

"While we bring our offerings of praise to every mother, we especially pay tribute to the pioneer prairie mother who followed her husband into the vast and pathless Middle West.

With the passing of the prairie, passes the prairie mother, but her toil, her tears, were not in vain. Where once was desert and desolation, schools, churches and happy homes bless the land.

Immortalized in bronze, in marble, in temple, are the heroes of war, leaders of state, and men of letters. But where, in all the eulogy of human achievement shines the glory of our pioneer prairie mother? Forgotten? No! Unrecognized? Yes!

Build heavenward your columns of marble and temples of fame; hallow each spot of patriotic pride, pay homage to the learned and wise, but forget not her who labored, who loved, and who perished in the performance of duty, the pioneer prairie mother.

## HISTORY MINUTE 170

### Peppard's "Wind Ship"

One of the most fascinating of the early attempts to use wind energy on the Plains was Peppard's wind ship. Samuel Peppard, a 27-year-old millwright from Kansas, created a wind-borne wagon designed to haul freight economically. The wind ship was "similar to an ordinary light wagon, with a bed three feet wide, eleven feet long, and six inches deep. A mast, with a sail nine by eleven feet, was raised over the front axle. The steering apparatus was attached to the front axle and resembled a boat tiller reversed." Peppard and his crew of three left Kansas May 10, 1860 and headed for the Oregon Trail in Nebraska's Platte Valley.

Observers at Ft. Kearny noted, "The ship was running in a westerly direction, under full sail across the green prairie."

Controlling the vehicle proved to be a challenge. At one point the ship briefly became airborne.

Attaining speeds of 15 miles per hour, Peppard cruised to within 100 miles of Denver before his invention was demolished by what was referred to as a small tornado. In the next two decades, windmills became a more practical way to harness the Plains winds.

### Drunken Intruders

These days, for most Nebraskans, law enforcement is just a phone call away. Not so in settlement days. Folks protected themselves as best they could. One woman remembered, "Father and Mr. Wallen had gone to Weeping Water to the mill. Mother and we little ones were left alone overnight. We were late doing the chores, and as we were working a "halloo" rang out on the other side of the creek. Mother heard them talking and swearing about the location of the crossing, and they sounded drunk.

She hurried to the house with us and took two short-handled pitchforks. One she gave to my eldest brother, the other she kept for herself. She drew the latchstring in, barricaded the door, and told my brother if they came and broke the door in, to stick the fork in the eyes of one and she would attack the other. They sat there in fear and trembling all night.

At Mrs. Wallen's the drunkards knocked and knocked, and said they would blow the occupants full of holes. Mrs. Luff said, 'Let us get under the featherbed, for bullets will not go through feathers.' This they did. After a time the men got tired and left.

## HISTORY MINUTE 172

### The First Commencement

The University of Nebraska's first commencement exercises, held in 1872, seem to have been complete in every detail except one: there were no graduates! The only degree conferred was an honorary Doctor of Laws bestowed upon Bishop Robert H. Clarkson of the Protestant Episcopal Diocese. Still, commencement speaker J.M. Woolworth of Omaha congratulated his fellow Nebraskans on providing a public institution of higher learning. "Here is far higher cause for just pride and elevated hope than the growth, large and rapid as it is, that can be measured by acres and miles and dollars and cents." Despite the lack of graduates that year, Judge Woolworth predicted, "Each year the class of graduates will go from here--small at first, but growing larger until, numbered by hundreds, they shall scatter among the towns and villages, and shall impress upon the policies of the State, and all the institutions of Society, the characters which shall here be molded. Sending hence this stream of educated young men, this University will repay the State beyond all account in dollars and cents and enrich the people."

## HISTORY MINUTE 173

### "The Kid"

If your kids are whining about a summer with "nothing to do," why not suggest they start a newspaper? Brothers Willie and Jay Green of Beaver City wrote, printed, and sold a semi-monthly paper, appropriately titled, "The Kid," from 1896 to 1898.

"The Kid" was filled with local news, a few advertisements, and an occasional column on stamp collecting.

The Brothers Green clearly had a sense of humor, as evidenced by this report: "The pump in the court house well will be taken up and the well will be sold for post holes." Even the want-ads were amusing. "Bulldog for sale, will eat anything. Is very fond of children."

Subscriptions cost 15 cents per year, but the publishers promised to exchange, for free, with any paper published in the world. New subscriptions were solicited with this verse:

"We may look a little green,  
but we're feeling boss serene  
and the climate of Nebraska we imbibe.  
But what we want to say,  
ere we close this tiny lay,  
is that now is the time to subscribe."

"The Kid" ceased publication in the spring of 1898, as the brothers entered high school.

## HISTORY MINUTE 174

### Standard Time

The spring-time switch to daylight savings time leaves many of us confused and running late, at least for a while. But our confusion is nothing compared to the time-keeping nightmare of the 1880s. Many cities and villages in the east kept their own official time by the town clock. And railroads, trying to stick to schedules, developed their own standards of time. By 1880, there were seventy-five standards of time in the United States. Something had to be done.

In 1882, Congress authorized the President to call an international congress to select a prime meridian from which to reckon longitude and establish time zones. The meridian running through Greenwich, England was selected, and four time zones were established in the United States.

But the railroads still had their influence. The division between Central and Mountain time zones passed through western Nebraska. The Burlington Railroad made the zone change at McCook. The Union Pacific made North Platte the dividing point. Towns along these rail lines quickly adopted the standard time. But folks not close to the railroad continued to use "God's time" for many years.

## HISTORY MINUTE 175

### The Garden

As we begin another gardening season, here's a few words of encouragement for all you green-thumb types from the 1878 book, "Nebraska As It Is."

"Nebraska may be very appropriately called the Garden Land. There is probably no country in America where a larger variety of garden products is grown. The great versatility of the soil is not more remarkable than the ease with which garden culture is conducted. Every farmer, mechanic and professional man--every lady who has an hour of each day to devote to the garden, may turn it into a real paradise, where fruits and flowers and the richest vegetable life shall spring up in perfection, to reward the cultivator with a gratification of every delicate sense. The Nebraska garden may be universal, for the soil is everywhere admirably suited to the perfection of the commonest or rarest garden products known to the middle latitudes, without the aid of artificial stimulants, and no man in all the State is so poor as to be excusable for the want of a patch of earth."

## HISTORY MINUTE 176

### Evelyn Sharp, Aviatrix

Airplane pilots' licenses have recently been granted to 9- and 10-year-olds, but these aren't the first youngsters to learn to fly. Nebraska's famed aviatrix, Evelyn Sharp took flying lessons at the age of 14, and earned her license at the age most teenagers learn to drive. By 18 she had a commercial pilots license.

With the aid of businessmen in her hometown of Ord, Evelyn bought her first plane.

In 1939, at the age of 20, Evelyn became a certified instructor. She taught 350 men to fly at Spearfish, South Dakota before the outbreak of World War II.

With the coming of the war, Evelyn Sharp joined the Army Air Corps' Women's Auxiliary Flying Squadron. These expert women pilots flew aircraft from production factories to overseas shipping points, thereby freeing men for combat duty. A certified instrument flyer, Evelyn flew in weather that kept other pilots grounded.

By age 24, Evelyn had become a Squadron officer and was only three flights away from a fifth rating, the highest certificate offered to women at that time. It was a rating she would never achieve. Her P-38 pursuit plane crashed near Middleton, Pennsylvania in the spring of 1944. In her 8-year flying career, Evelyn achieved more than many do in a lifetime.



### Halley's Comet

In May of 1910, Halley's Comet made one of its periodic appearances. The approach of the comet was greeted with anticipation, and some apprehension. Newspapers confidently announced, "Comet's Tail Coming With Great Speed, but there is No Excuse for Being Frightened." Despite some predictions of "war, earthquakes, flood, and direful change," the comet's performance was uneventful. The May 19 papers were full of disappointment. "Thousands of people were considerably chagrined because the celestial visitor did not stand them on their heads," the World-Herald reported. The David City Banner informed its readers that, "as a dangerous weapon, the comet's tail is decidedly outclassed by a cow's tail." The Lincoln paper sounded almost mournful: "The comet came, the comet went, and this little old earth is no worse and no better, and thus far, very little wiser. There was no collision, no deadly cyanogen gas. To the naked eye the tail of the comet was 'the veriest approach to nothing, set in the midst of naught.' Good-bye to Halley's for another seventy-five years."

The return of the comet in 1986 prompted a great amount of hoopla in advance--only to be followed by the disappointment felt in 1910.

## HISTORY MINUTE 178

### The Dust Storm

Dust storms were all-too-frequent occurrences in "the dirty thirties." The unusual storms could be as intense as Nebraska blizzards, but it was dirt, not snow that whirled through the air. One woman wrote about the storm she weathered in Chase County. "On the afternoon of May 22, 1933 we had what was known as the "Black Day" and it will long be remembered. By 4 p.m. there was complete darkness that seemed velvety black. Car lights could not penetrate it. Everything made of metal was charged with electricity. Barbed wire fences showed a spark of light at the point of each barb. Cars refused to start. It wasn't safe to use the telephone.

"We had a potato cave large enough to drive a truck down into it. All the people in Champion hurried to the cave as none knew what the darkness might bring.

"We left the cave about five in the evening. The wind ceased and the atmosphere had a pink cast. Red dirt was falling from above. I held out my hands and the dirt seemed coarse and rough. It must have been carried a long distance." Digging out after the storm required shovels to clear the drifts of dust from doorways, sidewalks, and porches.

## HISTORY MINUTE 179

### The Kansas-Nebraska Act

Nebraska became a territory on May 30th, 1854, when President Franklin Pierce signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The measure was the result of months of haggling and debate. At issue was the extension of slavery into unsettled territories. In order to get the act passed, proponents agreed to the doctrine of "popular sovereignty." This meant that slavery would be tolerated in new areas if the majority wished.

The new territory to the south became known as "Bloody Kansas." Both pro- and anti-slavery groups were determined to win the fight. Sparser settlement in Nebraska territory, and less southern influence, meant slavery was never a violent issue here.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act also killed, once and for all, any notion of a permanent Indian territory west of the Missouri River. The act authorized settlement of all the land between the Missouri and the Pacific Ocean. Previous promises of permanent Indian territory were broken.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act authorized building of the transcontinental railroad through Nebraska's Platte Valley, linking the new territory with both coasts.

## HISTORY MINUTE 180

### The Republican Flood

Spring flooding often afflicts Nebraska's river valleys, but few floods can rival the Republican River deluge of 1935. The 30s were dry years, so the wet May of 1935 was looked on with relief. By May 20th, the ground was saturated. Further rain caused flooding. On May 28th, the McCook paper reported that Red Willow County had come through the worst flood in its history, with few animals and no human lives lost. Little did anyone know the "worst" was yet to come.

On the evening of May 30th, heavy rain began falling in Colorado, then moved east into southern Nebraska. There was nowhere for the water to go. Dundy County was the first to be hit with an 8-foot wall of water. A second crest came surging down the valley the next day at noon.

Devastation was total. Over 100 lives were lost. Complete farmsteads were washed away, lines were downed, the McCook power plant was under water. As the flood receded, a thick layer of sand was left behind, rendering soil useless for farming.

With luck, the 1935 flood will always be "the worst." Six dams now control the Republican and its tributaries.

## HISTORY MINUTE 181

### Early Days along the Platte

Early travelers along Nebraska's Platte valley were impressed by the stark beauty of the prairie. Although there were few trees, the Platte Valley had a lushness all its own. Recounting the 1846 trip of Francis Parkman, Judge Bayard Paine wrote:

"They reached the junction of the North and South Platte rivers on June 7. They traveled four days south of the Platte before seeing their first buffalo, but they found the buffalo chips burned exactly like peat and used it in cooking all their meals.

The rank grass was up to the horses' bellies. They saw many antelope, their little white throats just above the grass-tops, and a few gray wolves trying to catch an antelope. There were many prairie-dog towns. These dogs were not fastidious in their choice of companions, for there were long checked snakes sunning themselves, and demure little gray owls which were perched side by side with the dogs and snakes.

Along the well-worn road they saw a beautifully carved claw-footed table which had been brought far, only to be thrown out because it was too heavy for the oxen to draw along the trail."

## HISTORY MINUTE 182

### A Summer Storm

Anyone who has ever tried to farm in Nebraska can sympathize with Moses Stocking, who remembered this about farming in 1860:

"By the first week in June, the wheat was headed out beautifully, the corn growing finely. A better prospect for a good crop could not be desired, when, presto, a change came over the spirit of my dream.

"About 4 p.m., June 10th, a cloud as dark as Erebus came wheeling up from the horizon with the speed of a locomotive. I started the teams toward their pasture, but the storm burst upon us in all its fury. The only armor between my skin and the hail and rain was a cotton shirt. Thoroughly drenched in a moment, smarting from the driving hail, I hurried towards Four Mile creek, jumped in, and got under a bridge until the storm was over.

"A more complete wreck of bright prospects could scarcely be imagined. The corn field was now as bare as fresh-ploughed fallow; not a hill, not a plant was left. The wheat field was no better. But thanks to the recuperative vigor of plants, the corn pushed rapidly up again and made a tolerable crop. The wheat made five bushels to the acre."

## HISTORY MINUTE 183

### Booker T. Washington Speaks

Booker T. Washington, a former slave who became head of the Tuskegee Institute, was the University of Nebraska's commencement speaker in 1902. A persuasive public speaker, Washington was a tireless advocate for improved educational opportunities for blacks. Washington was well received by his nearly all-white audience, according to news reports:

"The speaker of the day was welcomed enthusiastically and with University cheers by the students at commencement exercises June 12th. His subject, 'The Race Problem' was presented in a broad, fair-minded, and entirely unprejudiced spirit. He was interrupted by frequent and hearty applause, for even slightly unpalatable truths were kindly clothed and disguised in humor.

"The solution of the race problem to Mr. Washington is industrial and educational. The chance for advancement lies in learning, and in modern methods of labor."

"Mr. Washington has a strong and agreeable voice and was easily heard in most parts of the auditorium. He made a pronounced impression on the audience and large numbers remained for a handshake after the program."

## HISTORY MINUTE 184

### Flag Day

Flag Day, June 14, commemorates the day in 1777 when the Continental Congress declared, "The flag of the United States shall be of thirteen stripes of alternate red and white, with a union of thirteen stars of white on a blue field, representing the new constellation." Annual observance of Flag Day didn't begin until 1893, when the City of Philadelphia suggested that citizens, businesses, and public buildings should display Old Glory.

By the 1890s, flags were pretty easy to come by, but it wasn't always so. Tradition has it that Betsey Ross sewed the first flag, at the request of General George Washington. And in Nebraska's early days, flags had to be homemade, if they were to be had at all. One seamstress from Sutton recalled her adventure in flag-sewing in 1872:

"Sewing the stripes together was easy, but when it came to the five-pointed star--I cut and cut and only succeeded in making pieces that looked like crook-legged animals! My husband came to my rescue, and finally we evolved a five-pointed star fully as good as the average kindergarten child can make today."



## HISTORY MINUTE 185

### School Playgrounds

The hallowed halls of Nebraska's public schools may be silent for the summer, but school playgrounds seem to bustle all year-round. Playground equipment is a relatively recent addition to schoolyards. The city of Fremont pioneered the use of playground equipment at its grade schools in 1911. The idea was an instant hit. One observer noted:

"There is no loitering on the way to school in Fremont nowadays. The pupils come early and stay on the school grounds, where the liveliest scenes of frolic are enacted every morning and noon and recess period. The sight is as good as a circus. Tiny tots fill every seat on the seesaws. Bigger girls and boys keep the swings in motion. Others make the on-looker dizzy with performances on the 'giant stride.' It is a gay scene, like a fairyland."

"The only complaint is that the playgrounds are being frequented of evenings by an element of older youths who get unnecessarily loud and boisterous. There will be a stop to this, by an order that no one use the apparatus after the 9 o'clock curfew bell."

## HISTORY MINUTE 186

### The Lawn Party

Here's a social note from "the good old summertime" in 1876:

"Yesterday afternoon we visited the grounds of Mrs. Monell, where the lawn party is to be given this evening, and can say by personal inspection that it is a delightful place for such a gathering. There is an abundance of room for many ice cream tables, for a croquet ground, and for a dancing platform 30 x 50 feet, which is to be put down today. Walks are to be put down leading to the dancing ground, the trees are large and beautiful, and the grounds are to be lighted by numerous large lanterns and railroad lights.

"The ladies are requested to remember that this is 'leap year,' and they need not wait for cavaliers to escort them to this pleasure making, but the evening will be light and pleasant, and they can go alone.

"The weather promises to be good, there will be some excellent singing by one of the leading quartets of the city, and we can enthusiastically say that this promises to be one of the gladdest evenings of all the glad year. Should the weather prove unpropitious, the affair will be postponed and due notice given when it will come off."

## HISTORY MINUTE 187

### When Summertime was Chautauqua Time

"Fourteen days full of the best things genius can devise, or money can procure. The Beatrice Chautauqua is an oasis in the desert of life--an inspiration from the first day to the last."

The program for the 1901 Beatrice Chautauqua made no bones about the wonders it offered. Held each summer at Riverside Park, Chautauqua was a chance to be entertained, a chance to learn, the ultimate in affordable summer diversions.

Entertainment was outstanding: W. Eugene Knox, "King of the Impersonators;" moving pictures of Queen Victoria's Funeral; and Professor Sheckler and his dog, who both ascended in a balloon and jumped out, each with his own parachute. Music filled the program afternoon and evening, following morning classes in everything from Colonial History to Beginning Greek.

Cottages or tents with wooden floors could be rented for the 10-day Chautauqua season. Mail, groceries and fresh meat were delivered to your tent-flap daily. Day-trippers could ride out from town via horse-drawn carry-alls and get a full day's amusement for a quarter. Little wonder that from the 1880s to the 1920s, summer time was Chautauqua time.

## HISTORY MINUTE 188

### The Chadron-Chicago Horse Race

The Chadron to Chicago Horse Race, run in 1893, started out as a joke. Somebody idly suggested a thousand-mile horse race might be amusing. But Chadron folks took the notion seriously, and in no time the route had been laid out and a purse of one thousand dollars had been offered. The race was on!

Nine riders and seventeen horses set out from Chadron on the morning of June 13. Their destination: the entrance to Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show at the Chicago World's Fair. The Notorious Doc Middleton was the best known of the entrants. The hundreds of other world-renowned riders promised by the press failed to materialize.

The route crossed northern Nebraska and went on through Iowa and Illinois. Checkpoints were set up in towns along the way, at which riders had to register. As the race progressed, several riders, including Doc Middleton, were forced to drop out.

On the morning of June 27, one John Berry, riding a horse named "Poison" arrived in Chicago. His time: 13 days, 16 hours. His prize: the thousand dollars, plus an additional five hundred from Buffalo Bill.

## HISTORY MINUTE 189

### A New Yorker's Report

D.A. Chapman, a correspondent of the Troy, New York Whig, filed this report in June of 1854:

I have been with a party making extensive explorations. We started from Independence, Missouri due west to the Kansas river, thence northward until we came to Nebraska and traveled to Grand Island and Fort Kearny. Having plenty of time and our animals being in good condition (for we had excellent grass all the way) we rode out on the emigrant road, far into the Buffalo country, and had a glorious time hunting them.

That chimney rock 'took me down.' It is certainly a most astonishing curiosity. I thought we would never come to it after we caught sight of it. But what a miserable country that is, agriculturally considered, after you leave Fort Kearny. Nothing, absolutely nothing, but barren desert plains. All the fertile region is found within a hundred miles of the Missouri, except along the narrow bottoms of the streams. The great scarcity of timber will keep a great deal of good land from being settled for a century at least."

## HISTORY MINUTE 190

### For Happiness in Marriage

In honor of all those for whom wedding bells will ring in June, here's a turn-of-the-century word of advice from Professor Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "for happiness in marriage:"

"In married life, far more difficult than the mere harmonizing of opinions is the harmonizing of tempers. While many people have no opinions worth mentioning on any subject, the humblest or most ignorant can set up a temper. Nothing can deal with tempers except conscience and time. I have known young married couples with whom it was unpleasant to be in the house during the first year of marriage; and yet habit and sheer necessity made their society tolerable within two years, and positively agreeable in five."

"A great aid to the harmonizing of tempers is to form a habit of considering which of the two people really has most reason to care about a given matter. Thus it may make little difference to the wife whether breakfast is early or late, while a late breakfast may cost the husband his morning train. A carriage may be a very important matter to a wife with her skirts to take care of, while it may make no serious difference to the husband whether he walks or rides."

## HISTORY MINUTE 191

### Dutch Joe

Finding water was the key to settling Nebraska's sandhills, and it wasn't an easy task. Some wells were dug two hundred feet down, only to be abandoned. But in 1884, a German with a knack for finding water settled in Cherry County. "Dutch Joe," as he was called, proved that there was abundant water underneath the sandhills. Joe was in constant demand.

In seven years, he dug over 6,000 wells. Dutch Joe's wells were large, round cylinders, straight as a gun barrel. Some called him "the human badger." He could strike his spade into the top soil and sink out of sight in an astonishing short space of time. In a single day he was known to have dug a well sixty-five feet deep.

One day in 1894, Joe was called on to go to the bottom of the first well he had dug to clear out an obstruction. He gave the signal to hoist a bucket full of loose rock. When the bucket had almost reached the top, it slipped, falling 200 feet down onto Dutch Joe. His neighbors called him "a hero who lost his life making a home for many in the desert."

## HISTORY MINUTE 192

### Cooking with Chips

Fuel was scarce on the Nebraska prairie in settlement days. What little wood there was along creeks and streams was quickly used up, so homesteaders had to resort to cow chips or buffalo chips. This fuel was plentiful, but it dismayed fastidious housekeepers, and it burned so quickly the whole family could be kept busy stoking the stove and hauling ashes.

Handling chips while cooking led to much hand-washing. Charlie O'Kieffe described the routine of baking biscuits on a chip-fired stove this way: "First, stoke the stove. Get out the flour sack; stoke the stove; wash the hands; mix the biscuit dough with the hands; stoke the stove; wash the hands; roll out the dough; stoke the stove; wash the hands; cut the biscuit dough with the top of a baking powder can; stoke the stove; wash the hands; put the biscuits in the oven; keep on the firing the stove until the biscuits are ready for the table, not forgetting to wash the hands before taking up the biscuits."

This tedious routine was carried out as many as three times a day. It's no wonder that when the railroads brought coal, pioneer housewives rejoiced. The soft coal was as messy as chips, but at least it burned longer!



## HISTORY MINUTE 193

July 4, 1856

Nebraska Territory was only two years old in 1856, but that didn't stop settlers from celebrating Independence Day in fine fashion. Edward Harden, territorial judge, wrote home to Georgia with this description of the festivities in Nebraska City:

"We had a great demonstration on yesterday the 4th. I delivered the Oration. My speech took finely--after I concluded the audience gave me three hearty cheers, and they marched off in regular order to a free Barbecue prepared by our citizens for the occasion. I will send you a paper next week containing an account of it.

There were about 2 thousand persons in the ranks, a great many handsome and well-dressed Ladies. We had bass drum, a small drum, fife, clarinet, French horn, and two violins. They made fine music. It was indeed equal to any demonstration that I have ever seen in upper Georgia.

If my family were only with me I would enjoy this summer very much. It is a lovely summer climate, hot in the day usually, but the nights are always cool and pleasant."

## HISTORY MINUTE 194

### The First Winter Wheat

With the wheat harvest in full swing, it's interesting to note that the first crop of winter wheat in Nebraska was planted in 1821. Colonel Henry Atkinson, stationed at Fort Atkinson on the Missouri River, wrote:

"We have put down a small crop of wheat this fall, enough, probably, to give us seed for a large crop next year besides rendering us two hundred barrels of flour. This is a crop we should assiduously nurture, as being most useful and easiest of culture. We should, upon the most reasonable cultivation, after the next sowing, reap of this article an abundance for the entire bread part of our soldiers' rations."

Winter wheat was planted by Mennonite immigrants to Nebraska in the 1870s and 80s, but found little favor among Nebraska farmers until the turn of the century. Then winter wheat came into its own as a strong second crop, ranking only behind corn.

Although it was slow to achieve acceptance and use, winter wheat was one of Nebraska's earliest successful crops.

## HISTORY MINUTE 195

### The Rev. Mr. Horsetrader

Horsetrading was as common in horse-and-buggy days as used car-trading is today. Then as now, the motto which applied was, "Let the buyer beware," as this news item attests:

"Rev. Mr. Willis, a Methodist preacher at Kearney, traded a jackass to a Mr. Throop for a fine mare and a cow. Now it transpires that the jackass isn't worth ten dollars. Mr. Throop is whining about the matter. He says Rev. Mr. Willis took from him a good mare and his best cow, and if his own brother had done it to him he could not have felt any worse about it, and that he always felt such a regard for Methodist ministers.

Poor, simple Throop! When a man preaches Christ for 400 dollars a year and the people pay that only when ready, and let the minister's children go without shoes, and compel him to wear his clothes a year or two after they're worn out, we don't blame any preacher for showing that he is a better judge of jackasses than his disciples. The fact that a man is a Methodist preacher is no reason to suppose he is not a judge of jackasses. Mr. Throop had better practice the Bible injunction 'Know Thyself' and he will be well posted on the jackass question."

## HISTORY MINUTE 196

### How Dry Was It?

Nebraskans have endured more than their share of heat and drought over the years. One way of coping with seemingly impossible conditions has been to joke about the time it was worse. In 1878, for example, it was so dry that "when the fish swam up the creek they left a cloud of dust behind them," and some farmers had to run their "wells through a wringer in order to get enough water to cook with." But that's nothing compared to the year one farmer wrote, "It's pretty dry here. As a result, my cows have been giving condensed milk, and the hens are starting to lay powdered eggs. The wife complains about washing clothes in evaporated water, and it's hard to churn butter out of condensed milk."

Of course, that's not as bad as it was in the thirties. In those years in central Nebraska there were frogs who had grown up to be seven years old without having learned how to swim.

This year's dry spell isn't over yet, but it will have to go some to rival 1974. That was the year a farmer spotted two cottonwood trees fighting over a dog.

## HISTORY MINUTE 197

### The Populist National Convention

Omaha was the scene of a national political convention in 1892, but it wasn't the Republicans or the Democrats who came to town. It was the People's Party Convention.

The People's Party, also known as "the Populists," grew out of the farm crisis of the 1880s. Poor farm prices and high railroad rates caused farmers to band together and take political action. Their organizing paid off in the state elections of 1890. Populists hoped for similar results nationwide in 1892.

Meeting in July, the People's Party hammered out an election platform. Reform proposals called for a stable currency, the secret ballot, a graduated income tax, an eight-hour day, and the direct election of U.S. senators.

General James Weaver was nominated for president, but the platform was the real star of the show. Cheers and shouts of 'amen' greeted the platform reading. When the policies were adopted, thirty-four solid minutes of applause followed. The People's Party ticket got only 9 per cent of the vote in 1892, but two years later the Populists elected Nebraska's governor, several Congressmen, one U.S. Senator, and many state legislators.

## HISTORY MINUTE 198

### The Great Double Show

"Never in the annals of amusement has any exhibition offered such an entertainment as this-- a vast combination of wealth, industry, and research!" So read the announcement for the Great American and Rentz Royal German Allied Shows. The Great Double Show, as it was called, traveled through Nebraska in the summer of 1876. Admission was 50 cents, but you were guaranteed to get your money's worth.

First came the grand animal menagerie, "an unlimited array of living animal wonders, strange and rare. More rare wild beasts, strange birds and reptiles than were ever before exhibited."

"Next comes the museum, a department replete with a leviathan collection of natural and artificial wonders. A thousand objects of interest, amusement, and instruction."

And last but not least, there was "the grand arenic entertainment. The Grand Double Circus, of European and American artists is replete with every detail and adjunct of equestrian, calisthenic, gymnastic and acrobatic pastimes, all given with unusual taste and propriety."

If all this advance billing wasn't enough to convince you, the Grand Street Parade, made up of selected performers and animals, was sure to make you part with your four bits.

## HISTORY MINUTE 199

### Designing the New Capitol

In 1919, Nebraska had a problem. Its fourth capitol building was very overcrowded. Worse yet, the building's foundation was crumbling. Something had to be done. The Nebraska Legislature appointed a Capitol Commission to select a design for a new capitol building.

A nationwide competition was held to solicit designs for the new structure. Ten plans, including three by Nebraska architects, were picked as finalists. A three-man jury was charged with reviewing the plans and making a final choice. The jury was instructed to look for a plan which would create a beautiful, inspiring monument worthy of the state. At the same time, the design had to reduce a practical working home for state government. Nebraskans wanted both a statehouse and a lasting symbol for the state.

In July of 1920, the jury's decision was announced. Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue's unique plan seemed the perfect choice. His concept for a tall tower with useable space provided for striking beauty and utility.

The Capitol design search took nearly two years, but it resulted in a statehouse recognized as one of the world's architectural masterpieces.

## HISTORY MINUTE 200

### The Case of the Poisoned Ice Cream

Eating ice cream has long been a favorite way for Nebraskans to beat the summer heat. In the days before refrigeration, ice cream-making wasn't foolproof. Food poisoning was sometimes the result. In July of 1876, such a case was reported:

"It seems that the proprietor of a restaurant had an unusual call for ice cream, and having used up all his corn starch, he used the patent starch for the same purpose, consequently a very sick public, a large number being poisoned. The doctors had a busy day of it. The people are all doing well, but for a time it was feared some would die."

A few days later, it became clear the Beatrice case was not one of simple food poisoning.

"An analysis by Professor Aughey of the State University shows that large quantities of arsenic and tartar emetic was mixed with the cream. The community is therefore compelled to conclude that a deliberate attempt to commit a wholesale murder was made in this case. Nothing has transpired that would lead to the detection of the party who attempted this horrible crime. Had it not been for the addition of the tartar emetic to the dose, no one would have survived."



## HISTORY MINUTE 201

### "The Way to Get Rid of Ministers"

Times were tough for many settlers in Nebraska's territorial days. Scarcity was the only daily fare that could be depended upon. One pioneer, remembering the slim pickin's of the 1850s, wrote, "Once a minister came, and after addressing the few settlers, all dispersed without inviting him to dine. Perhaps they all felt like ourselves, too poor and proud to offer the man of God what would hold soul and body together. At all events, I invited him home, all the while pondering over in my mind what we could set before him. The clouds were somewhat removed when I thought of the plate of butter in the root house, which was a luxury in those days. I felt easy until the table was being set, when, alas! vain hopes. Our dog 'Trusty,' so untrue to his title, had stolen the butter. Sorrowfully we watched the preacher wash down the dry corn bread with the familiar beverage, corn coffee; and that was the last Camp Creek ever saw of Mr. Preacher."

James Fitch, the unfortunate host in the story, entitled his reminiscence, "The Way to Get Rid of Ministers."

## HISTORY MINUTE 202

### Bryan for President, 1896

Political pundits are already writing off this year's political conventions, and the presidential candidates, as downright boring. Not so in 1896, when Nebraska's William Jennings Bryan was nominated from the floor of the Democratic convention. On July 8, Bryan delivered his famous "Cross of Gold" speech. His eloquent plea for a silver currency standard so stirred the delegates, that they nominated Bryan on the fifth ballot.

One observer described the convention scene this way:

"At the conclusion of his speech...a death-like silence prevailed. Then like a great cloud that monster assemblage rose to its feet. The cheers were deafening. Old men stood on their chairs and hurled their hats towards the ceiling. Suddenly a big delegate from Georgia seized his state standard, and swept across the hall and planted it besides the Nebraska banner. Then came our frenzied friends from other states, until the banners of thirty were gathered around Nebraska. Meantime, a hundred hands had seized our Bryan and were bearing him aloft in triumph."

Despite his party's enthusiasm, Bryan was defeated in November by Republican William McKinley.

## HISTORY MINUTE 203

### A Pleasure Trip?

The perils of early automobile travel are clear in this 1908 account of a summer excursion:

The boys made a little trip to Red Cloud Sunday. The trip there went without mishap, the real sport being reserved for the trip home. During the night a little shower "laid the dust" and the boys got an early start. About six miles out the mud began to thicken up and on each succeeding hill it got worse. The car began to stop on the hills. The boys got out and pushed about half a dozen times, until they got to a genuine hill. Alas, the wheels revolved only to deluge the boys with mud.

Charley thought to strew the pathway with hay. A hay-stack a quarter of mile away was levied on, and the boys were rewarded in seeing the car take off. When it reached the limits of the hay, it stopped, stuck again. It was necessary to divide the passengers into three shifts, one to run the machine, one to gather hay from the rear and spread it in front, and one to cuss. When the top of the hill was finally reached, the hillside looked as though it had been hit by a Kansas cyclone.

This is but a sample of the adventures enjoyed. Next time the boys go, they have decided to drive--horses.

## HISTORY MINUTE 204

### Preserving the Remains

In Nebraska's early days, funerals were usually hurry-up affairs. The difficulty of preserving the remains meant that funerals had to be held soon after a death--whether loved ones had gathered or not. Advances in the undertaker's art were rare enough to be considered newsworthy, as this item from 1876 attests:

"Mr. B. Crabb has just received a patent case for preserving the remains of deceased persons. It consists of a zinc case into which the remains can be placed, already enrobed for the grave. Above the remains ice and salt are placed, and by this means the remains can be preserved any length of time.

It is by far the best arrangement for this purpose, and no matter how hot the weather, or unfavorable the other circumstances, the remains can be kept from decomposition. Where it is desirable to keep the remains of deceased friends until the arrival of loved ones from abroad, this arrangement is invaluable."

This new and improved approach may have been available in larger Nebraska towns, but the majority of settlers continued to bury their dead simply and quickly.

## HISTORY MINUTE 205

### Sod Schooldays

Many Nebraskans learned their readin', 'ritin', and 'rithmetic in a schoolhouse built from sod. Arta Kochen of North Platte taught in such a school in 1901. She remembered: "The school was a long, low sod building with two rooms. The rough dirt walls had been smeared over with some sort of sand mixture and then white washed. There were two little crooked windows. One of these we curtained with daisy chains made of bright papers. In the other we stowed a pail of water, carried a mile over the hill and peppered with sand. The door was of rough pine and opened just far enough to allow one person to squeeze in.

The schoolroom furniture consisted of a rickety table, a broken rocking chair, two good chairs on loan, two others with broken backs, a cracker box and a soap box. The blackboard was a piece of a man's rubber coat tacked on the rough wall. The roof was of branches covered with sod, but almost anywhere I could look up and see the little white clouds floating by.

In spite of such difficulties, the interest of my students never waned.

## HISTORY MINUTE 206

### The Fool's Graveyard

Most of us can't resist engaging in one form of foolishness or another. We ignore common sense and risk life and limb for no reason. This same willful disregard of prudent behavior was noted in 1901:

"Take a walk through any cemetery and you will almost believe that the fools are passing away. There is the last resting place of the man who blew down the gun to see if it was loaded. Further along is buried the man who tried to see how close he could pass in front of a moving train. Then you pass the monument of the hired girl that started a fire with kerosene, and what remains of the boy that pulled the gentle mule's tail. Side by side lie the ethereal creature who always kept her corset laced to the last hole, and the intellectual idiot who rode a bicycle nine miles in ten minutes. Next there lies the fellow who told his mother-in-law that she lied.

The old woman who kept baking powder side by side with strychnine in the cupboard and others are quietly waiting for Gabriel to blow his great awakening trumpet."

## HISTORY MINUTE 207

### The Weather Report

Nebraska's weather has always been cause for comment. No matter how hot, cold, wet, or dry it is, somebody always remembers the year it was a real record-breaker. Official weather records date from 1878. Weather observers included U.S. Signal Service officers and railroad station managers. But the majority of reporters were volunteers. Supplied with standardized rain gauges and thermometers, these observers skillfully recorded conditions and filed monthly reports.

By 1890, there were seventy-nine official weather stations across Nebraska.

The September 1890 report stated, "the month was one of extremes in temperature, early frost, and prevailing lack of rain. The mean temperature was 62.4, about 2 degrees below normal. A maximum temperature of 104, excessive for September, was reached at Wilcox, and a minimum of 18 degrees, also unusual for September, was reached at Fort Niobrara in conjunction with the first frost of the season on the 13th."

To many observers, the month was one for the record books. They wrote: "A September frost before the middle of the month has been heretofore unknown."

"Least rainfall of any of the past thirteen years." "Remarkable number of frosts. Ice one-fourth inch thick."

## HISTORY MINUTE 208

### Law and Order

By 1901, many Nebraskans could look back on the days when law and order came out of the barrel of a six-gun. One group in Valentine remembered outlaws who "made frequent attempts to terrorize the peaceable populace by now and then putting a bullet hole through a lamp chimney as a matter of target practice." If a human target was hit, "at the trial, self defense was the plea which got the man free, no matter if the victim happened to be without fire arms," they recalled.

These old-timers also recollected "when a prominent citizen carried a shot gun to and from his business for two weeks ready to at any time defend his life. Another man who had provoked some desperadoes in the discharge of his duty was confronted by several winchesters upon going out to the stable one morning. Smooth talk and a persuasive manner finally overcame their prejudices, and another tragedy was avoided."

The upright citizens noted with satisfaction, "These desperadoes who came abreast of civilization antagonizing, threatening and menacing, have fallen by the wayside with the great onward march of progress, law and order."



## HISTORY MINUTE 209

### The Largest Robbery

On September 17, 1930, a blue Buick stopped at the corner of 12th and O Streets in Lincoln. Several well-dressed men got out and entered the National Bank and Trust Company. One man, holding a Thompson submachine gun, stayed outside. A policeman across the street saw the man, but assumed he was guarding a money transfer.

Someone was suspicious, and called the police. Two policemen responded, and were told by the man with the machine gun to keep right on moving. The flatfoots hurried four blocks to the police station to get reinforcements.

By this time, the robbers had helped themselves to 2.7 million dollars in cash and securities. They jumped back into their car, which was equipped with a siren, and sped away. In less than ten minutes, a solid financial institution was left insolvent.

Three men were eventually arrested and tried. Two were sentenced, one was acquitted. A fourth mobster returned some securities in a plea bargain.

Years later the F.B.I. questioned whether the real culprits had been found. One thing was certain: the heist was the largest in U.S. history. It would hold that record for more than forty years.

## HISTORY MINUTE 210

### Emancipation Day

Emancipation Day, marking Abraham Lincoln's 1862 proclamation abolishing slavery, was a significant holiday for Black Nebraskans. For former slaves and their descendants, September 22 was the real Independence Day. Although freedom did not bring equality, Emancipation Day came to symbolize black hopes for justice.

Celebrations were organized in a number of Nebraska communities. One of the earliest affairs was held in Lincoln. Parades, a brass band concert, picnic and ball were included in the festivities.

Nebraska City's 1902 affair was even grander. A large contingent accompanied by a cornet band arrived from Omaha on a special train. They enjoyed an ox roast, a dance and a cake walk.

Valentine hosted its first Emancipation Day celebration in 1902. Black soldiers and officers stationed at Fort Niobrara invited local citizens to join the observance. A reporter noted, "People listened to short interesting addresses by Chaplain Steward of Ft. Niobrara and Colonel Towle. A more gentlemanly or better behaved lot of men never garrisoned at Ft. Niobrara."

## HISTORY MINUTE 211

### Billy Sunday Cleans Up

Today's televangelists are often in the news, but they're not the first pulpit-pounders to capture the attention of Nebraskans. When the flamboyant and controversial Billy Sunday announced his intent to clean up Omaha in 1915, everyone sat up and took notice.

Billy Sunday wasn't easy to ignore. Famous for his blunt, informal language and his energetic delivery, Sunday was America's most popular and successful evangelist. He had heard things were "rotten as hell" in Omaha, and he was going to fix it.

Sunday preached in a specially-built, 11,000-seat Tabernacle at 14th and Capitol. His message was simple. He said he knew "less about theology than a jack rabbit knew about ping pong," but he was convinced that those who drank, danced, and played cards were on the road to hell.

Using what some called vulgar language and an almost gymnastic preaching style, Sunday created a sensation. Even his detractors had to admit he was a success by the numbers. Some 13,000 converted. And the offering plates brought in over 57,000 dollars.

## HISTORY MINUTE 212

### The Rules

If you think your working conditions are unreasonable, consider these rules posted at a wagon works in 1872:

This office will open at 7 a.m. and close at 8 p.m. daily, except on the Sabbath, when it will remain closed.

Each clerk will bring a bucket of water and a scuttle of coal for the day's business.

Clerks will fill the lamps, clean the chimneys, and trim the wicks every day and wash the windows once a week.

Male employees will be given an evening off each week for courting purposes, or two evenings a week if they attend church regularly.

Any employee who smokes Spanish cigars, uses liquor, get shaved at a barber shop, or frequents pool or public halls will give the employer good reason to suspect his worth, integrity and honesty.

Any employee who has performed his labors faithfully for a period of five years, has been thrifty, attentive to religious duties, and is looked upon by his fellow workers as a substantial and law-abiding citizen, will be given an increase of 5 cents per day in his pay, providing profits allow it.

## HISTORY MINUTE 213

### The Old Settlers' Picnic

The town of Britt, in Cherry County, wasn't established until 1898. But that didn't stop citizens from organizing an "old settler's picnic" in 1903--even though the settlers had only been there five years!

The September event was regarded as a great success. "About 500 people gathered to talk over old times and enjoy a day together in sport. They came from the surrounding country 15 to 20 miles around and met as a great family. The day was perfect." The entertainment included music, dancing, horse races and a baseball game.

The event was such fun that the Valentine newspaper editor felt compelled to record the event in poetry.

"Full more we'd write in verse or rhyme  
In praise of all that is sublime  
If we could rhyme and verses fix  
We'd write this up and sign it, Bix.  
The editor and boy were there  
To swell the crowd of people where,  
They all are cheerful playing ball  
And people courteous to all.  
We'd like to write about the game  
Because we umpired for the same  
We'd mention those that played base ball

But hang it, we don't know them all."

## HISTORY MINUTE 214

### The State Bird

The western meadowlark was designated Nebraska's state bird in 1929. The lark is admired for its bright yellow plumage, but what it's really known for is its song. A meadowlark fan in 1917 wrote:

"I like the way that bird sings. He pours out his soul in song like you pour out a pail of warm milk into a ten-gallon can. He volunteers his song. He sings his encores without coaxing. He alights on the tip of the trees or the telephone pole and without posing, begins his recital. He tips his head skyward, throws his little throat into high and sings his song broadcast and buoyant over a whole 80-acre lot.

"How it penetrates! How it vibrates! How it sets the joy strings in your heart a-humming!

"I have paid good U.S. money to hear a human being roll melody off her chest. She gave the money's worth. I do not complain. But she lacked a lot of reaching the lark. She lacked that fine unconsciousness that belongs in mortals only to the unspoiled baby and in the feathered world to the meadow lark and a few choice others."

### The Duel

By the time Nebraska was settled, the gentlemanly art of dueling had been replaced by the less formal, and more lethal, art of gunslinging. But a few duels were fought here. One altercation at Ft. Atkinson in the 1820s had such an unusual outcome, it was still talked about twenty years later. In 1844 Lieutenant Henry Carleton recorded: "There was a officer there then who was a very excellent shot, and very unpopular. The officers agreed to run him out by challenging him to duels.

"The first gentleman to challenge him was suffering from consumption, and it was thought at best he couldn't live long. The parties went upon the ground. Most of the officers were present. Each man took his post, and at the word, both fired. The sick gentleman fell, shot directly through the lungs. "Strange as it may seem, he recovered, not only from his wound, but from his disease. The taking of lead pills proved most efficacious, not only to the shootee but to the shooter; he soon became as popular as his antagonist did healthy. So there is one argument in favor of dueling."



## HISTORY MINUTE 216

### Signs and Sidewalks

Visual pollution, in the form of too many signs and billboards in too little space, is what most of us consider a modern urban problem. But Omaha faced similar ugly excess in 1876. One writer offered this novel solution:

"I think that some of the superfluous signs that deface many of the really neat-looking buildings might be profitably employed in making crosswalks for foot passengers, who could read "Wholesale and Retail" at large while crossing the street. These numerous placards are not peculiar to the West, but they are rather more exaggerated in all new towns, where everything is new and where there are no established places of business."

This plan promised to solve two problems, for "the sidewalks are simply atrocious, and the streets in wet weather make you think of "sink or swim," while in dry weather they are more like the great desert of Sahara. I am confident that if one of Barnam's camels were to go through here on a dry day, he would bury his nose, in true Arabian style, till the cloud of dust that whistled down the street had passed over."

## HISTORY MINUTE 217

### Early Football

Football is such an established tradition that it's hard to imagine autumn without it. But not all that long ago, the sport was a new and not altogether welcome addition to the high school scene.

Recruiting enough players to form a team and finding suitable opponents proved to be a challenge. Perkins County High School formed its first team in 1912, but only had six boys who could play. Boys out of school were rounded up to fill out the roster. A town team was then organized so the school team would have someone to play.

Broken noses, arms, legs, and even fractured skulls were common and caused much criticism of the new sport. After the Perkins County team endured numerous injuries, "the dads thought it too much torture and finally called a halt to the playing." Harsher critics called for football to be prohibited by law. "The popularity of the game shows that American people are fast drifting back to the gladiatorial days of the Roman Coliseum," The Nebraska Legislature considered a football ban after a Doane College player was killed in 1896, but the measure was defeated.

## HISTORY MINUTE 218

### Summer's Quick Start

The town of Sumner in Dawson County may not have been founded until 1890, but the good citizens quickly made up for lost time. One observer wrote:

On July 1, not a single house or graded street marked the present site of the city. The whole was covered by ripening fields of grain. In two short months a thriving village with beautiful and symmetrical streets was reared in the midst of this agricultural fountain; the iron horse snorted on his freshly made track of steel, and the mingled sounds of the hammer and saw combined to drown out the music of the sickle.

Today over fifty substantial buildings stand, a nucleus around which will be grouped enough buildings to make this one of the leading cities of western Nebraska. More lumber has been shipped here than to any point along the entire valley. The rapid growth of this city has already prompted the laying out of an elegant addition to the west of the principal business location."

Despite this energetic start, Sumner's growth was less than predicted. Its peak population was reached in 1920, and numbered 354.

## HISTORY MINUTE 219

### A Loup City Romance

"Two marriages in one evening!" the headline announced. This 1874 account gave the fascinating details of a busy night for cupid: "Frank Ingram, probate judge in Sherman County, was called upon to perform a marriage ceremony for the first time on the evening of the 8th. The happy couple were Robert Russell, one of the commissioners of Sherman County, and Miss Anna Flint of Beaver Creek, same county. Although the old gentleman was opposed to the match and it took a good team, an active man, and a six-shooter to bring on the prize, we are assured that the match is a good one. The couple has a host of friends who are willing to swear that the match was made in heaven.

"On the same evening a young lady who was present caught the matrimonial fever, and a young man who happened to be sleeping nearby was awakened, and it was decided to perform the ceremony at once. A license was theretofore issued, and the twain were made one and retired in good order."

## HISTORY MINUTE 220

### A Collision Course

The advent of motorized transportation, in the form of automobiles and street cars, provided many Nebraskans with a new way of getting around. But sometimes this new technology literally collided head-on with horse-drawn vehicles. The results could be serious:

"Last night a hack driver attempted to cross the track of the motor cars just as a train came by. He missed his calculation. The motor struck the team, killing one horse and crippling another. The driver was thrown to the pavement and sustained several painful bruises. The front wheels of the carriage were smashed to pieces."

Sometimes it was the motorists who were at fault. "While a party of people was going out for a picnic today in several conveyances, the last buggy in line was run into by a street car at the Clarkson and Thirteenth Street crossing. The buggy overturned, the occupants spilled out, and the street car derailed, but nobody was hurt. After damages had been repaired, the procession went on its way."

Of course the motorized vehicles eventually won out, driving horse-powered vehicles from the streets.

## HISTORY MINUTE 221

### The First Territorial Governor

Francis Burt was a governor for the record books. Not only was he Nebraska's first territorial governor, he also served the shortest term of any chief executive.

Burt was a 47-year-old South Carolina editor when he was appointed by President Franklin Pierce to lead the new Nebraska territory. The trip to Nebraska was no cakewalk in 1854. By the time Burt arrived in Bellevue on October 7, he had travelled by railroad, stagecoach, steamboat, hack, and wagon. Low water in the Missouri stopped steamboat traffic, so the new governor had to travel overland.

Burt had become ill in St. Louis, and by the time he arrived in Bellevue he was so weak he immediately took to a bed in the mission house. He never got up. The oath of office was administered at his bedside on October 16. Two days later, Francis Burt died.

Secretary Thomas B. Cuming became acting governor. Despite vociferous protests, he located the territorial capital at Omaha. Had Burt lived, the capital most likely would have remained at Bellevue, and the history of the state might have been quite different.

## HISTORY MINUTE 222

### Fremont's Manufactories

Ninety-five years ago, Fremont was home to a surprising variety of industries. A report entitled "The Merry Hum of Wheels" recounted factory activities.

The local brewery employed thirty men and produced 1500 barrels of beer per month. Breitenfeld & Gumb's cigar factory prided itself on being "the only union factory in Nebraska west of Omaha." The woolen mill was able to procure "a large quantity of excellent wool from Dodge County sheepgrowers." The Nebraska Binder Twine Company was busily converting its hemp into twine. A foundry, harness factory, feed mill, marble factory, planing mill, and creamery were among Fremont enterprises humming along.

Fremont was even home to the brand new snack food industry. H. Archer of the pop factory was touring Nebraska selling soft drinks--and collecting empties. And George F. Wolz was enjoying great success with his new, celebrated "Potato Chips." Business was so good that Mr. Wolz improved cooking facilities so as to quadruple the factory output. The report concluded, "the making of this delicious table article seems destined to become an important industry of Fremont."

## HISTORY MINUTE 223

### Cowboys on the Loose

Who says the west wasn't wild? Consider this news item from 1874:

"Last week Kearney Junction was thrown into considerable excitement by a posse of Texas herders getting drunk and riding into the city, flourishing firearms and intimidating peaceful citizens.

"For three or four days the excitement was at white heat, and the chivalrous citizens of the Junction patrolled the streets armed to the teeth. On Saturday last, three herders rode into the city, passing up and down the streets and threatening vengeance to those who had a few days previously wounded two of their number. The citizens rallied and after a sharp fight drove one of the invaders from their soil, the other two being shot and seriously wounded and captured.

"Telegrams were afterward sent to the Governor, to Omaha, to Plum Creek, and to General Ord for assistance, which will hardly be necessary, as we learn that the "invaders" have departed, leaving Kearney Junction to the fate of grasshoppers."

A week later, this postscript appeared: "Texas Spence, one of the pugnacious herders that recently assailed the Kearneyites, has died of wounds received in the melee."



## HISTORY MINUTE 224

### Growth in the Third District

The decade of the 1880s was a time of tremendous growth for Nebraska. The U.S. Census of 1890 reported the greatest increase of population in central and northwest Nebraska--the third congressional district. In ten years, this part of the state grew by 66%. Twenty-one new counties were organized in the district. Sixty thousand souls inhabited those counties, where none had been listed in 1880.

Nebraska boosters saw this growth as the fulfillment of the state's destiny. One advocate wrote, "Hurrah for Nebraska's northwest! This truly remarkable increase is a magnificent development. It comprises in large part that portion of the state which the croakers declared fifteen years ago could never be utilized except for great cattle ranges, but the cattleman and the cowboy have passed on and the farmer has taken their places, the broad plains have been dotted with homesteads and agriculture has conquered the desert.

"Buffalo, the most populous county in the district, has passed the older eastern counties of Hall, Dodge, and Washington.

"Central and northwestern Nebraska have abundant reason for self-congratulation at the great showing. We feel our oats!"

## HISTORY MINUTE 225

### The Homesteaders

In 1873, Professor James Butler painted this picture of Nebraska settlers: "A majority of homesteaders are men of family.

"If they have the money they buy, at the nearest railroad station, lumber for house-building, already so far manufactured that they need no carpenter to set up their dwellings. But poorer men throw up sod houses. The green sward turned up by the breaking plow is so "matted and massed together" as to form better brick than the Hebrews turned out for Pharaoh. Out of this material, and with no tool but a spade, many a man by ten days' labor has completed a house, roof and all, 15 by 15 inside, a Nebraska "brown front"--both warmer in winter and cooler in summer than any house which can be made of lumber. Doors and windows are for sale in all stores, and trees alongside every brook afford rafters.

"Many pioneers leave their families in the old home until they have prepared the new one. Westward trains are full of wives carrying children to their husbands. Sixteen babies have been counted in a single car on this pilgrimage."

## HISTORY MINUTE 226

### The Prohibition Amendment

Every election has its hot issues. Deficits and radioactive waste may confront us now, but here's what voters in 1890 faced:

"The greatest question ever before the voters of Nebraska will be disposed of at the general election a month hence. On that day will be decided whether the sale of liquors will be prohibited in this state, under an amendment to the constitution, or whether the saloon is to continue its licensed work of destruction.

"We fail to discover any reason why the liquor traffic should be legalized any more than any other known blight, contagion or disorder. As to prohibiting the traffic entirely, of course that is not possible; but it can be made an outlaw from society and driven as a criminal into hiding.

"As the election approaches, nearly everyone is anxiously inquiring, 'will the amendment carry?' The people have made up their minds upon the question. And Nebraska will be a state where the school house and the home are given precedence over the man traps created by a licensed whiskey traffic."

Despite the writer's optimism, a state prohibition amendment was not passed until 1916.

## HISTORY MINUTE 227

### Halloween Pranks

Goblins and ghoulies have long been part of Nebraska Halloween celebrations, and so have Halloween pranks. Fairly typical was this 1891 report: "Saturday night a Fremont preacher was in his watercloset at about the Halloween hour. The building was pushed over from behind and he was penned in. His wife was compelled to tear off some siding to release him from his perilous situation."

A more elaborate trick was played between Bennet and Cheney ten years later. The B. & M. freight was making good headway between the towns, when the engineer saw a man standing on the track. He whistled, but the man failed to move. The brakes were applied, but too late--the man was ground under the wheels.

On investigation, the conductor found that the man was simply a straw dummy. The reporter of the incident remarked, "the speeches made by the crew would not look well in print."

Some communities hired extra police to combat the mischief. Others organized town parties as an alternative to pranks. Still, many were advised, "You may want to turn the dog loose to protect your property."

## HISTORY MINUTE 228

### The Farmers Alliance Takes Kearney

In the election year of 1890, farmers banded together to form a new political party. The Farmer's Alliance vowed to fight the railroad monopoly and high bank interest rates. A show of strength was organized for late October, when Alliance members from across the state gathered at Kearney.

The alliance procession was over two miles long. Headed by the local police and a military band, the parade was made up of farm vehicles--371 of them, decorated with hay and banners denouncing "railroad rule" and the old political parties.

It took about an hour for the procession to pass. One participant noted, "several times trains blocked the crossing, and then you could hear the grangers cuss the railroads all along the line."

"An avalanche of oratory" followed a basket dinner at the lake grounds. Then "the greatest gathering of farmers ever seen in Kearney melted away, greatly encouraged by seeing the rest of their crowd and swapping prophecies" about the election.

The farmers had reason to be enthused. In November, their party elected two congressmen and took control of the Nebraska legislature.

## HISTORY MINUTE 229

### Just Say No, 1880s-style

In 1885, the young ladies of West Point came up with a novel way to encourage their boyfriends to "just say no" to alcohol and tobacco. They presented this rhyming list of demands:

"The man who takes the red, red wine,  
Can never glue his lips to mine.  
The man who chews the navy plug,  
Will in our parlor get no hug.  
Who smokes, or drinks, or cuts a deck,  
Shall never, never bite my neck.  
Drink nothing stronger than red pop,  
Or in your lap I'll never flop.  
If you drink wine or other slop,  
You'll never hear my corset pop.  
The man who guzzles lager beer,  
Can never, never bite my ear.  
If aught than water you e'er taste,  
Just keep your arm from off my waist.  
The man who smokes the cigarette  
Can never squeeze me, you can bet."

The young men of West Point met to discuss these demands. After a stormy debate, they decided to reform--but not until after New Year's.

West Point Progress, 12-10-85

## HISTORY MINUTE 230

### The Ballot

Nebraskans at the polls this month will mark standardized ballots. But in Nebraska's early days, ballots were anything but standard. Each political party's county central committee printed up its own ballot. No space for write-in candidates, and no way to vote for another party's candidate. You voted the straight ticket, or you didn't vote.

In 1891 the legislature adopted the Australian Ballot Act, which greatly improved balloting procedures. Slates for all political parties appeared on ballots printed at public expense. There was even room for write-ins. Still, many people longed for the days of the straight ticket. In answer to their concern, the legislature passed the 1897 blanket ballot law. This law provided that a circle and a political party's emblem would appear at the head of each party's slate. By placing an X in the circle, the voter could easily vote the party line. Picking and choosing between parties was still possible, but the unsophisticated or illiterate voter found it easier to choose the party emblem. Ballots with party logos remained in use in Nebraska until the 1930s.



## HISTORY MINUTE 231

### The State Corn Contest

In the fall of 1905, boys and girls from across Nebraska descended on Lincoln for the first State Corn contest. Sponsored by the Department of Public Instruction, the competition featured boys' corn-growing efforts and the girls' corn-cooking. Exhibits of corn and corn products filled the agriculture building at the State farm. Educational sessions included lectures on improving the corn crop and the principles of scientific cooking.

The two-day event culminated in a corn banquet at the Lincoln Hotel. Over seven hundred diners supped on a meal of corn soup, corn pone, corn dodgers, hominy grits, Johnny cake, corn pudding, corn sauce, corn cake, corn-fed beef, corn coffee, and corn ice cream. This corny repast was followed by the crowning of King Corn, his Queen Alfalfa, and their heir to the agricultural throne, Baby Sugar Beet.

Even though these crops reigned supreme in Nebraska, a speaker reminded the group, "Our boys and girls are the real kings and queens of Nebraska. They stand at a premium wherever they go, fed on these products for which our state is famed."

## HISTORY MINUTE 232

### Fire Calls

Chasing fire engines has been great entertainment for as long as there have been fire engines to chase. In Fremont in the 1890s, if you couldn't witness the fire yourself, the local paper thoughtfully supplied details of all fire calls:

Sunday afternoon about 5 o'clock the large barn of E.N. Morse was discovered on fire, having caught from a bonfire set by the children. The alarm was turned in, and the neighbors quickly rescued the horses and some other property from the building. The flames spread with astonishing rapidity and within a very few minutes the whole structure was a mass of flame, which was breaking out through every opening, and an immense volume of smoke was rolling heavenward. The fire department was promptly on hand, and had several streams working on the blaze. There was a splendid exhibition of what Fremont firemen can do, and it was witnessed by hundreds of people. Although nearly every board and stick of timber in the whole building was on fire, the flames were extinguished and the blackened shell was left standing.

## HISTORY MINUTE 233

### Carrying coals to Omaha

The start of the heating season has Nebraskans changing furnace filters and bracing for high utility bills. A hundred years ago the cost of fuel was not the only problem.

"There is a great deal of complaint about the scarcity of hard coal in this city, that it is almost impossible to procure any at our coal yards, and so it has been for several winters back. What is the trouble? Why is it that this city is not supplied with this necessary article? Why there can't be found a capitalist who can furnish coal, enough at least to carry us through the coldest weather, is certainly a mystery. Some claim that it is the fault of the railroads, that they can make more money by carrying other freights; that they side-track coal cars when they interfere with the carloads of gold that they are taking from the people, and then they let the people freeze. The railroads claim that our coal dealers buy in small quantities and wait until the roads are choked with fall freighting before they ship."

## HISTORY MINUTE 234

November 11, 1918

This November 11th marks the 70th anniversary of the end of "the war to end all wars." The armistice which brought World War I to a close was greeted with great rejoicing in Nebraska towns. The state had lost over seven hundred and fifty sons in the conflict. So anxious were Nebraskans for the war to be over that some towns celebrated victory before the peace was signed.

Erroneous reports of the war's end led citizens of York to honk horns and parade down main street November 7, four days before the armistice was signed. The false start didn't dampen anyone's spirits. When confirmation of the peace came on November 11 at 2:20 a.m., the party began again.

"Mayor Smith came downtown and gave orders that no one be allowed to sleep anymore when such good news was available." The siren at the light plant blew until sun-up, signalling festivities that would last well into the night.

Armistice Day was observed each year until 1954. Then Congress changed the name to Veterans' Day to honor all those who served in America's armed forces.

## HISTORY MINUTE 235

### The Concealed Weapon

Gun-toting was common on the Nebraska frontier. But by the turn of the century sporting a firearm was considered crude, at least in the eastern part of the state. And carrying a concealed weapon was just as illegal as it is today, as an absent-minded cowpoke discovered.

"A young man from the Standard Cattle Company's ranch at Ames was fined 2 dollars and costs in police court this morning for carrying concealed weapons. According to his story, he took his revolver along while herding cattle yesterday to shoot at geese with, and forgot to put it away before he came to town to attend the show. The weapon was a big six-shooter that must have weighed several pounds, and he carried it in his clothes without a belt. It didn't stay very well, and when it threatened to slide down into his boots he started to adjust it to stay better, when the eagle-eyed policeman caught him and escorted him to police headquarters."

## HISTORY MINUTE 236

### Illiteracy in Nebraska

Nebraskans have always strongly supported public education. Schools were among the first institutions established in newly-settled areas. Despite the lack of books, trained teachers, and even schoolhouses, Nebraskans were educated. By 1892, the state could report with pride:

"Nebraska is the banner state as far as illiteracy among children is concerned, as it shows a record of only 3.4 per thousand who are unable to read and write. Iowa held this honor in 1890. New York is eighth on the list. Illinois is twenty-fifth."

"Reports further show that if things keep on as they are going in the United States, women some day will know as much as men. As it now is, the girls of the country are outstripping the boys as far as elementary education is concerned.

"Changes are now in progress, says Uncle Sam, which point to the coming of a time when females will be less illiterate than males. They also point to the coming of a time in the more remote future when illiteracy for all classes will practically have disappeared."

## HISTORY MINUTE 237

### The Illegal Cigarette

Nebraska's Clean Indoor Air Act now prohibits smoking in public buildings. But this isn't the first time cigarettes have been outlawed in the state. A 1905 reads:

"Samuel Koontz, a bookkeeper from Omaha, was arrested yesterday afternoon on the steps of the postoffice. He is charged with rolling and smoking a cigarette in violation of the state law. This is the second arrest made by the police since the law went into effect.

"This is an outrage," Koontz declared to a reporter. The idea of arresting a man for something that harmed no one. A free American citizen has a right to make anything that is not patented. The law might as well try to tell me whether I shall wear a sack coat or a cutaway as to tell me that I can't smoke cigarettes.

The Omaha police chief told me there would be no more arrests made until the case was decided by the supreme court." Koontz said, "I will fight this case to the finish."

Lincoln Chief Cooper said until the law is declared invalid he would continue to make arrests.

## HISTORY MINUTE 238

### Letter from Hawaii

Letters from hometown boys serving in World War II were often printed in the local paper. This letter, postmarked Hawaii, described the trials of Army life in November of 1942:

"On the second morning they put some clothes on me. What an outfit! They only have two sizes--too big and too small. The pants were so tight I couldn't sit down. The shoes were so big I turned around three times and they never moved. What a raincoat they gave me! It strained the rain. I passed an officer all dressed up with gold braid and all the trimmings. He called after me, "Didn't you see my uniform?" I said, "Yes, What are you kicking about? Look what they gave me."

"Marching down the pier I had the worst luck. I had a sergeant who stuttered, and it took him so long to say halt that 27 of us marched overboard. They pulled us out and lined us up on the pier. The captain yelled, "Fall in." I said, "I've been in, sir." That didn't help any.

"If you need any help, let me know."



## HISTORY MINUTE 239

### The Thanksgiving Proclamation

Before Thanksgiving was a legal holiday, Nebraska's governors issued proclamations setting aside a day for giving thanks. (These statements often reminded Nebraskans of their many blessings.) A parody of the official proclamation appeared in 1882. It stated:

By virtue of the authority in me vested, I hereby appoint Thursday, November 30th to be kept as a day of thanksgiving. We have abundant cause to be thankful:

--thankful that the democratic party did not capture the republican journals as well as the elections, and that a few of the post offices have been saved.

--that the woman suffrage question received a respectable internment in Nebraska and Rhode Island.

--that the antimonopolists haven't gobbled up the railroads, nor the railroads the antimonopolists.

--that the comet hasn't interfered with human comfort, and the recent magnetic storm left the crockery intact.

--that the crop of sausage meat and spare ribs promises to be larger than usual.

--that all kinds of lubricating grease emerges from the creamery doors as butter.

Signed, Little Mac, Squatter Governor.

## HISTORY MINUTE 240

### Don't Bet on the Weather

It's never safe to be on Nebraska weather, as this account attests. "There was a lawyer living in Fremont in the fall of 1867 and he took a contract to furnish the Union Pacific a thousand cords of wood. He didn't have any money, but he bought some timber land over across the Elkhorn on time. He started a store here, buying the goods in Omaha on credit, and paid his woodchoppers in goods out of the store. In ordinary seasons his scheme would have worked, but the winter of 1867 was against him. There was no bridge across the Elkhorn and his intention was to cross the river on the ice. But the Elkhorn didn't freeze solid enough to cross teams. When he finally managed to make a crossing over the river, the early spring rains had come and the low bottoms east of town became impassible. His cordwood was on the other side of the Elkhorn, the 5 dollars a cord he was to get for it was in the hands of the railroad, and his inability to make the two connect caused his financial ruin."

## HISTORY MINUTE 241

### You're in the Army Now

Although the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s was made up of civilians, it was run like the regular army. Inspections were a frequent part of the routine, as one unfortunate corpsman found out:

"As the officers went their way on an inspection tour of the barracks, something caused them to stop at the bunk of Mr. Fritz Lambert. The blankets were ripped back, and there exposed to the view of all was a flimsy garment usually worn by the fair sex. "Inspection was immediately called off, and the erring Mr. Lambert was called into court to testify just why he had the article of feminine apparel in his possession. Unable to satisfy the court, he was sentenced to wear this garment during the evening meal. And sure enough, Lambert appeared in the mess hall beautifully dressed in the soft silk slip, and blushing like a June bride.

"This shows what happens to young men who stray from the straight and narrow path. Benefit from Mr. Lambert's experience, and never let your actions bring sorrow and discomfort to you."

## HISTORY MINUTE 242

### Pearl Harbor

Nebraskans, along with their countrymen across the nation, were stunned when the radio broadcast news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Nebraska's congressional delegation, although strongly isolationist before the attack, was united in its demand for immediate offensive action.

Sadly, Nebraska's 700 Japanese-Americans became the subject for action that was offensive in more ways than one. Many were longtime citizens of the state. These Americans vigorously proclaimed their loyalty to the U.S., pointing out that their sons were serving in the military, and that few of them had retained close ties with Japan.

Despite these declarations of loyalty, some Japanese-Americans were arrested. Reverend Hiram Kano of Scottsbluff was detained by the FBI in North Platte. The Episcopal priest had been a protege of both William Jennings Bryan and Bishop Allen Beecher. Yet these connections, and his long years of responsible service to community weren't enough to save Kano. His roots in the Japanese nobility seemed a jailable offense, if not downright treasonous, in the passion-filled days following December 7, 1941.

## HISTORY MINUTE 243

### Snow Pudding

Compiled cookbooks, filled with recipes contributed by local cooks, have long been printed in Nebraska. These cookbooks present a fascinating look at what people cooked and ate. Some of the collections even show us what earlier Nebraskans laughed at.

One such cookbook, entitled "The Prairie Gem," gives typical recipes of the 1890s. But just for fun, one contributor, a Mrs. M. Bitney, included these "ringers."

Here's Mrs. Bitney's recipe for "shirred eggs:"

"Carefully remove the shell from a fresh egg and hold the white and yolk firmly in the left hand. Then with a fine needle and thread, gather the material in straight rows about half an inch apart. Draw up to the required fullness and fasten neatly with the ends of the thread."

And with winter approaching, you'll want to take note of this recipe for "snow pudding:"

"Take about 4 quarts, say, 4 1/2 of fresh snow. Wash in several waters and put it out to soak overnight. In the morning knead it up and set by the fire to rise. Add some melted glue and set aside to cool."

"Bon appetit!"

## HISTORY MINUTE 244

### Let Them Eat Crow

The battle between farmers and that feathered bandit, the crow, has gone on through the ages. In the 1930s, new methods for controlling crows were tried out. One report stated,

"Farmers cuss, discuss, and defend the crow, depending on where the conversation takes place. It is true that crows often devour many times their weight in various insect pests but it is equally true that in many sections they are very destructive to crops. This had led to some states putting a price on Mr. Crow's head. These bounties range from five cents per head in some counties to 25 cents or more in Ohio. Crow eggs in lots of ten or more are worth five cents each in Indiana while crow heads bring 10 cents. Nebraska also offers 10 cents per scalp as does Minnesota in season. Virginia pays 15 cents during the summer.

"In Tulsa, Oklahoma, doctors are conducting a campaign to convert people to eating crow dinners. Claiming the crow is as delicious a bird as pigeon, they hope to overcome the long-standing objections."

Despite the good doctors' good intentions, they just couldn't convince folks on the Plains to literally eat crow.

## HISTORY MINUTE 245

### Don'ts For Ax-Wielders

Here's some good advice for those of you contemplating cutting firewood for the winter the old-fashioned way:

"Every weekend I have guests at my cabin, and they all love to chop wood. I have seen one shin cut to the bone, another man cut through the right shoulder muscles, and one with sight impaired by a flying stick. I therefore keep sharp axes from beginners, and I have a list of don'ts:

"Don't carry an axe on the shoulder; a stumble may cut the neck or face.

"Don't stand on a log when chopping. Axes bounce once in a while, and endanger the leg.

"Don't begin to work in thick brush until you have cleared out more than enough swing room. A friend of mine took a lusty swing at a leaning tree, and a branch caught the double ax, and snapped it right back over his shoulder, cutting his back.

"Don't leave a double ax sticking in a stump or a tree. It can be walked into, or fallen on in the dark. Hang it, head up, on two spikes in the wall."



## WILD TURKEYS

The wealth of game on Nebraska's pioneer plains is legendary. J. Sterling Morton remembered this encounter with the now-elusive wild turkey:

"We were all seated on the ground, eating wild plums, when we heard the cluck-cluck of a turkey. Immediately we laid ourselves flat and in the course of ten minutes beheld a procession of at least seventy-five wild turkeys feeding upon the plums. We remained moveless and noiseless until those turkeys had flown into the tall cottonwood trees to roost. Then after darkness settled, we faintly discerned the black forms of turkeys all through the bare limbs. It required no deft marksmanship or superior skill to bring down forty of these birds in a single evening.

"In quick time we had turkey roasted, turkey grilled, turkey broiled, and never have I eaten any turkey so well flavored, so juicy and rich, as those fattened upon the wild plums of the Republican Valley."

The hunters later met a party of Pawnee. The Indians requested turkey feathers. The hunters shared their bounty of wing and tail feathers, which the Pawnee used for head decorations.

## HISTORY MINUTE 247

### Medical School

Doctors were hard to come by in pioneer days. But by the 1920s, medical care in small Nebraska towns was more accessible than it is today. And by the 30s, motion picture technology was helping some physicians far from the big medical centers to keep up with the latest techniques.

Doctors "in the immediate vicinity of Valentine have organized group conferences at which timely subjects in the field of Medicine are discussed. Dr. Chester Johnson has purchased a 16 millimeter Eastman Kodascope, in order that various educational medical films can be presented for discussion. This organization should prove to aid our physicians in staying abreast with the rapid advancement of medical science, and furnish better protection to the health of our community.

Monday evening, a very instructive film on childbirth was presented at the Cherry County Hospital. Many enlightening phases in Obstetrics were discussed by physicians and nurses present.

Mrs. Tyler, superintendent of the hospital, served a delicious luncheon following the discussion. All present were well satisfied that such meetings will be a permanent feature in Valentine.

## HISTORY MINUTE 248

### Season's Greetings

For many of us, the holidays are a chance to catch up on correspondence. This letter from Fritz Schneiderback to his cousin Hans was published in 1936:

"Dear cousin: I now take pen and ink in hand and write you mit a lead pencil. We don't live where we used to live, we live vere we have moved. I hate to say it but your dear old aunt vat you loffed so vell is dead. She died of New Monia on New Years day in New Orleans.\*

"The Doctor gave up all hopes of saving her when she died. They found 10 thousand dollars sewed in her bustle. It was an awful lot of money to leave behind.

"We sent Hilda to the butcher's to see if he had pigs' feet. She came back and said she didn't know. The butcher had his shoes on.

"Oh how I wish we were closer apart. Your brudder John is getting along fine with the smallpox and hopes you are the same.

Fritz.

P.S. If you don't get this letter, let me know, and I'll write you another one."

\*at fifteen minutes in front of five.

## HISTORY MINUTE 249

### A Christmas Delivery

Modern shipping companies prides themselves on prompt, reliable delivery. But few could match the phenomenal performance of this 1882 Christmas delivery to Ft. Robinson:

A corporal, a driver, and a six-mule team were dispatched to the nearest railroad point to get Christmas goods for Ft. Rob. When the shipment arrived, they loaded their wagon and started on the 125-mile trek north.

The second morning out, a blizzard broke. The corporal remembered, "Without shelter or fire for three days and two nights, when we thought each day would be our last, we traveled over open country for about fifty miles and had to break trail all the way, it being 30 or 40 degrees below zero.

"At night we tied the mules so the wagon would act as a windbreak and covered them with blanket-lined covers. We would spread our tent on the snow, roll out our bed and pull part of the tent over us and let the storm howl."

Against all odds, the travelers made it to the Fort by Christmas Eve. "So Santa arrived and there was a Merry Christmas after all," the valiant corporal wrote.

## HISTORY MINUTE 250

Mr. Stanley, We Presume?

Christmas wasn't the big news story in Omaha on December 25th, 1890. Instead the papers were filled with accounts of the the return of a former citizen:

"Twenty-three years ago Henry M. Stanley came to Omaha as a special correspondent to the New York Herald. After almost a year passed among the then few residents of the metropolis, he left Nebraska to become war correspondent in Abyssinia, and two years later he started upon a perilous expedition to ascertain the whereabouts of Dr. Livingstone, the famous African explorer.

"Last night Henry M. Stanley came back to Omaha, but what a change in the condition of things! In 1867 he left the city virtually unknwn except to a few intimates. Last night he greeted an audience of 1800 people who had crowded the Grand Opera House.

"People of all ranks, professions, and stations," including the Governor, ignored their Christmas Eve traditions, to sit spellbound as Stanley recounted his exploration of Africa. Still known as "the dark continent," Africa was as exotic to Omahans in 1890 as Omaha once had been to New Yorkers like Henry Stanley.

## HISTORY MINUTE 251

### A Zestful New Year

New Year's provides us with our annual chance to improve ourselves, or at least to resolve to do so. Here's a suggestion of "how to get more zest out of life in the coming year," from fifty years ago:

Keep rested. Tired people take zest from others as well as themselves. It is amazing what a difference going to bed earlier will make.

Don't be too ambitious. The world is crowded with scarred people, the result of wanting to be bigger shots than they can be.

Don't fret about how little book-learning you have. If you learn a little something new each day, you are educated.

Don't be too conscientious. If you suffer chronic inflammation of the conscience, the very inertia is likely to make you go wrong.

Have a few troubles and a little pain. Those are like olives in a meal. After the tart sour things, everything tastes good.

Be your age. Some people try at 50 to still get a kick from doing what they did at 10.

Look into the future. There is always going to be another crest in your zest.

## HISTORY MINUTE 252

### Look out for the Ladies

New Year's callers were generally graciously received in the 1880s. But every four years, things were different. A West Point account reads:

"Ye local was interrupted by a bevy of ladies out in full force making New Year's calls. Their countenances were sad, and we inquired the cause whereof, and found they were pining for attention from the masculine portion of the community, who seemed to have a propensity to dodge under counters, hide in dry goods boxes, and generally turn their backs on their visitors. Only two who remembered it was Leap Year retained their equanimity. The butcher, with all the chivalry of his race tendered them a knife, and invited them to partake of the fragrant sausage or the highly seasoned bologna, and afterwards gave them a ride in his meat chariot. The photographer was another generous soul who promised to take the group, provided the camera would do its duty.

"The other boys have since regained their composure, but contemplate the Baby Mine hair cut so as to escape for the rest of the Leap Year."

## HISTORY MINUTE 253

### Claiming the First Homestead

A few minutes after midnight, January 1, 1863, Daniel Freeman filed a claim in a land office in Brownville. In doing so, he became the first person in the United States to claim land under the Homestead Act. This law, passed by Congress in 1862, allowed any citizen over 21 years of age to file on 160 acres of public land. After living on the claim for five years and making certain improvements, the homesteader received clear title to the land.

To become the first to file, Daniel Freeman had to do some fast talking. Of course land officers were not normally open in the wee hours, and certainly not on legal holidays like New Year's. But Freeman pleaded hardship, stating he would have to return to the army before the office would resume its regular hours. As a soldier Freeman felt he deserved special treatment.

In a way it's fitting that the first homestead claim was filed in Nebraska. More land was claimed under terms of the homestead act in Nebraska than in any other state or territory in the years following the civil war.



## HISTORY MINUTE 254

### A Word from the New Year

Here's a word from a Sarpy County newspaper of 1929...byline:

Hello everybody. Happy New Year. I may be young, but I have a bunch of good ideas. During my short time here I've checked the record of the old year, and honestly folks, I had to blush; in fact my face got as pink as my newborn toes. Why, it doesn't seem possible such a worthless record could be left by anyone!

Wasted moments mis-spent efforts, broken friendships, oh! a hundred things of mischance, and every one of them avoidable.

Well, let us see if we can show up better. There is an old German song, "Resolutions, yes we make them, not to keep them but to break them," but that is only a song. This year we are going to keep the biggest resolution of all: "I resolve to keep all of the resolutions I have made, faithfully and well."

Now folks, if you will just cooperate, I will stand before the 'mike' on December 31st and challenge my successor to equal the record I have made. Thank you and good night."

## HISTORY MINUTE 255

### A Calendar for 1930

Nebraska merchants often distributed calendars in appreciation of their customer's business, and as cheap advertising. Most calendars sported graphics aimed at a general audience, but a few were somewhat more provocative. Strict postal regulations prevented anything too racy from being sent through the mails. One Bellevue merchant, whose calendars usually required hand delivery, sent out a tamer version for 1930:

"John Harder is making his annual distribution of calendars. The scene is that of an up-to-date gas filling station with a jovial attendant in charge who is obligingly waiting on a beautiful young lady.

"John ordered the calendars last summer and had forgotten all about them until they arrived in town the other day. His original intention was to employ one of his big transfer trucks to make the deliveries, but after taking a look at the work of art, he decided to send the calendars to his friends and customers through the mails. He consulted with the Postmaster, and was assured that no arrests would following the mailing of the calendars."

## HISTORY MINUTE 256

### The Blizzard of '49

Survivors of the blizzard of 1888 are all dead and gone, but many current Nebraskans lived through a more severe storm--the blizzard of 1949. November and December of 1948 had been exceptionally snowy, but those storms were nothing compared to the blizzard that hit forty years ago this January.

Heavy snow began falling, and kept falling. Forty-one inches of snow fell at Chadron in a two-day period. Buffeted by gale force winds, the snow blocked roads and brought railroads to a standstill. Livestock, outbuildings, and even homes were buried by huge drifts.

State crews and the Nebraska National Guard worked valiantly to open lines of communication and rescue the stranded.

But the job was too big for Nebraska alone. On January 28th, the U.S. Army began Operation Snowbound.

In the next three weeks, the army opened 87,000 miles of road, liberated 150,000 snowbound people and ferried the critically ill to hospitals.

## HISTORY MINUTE 257

### Advice to the Legislature

Here's some advice offered to the Nebraska legislature, in the days before there was a unicameral:

"The Legislature now 'sits'--if they will just remain sitting, and busy themselves in wielding the pruning knife on the foot-thick statute book, they will please us mightily. But we know that of the hundred members of the house there will be ninety-nine who have a pet bill which he will duly present to the sifting committee. It is a certainty that a large number of this number will sift through the sifting committee and eventually be added to the long list of laws now in the big book.

"There are laws which never have been enforced and which will never be enforced, because they are silly laws. Why permit them to remain on the books? The wise farmer culls poor producers out of the cow herd. A broken-down chair is a useless, room-taking article. A broken-down law is far worse.

"We do not propose any laws for the consideration of the legislature. Just start the culling process right now."

## HISTORY MINUTE 258

### Football Inventions

As armchair quarterbacks rehash the college bowl games, and anticipate the Super Bowl, it's interesting to note some 1927 "inventions" that helped make football the game we know today. One sports observer wrote, "From the old game of heavy men and heavy armor has come a new game of speedy scrimmage and running. Hence the latest suit weighs only seven pounds. Foam rubber replaces the usual fiber padding. The new uniforms protect the players as much, but are ten pounds lighter.

"Fast and accurate footwork is developed by an ingenious new method of training players devised by the coach at Northwestern. This is a novel form of the hurdle race in which the runners, at full speed, must step in the center of boxes laid in zigzag pattern on the ground. The footwork not only peeps up the men, but teaches them to dodge opposition as they race for a touchdown.

"Adjustable football cleats of bakelite, an early form of plastic, are among science's newest contributions to the sport. Unlike leather cleats, the new models don't soak up water on a wet field."

## HISTORY MINUTE 259

### The Womanless Wedding

Weddings have always been good fodder for the society pages of Nebraska newspapers. But after the turn of the century, notices for a peculiar sort of wedding began to appear. These nuptials had the usual cast of characters--blushing bride, nervous groom, proud parents, guests moved to tears by the beauty of the scene. But what was unusual about these weddings is that they were womanless.

The womanless wedding, with all the female roles played by men dressed in women's clothing, was a standard entertainment and money-raising scheme for community service organizations. This "wedding" in Bellevue was typical:

"The mysterious wedding is to take place in the Social Center under the auspices of the Junior Woman's Club. Among the prominent persons who will be guests are Clara Bow, Colonel Charles Lindbergh, and President and Mrs. Hoover.

"Since so many people wish to attend, an admission fee of twenty-five cents will be charged. Thirty prominent men are to take part in the wedding. It is entitled, 'What, No Women?' and proceeds will go to the community."

## HISTORY MINUTE 260

### How Cold Was It?

Fifty years ago, it wasn't unusual for the weather man to be inaccurate in his forecasts. But it was rare for the report of the current weather conditions to be disputed--after all, it was just a matter of reading the thermometer. One frigid morning in January, however, there was disagreement about exactly how cold it was:

"Weather conditions in and around Omaha were very peculiar Wednesday. The cold is not strange, but it was the variance of temperatures at points not widely separate that was peculiar. The official report at the government weather office at 8 o'clock was 8 degrees below zero. At the same time at Bellevue it was officially 22 below. Unofficial reports from Ralston place the temperature at 28 below.

"Mr. Robbins of the weather bureau said the air near the ground this morning was unusually cold, and low-lying places were the ones that had the low temperatures. The government thermometer at the Federal Building is 155 feet above the ground. People who walked to work or waited for cars are convinced that it was colder than 8 below."

## HISTORY MINUTE 261

### The Hot Lunch Plan

The hot lunch program for Nebraska school children began in the late 1920s. By 1929, about 400 students were enrolled in what was called "hot lunch work." Some rural schools adopted "the pint jar plan." Under this plan, each pupil brought food from home, packed in a pint fruit jar. These jars of food were placed in a kettle of water to warm during the morning.

Teachers were happy with the plan, one report said, because it eliminated preparing food at school. "At recess time the kettle containing the jars of food is set on the stove, and by noon the food is hot for serving. Usually each pupil brings a cup or bowl and a spoon in the lunch box each day. The dishes are then taken home each night to be washed."

In 1929, 132 boys and girls were on "the pint jar plan" The scheme was so successful that it spread throughout the state in the next two decades. In 1946, Congress passed the National School Lunch Act, to provide federal assistance to develop the hot lunch program students enjoy today.



## HISTORY MINUTE 262

### The Wolfless Wolf Hunt

Organized hunts for "wolves"--what we now call coyotes--were a frequent part of the winter sporting scene in the 1920s and 30s. Literally hundred of hunters joined in the search, but despite all the manpower the wiley coyote was not always bagged. One southeast Nebraska hunt was particularly unsuccessful:

"There were about three hundred hunters from Cass County, Omaha, and Sarpy County who participated January 13 in a wolf hunt. They made three drives during the day. The first started west of Springfield, ending east of Stutzer's house without killing any prey. The second drive was southeast of Springfield. No luck. The third drive was east of Springfield. This drive ended without any wolves.

"During the course of the drives there were about four wolves seen by the hunters, but due to the extreme cold weather and shortage of men, the hunters were not able to form complete lines. They hope for better luck next time. The Springfield Ladies Aid served lunch at noon to the nimrods."

## HISTORY MINUTE 263

### Legislative Side Glances

Fifty years before glasnost and the warming of Soviet-American relations, the Nebraska legislature discussed its perception of the communist threat:

"The consideration of a bill which would have barred the Communist party from the ballot in Nebraska brought to light some interesting side glances. One representative made the amazing statement that communists in America are of minor importance. It is fortunate for the reputation of the legislature's intelligence that this wishy-washy view was not indulged in by all those present. The representative from Arapahoe declared rightly that the Communists' objective was domination of America.

"The representative read from a report of a congressional committee on communist activities and said, "If ever there was a time when America should rise up it is now. You can't expect to meet this enemy in the open. They only operate through destructive underground channels. They are headed for your home and your town."

Another representative disagreed, stating there were fewer communists in the state every year, and there was no need for restrictive legislation until the party became a more visible element in Nebraska's political scene.

## HISTORY MINUTE 264

### Becoming American

Foreign immigrants to Nebraska faced many difficult adjustments. New language and customs, new occupations, and a new environment required that many old world ways be changed.

Some immigrant groups banded together to help themselves through the transition. In 1927, two hundred Roumanian families in Omaha became affiliated with the Union of Roumania Beneficial Society. This society offered the usual benefits of a fraternal organization, paying burial costs and caring for members' survivors. In addition, the Society worked hard to enable its members to become "full-fledged Americans." Buying a home, supporting the public school system, and becoming citizens were all steps the Society strongly stressed.

In reporting these efforts, one Omaha paper wrote, "The sincerity of these people to become Americans in all things is unquestioned. What a wonderful thing it would be if everybody would make the effort to become real Americans that these people are making!"

The eagerness of foreign immigrants and first-generation Americans to drop the old ways and become "American" has been matched in more recent years by succeeding generations, who have worked just as hard to rediscover their ethnic roots.

## HISTORY MINUTE 265

### Those Jitneys!

The advent of the automobile changed transportation for many Nebraskans. In larger cities, even if you couldn't afford a car, you could buy a ride in a taxi, or "jitney." One writer in 1915 found the new "jitneys" a decidedly inferior mode of public transportation:

"The jitneys do not haul passengers over ten miles for 5 cents, but the street car company does. The jitneys do not sprinkle the streets, or clear the snow off the streets, but the street car company does. The jitneys are not, as a rule, driven by expert drivers, but the street cars are run by experienced men who obey the rule, 'safety first.'

"The jitneys are not, as a rule, financially responsible for accidents, but the street car company is.

"The jitneys do not pay for any street paving, but the street car company lays down a mighty good pavement between its tracks. The jitneys run only when they please. The jitney is a nuisance, a parasite, and a pirate. The jitney has never done anything to promote the public welfare, but the street car company has done so in many ways."

## HISTORY MINUTE 266

### Millard Ablaze

In the winter of 1930, students in Millard received an unexpected vacation when the town's combination elementary and high school burned to the ground. The blaze was a serious one. "The entire town was threatened, but the distance of the school from the other buildings prevented the spread of the fire, which could be seen for miles around. Another factor in preventing the spread of the fire was the heavy snow which covered the roofs of the town's buildings.

"The Millard Volunteer fire force was handicapped by a lack of sufficient water pressure, and the volunteers appealed to Omaha for a pumper. The truck from Omaha reached Millard in 30 minutes, a record run.

"Members of the school board were at a loss to determine the cause of conflagration. There had been some dissatisfaction over the manner in which the school was conducted, but there was no general outcry against conditions.

"Students books will be replaced by others from Omaha. Classes will then be resumed in the old St. Paul's Lutheran church, and the new St. Paul's, the only churches in town. Construction of a new school will start as weather permits."

## HISTORY MINUTE 267

### Baby Bonds

In the days of World War One, all Nebraskans were expected to do their part. Housewives conserved foodstuffs, school children collected scrap metal, and everyone bought bonds. Activities in some towns came to a standstill to insure participation in warbond campaigns.

"All the business places will be closed from 2 to 4 p.m. on Friday, and everybody will bend his efforts to the buying or selling of Thrift Stamps and Baby Bonds. Burt County's share is about two hundred fifty thousand dollars. So far little more than sixty thousand dollars' worth have been sold. The county has stood at the top or close to it in everything else. But in the sales of small bonds its place is sixty-third among the counties of the state.

"A determined effort is being made to fill the quota. In the country school districts, all the residents are requested to gather at the school houses between 2 and 4 o'clock. All who do not put in their appearance there will be called on to explain why they did not do so."

## HISTORY MINUTE 268

### Honest Abe

Abraham Lincoln met his untimely death three years before the capitol of Nebraska was named for him, and it's not known for certain if he ever visited the state. It is a fact that Honest Abe traveled up the Missouri in 1859, and that his steamboat made stops at several Nebraska towns. His destination was Council Bluffs; his purpose, both business and pleasure.

Republicans persuaded the nationally-known Lincoln to speak. "He has yielded to the earnest importunities of our citizens, without distinction of party, and will speak upon the political issues of the day. Go and hear 'old Abe.'" one writer urged.

Lincoln's remarks were well received. A reporter noted, "This distinguished gentleman addressed a very large audience. The clear and lucid manner in which he set forth the true principles of the Republican party--and the dexterity with which he applied the scalpel to the Democratic carcass--beggars all description at our hands. Suffice it that the speaker fully and fairly sustained his great reputation as a man of great intellectual power--a close and sound reasoner."

## HISTORY MINUTE 269

### A Girl's Heart

Here's some good hundred-year-old advice for you ardent swains, in honor of Valentine's Day:

"Did you ever think how fragile a thing a girl's heart is? When you utter the tender words that you know well you do not mean, do you ever think of how they will take root and bloom into the blossoms of saddest regret?"

"If you do not admire a girl particularly, don't lead the trustful little maid into believing that you do. Don't make your visits so regular that the family, as well as the sharp-eyed neighbors, imagine you a would-be suitor."

"If you are not in the position to marry, don't make your visits too pronounced to any one girl. Better be called cold of heart than a male flirt. Besides, it is not fair to the young woman to keep company and then suddenly break off. You leave her prey to the gossiping neighborhood, until her tender heart withers and dies, like the flowers you lavished on her and the meaningless vows you uttered."

"Make your fortune, get your nest, and then look for your bird."



## HISTORY MINUTE 270

### The Class of 73

Sixty years ago, the first class to graduate from the University of Nebraska had its fiftieth reunion. It was a remarkable gathering, because every graduate of the class of 1873 was in attendance. Two men, Judge Dales, and Judge William Snell, made up the entire class.

University authorities believed that no other school in the United States of equal age could claim that all members of its first graduating class were living fifty years later. Every other class at the university had suffered the death of at least one member.

The class of 73 graduated the first year the University was in operation. Both men had taken college work elsewhere, but completed their degrees at Nebraska. They were both awarded Bachelor of Philosophy diplomas.

Judge Dales also had the distinction being the oldest employee at the University of Nebraska, having served as secretary of the Board of Regents for forty-seven years.

Judge Snell practiced law in Lincoln and Fairbury and served in the state senate before moving to Washington State in 1888.

## HISTORY MINUTE 271

### Early Black Nebraskans

Nebraska's territorial census of 1854 listed four free Blacks as residents of Cass County. The territory's free Black population grew slowly, numbering about ten in 1856.

During the 1860s, many free Blacks came to Nebraska, the bulk settling in Nebraska City. A bill was introduced to the territorial legislature to prohibit such settlement, but it failed. Another bill giving Blacks the right to education in the public schools was passed.

In the 1870s, several Black families lived in Nebraska City. One young man who had been brought to the town as a slave in 1854, returned as a free man. He became an employee at a local bank.

In the 1880s, a colony of Black homesteaders settled in Custer County. A group of Black Lincolnites formed a colonizing society, but their goal was not western Nebraska, but Liberia in Western Africa.

Substantial migration of Blacks to Nebraska did not occur until after World War One. Increased industrial opportunities caused many southern Blacks to move north. The bulk of these immigrants settled in Omaha and Lincoln, although most Nebraska cities experienced some growth in Black population.

## HISTORY MINUTE 272

### The Case of the Missing Attorney

Here's an unsolved mystery from the pages of the Sarpy County Agriculturalist of sixty years ago:

"Arthur Balis, the `missing' former village attorney of Bellevue has been `found' and the `finding' seemed to surprise the attorney. He has been in Lincoln since June of 1928, and is now practicing law. Balis was a halfback on the University football team and graduated from law school in 1916. In July of 1926 he mysteriously disappeared, and people have not known of his whereabouts. His friends received letters intimating that "he would leave the world forever."

The bank that held a forged warrant as collateral received a bill of sale of all of Balis's property and his friends made up a small shortage to pay his debts.

It is said that Balis made no attempt to hide and left Bellevue on advice of friends who feared he would suffer a breakdown was he to remain. It is said he used his own name, and that appeared at the Douglas County courthouse and talked to newsmen about a case."

## HISTORY MINUTE 273

### Improved Printers

The printing profession has not always enjoyed the best reputation. In the 19th century, printers were regarded as hard-drinking, flighty types who'd leave town at the drop of a hat. But by the turn of this century, responsible craftsmen had greatly improved the public's attitude. One observer wrote, "There has been a wonderful improvement in the morale of the craftsmen in the last twenty years. In the old days, men drank whisky to steady their nerves.

"Today booze is passe in the craft. Many members of the craft own their own homes. They pay their bills with checks. They have money in the banks. Their kids are getting fine educations. Members of the craft are even painting china and taking piano and violin lesson. They are members of fraternal organizations, active in church work and command the respect and esteem of their fellow citizens.

"Their average income is more than one thousand dollars per year. The 'good old days' are nice to romance about, but no one who has been through them would trade eighteen ninety-five for nineteen-fifteen.

## Women Candidates

Seventy years ago, women in Nebraska were not eligible to vote, but that didn't prevent them from standing as candidates for elective office. In Oakland, two women filed for election to the Board of Education. The account reads, "This is a new departure for this community, but one worthy of the earnest thought and consideration of every voter in our community. These women have not submitted their names to prove the woman's right to vote; it is not because of dissatisfaction with the present board, but as a home and the care of children is incomplete without the mother's help, so in the education of the child, woman's counsel is a vital and necessary aid."

"Surely no citizen can be more interested in the child's welfare than the mother, and it is for this reason that the names of two of our well-known citizens have been submitted for the election."

Support for the women candidates came in the form of testimonials from leading male citizens.

Women serving on other northeast Nebraska school boards were cited as the strongest proof that females could work in harmony with men.

## HISTORY MINUTE 275

### Our Public Schools

Today, America's public schools are the subject of much scrutiny and criticism. But in the 1920's, our educational system was regarded as the linchpin of American society. A Sarpy County editor extolled the public schools. He wrote, "Our forefathers built wisely and well in more ways than we often give credit. America's system of education strived to make good citizens as well as educated citizens. How well we have succeeded is obvious on every hand. No nation of the earth gives the children the opportunity of receiving a good education as has America. No nation of the earth has fewer criminals per thousand than does the United States. No nation of the earth has a less number of paupers per thousand inhabitants. In view of all this, is it not right to uphold our educational system at all hazards? In fact the life of America depends on the stand we take in regard to maintaining our free public school system.

"Yes, our public schools are the life blood of the nation. Permit the school to fall and America will fall."