Saving Nebraska’s Treasures

In attics, underneath beds, on shelves, our heritage is slowly disintegrating. Most of us own things that are important to us—photographs, scrapbooks, a handed down quilt, a well-worn rocking chair. But the truth is, most of us don’t do a very good job of taking care of our treasures.

Most people don’t know what to do or don’t consider the long-term implications of storage, repair, or cleaning techniques. So we write on photographs with ballpoint pen, repair torn paper with transparent tape, store chemically reactive material in acidic cardboard, plastic, or paper containers because it’s easy and it’s what we know. But unwittingly we’re placing our heritage at risk.

To help Nebraskans and others learn about preserving the objects they hold dear, the NSHS Ford Conservation Center has joined NET (Nebraska Educational Telecommunications) and the Nebraska Library Commission in a partnership project called “Saving Nebraska’s Treasures.” Behind-the-scenes work has been under way for months, and will go public this spring and summer. Practical information about the best ways to preserve treasures, in the home or in a museum context, will be offered in three ways:

On the NET set of “Saving Nebraska’s Treasures,” Ford Center Metals Conservator Debbie Long examines a patron’s brass doll bed.

The Nebraska State Historical Society collects, preserves, and opens to all, the histories we share.
A television program, “Saving Nebraska’s Treasures,” to be broadcast statewide on the NET network in May. Viewers will explore attics, warehouses, pow-wow grounds, museums, and homes where artifacts from our rich heritage survive, and conservators at the Ford Center’s labs will examine the materials from which objects are made, explain the factors that speed deterioration, and offer preservation pointers viewers can implement at home or in local museums or libraries. Watch your TV listings for an air date.

Distance learning workshops offering half-day courses led by NSHS conservators and sent by satellite to reception sites around the state will expand on the information and techniques introduced in the television show. The workshops will originate from the NET studios in Lincoln, but access will be statewide through the network of NET’s satellite reception sites, including schools, county extension offices, and some libraries. Reception site locations will be announced soon.

Workshop Dates & Subjects

- June 14—Organic Materials
  (including wood, cloth, bone, leather, horn) Julie Reilly, instructor
- July 12—Inorganic Materials
  (including iron, silver, copper, alloys, stone) Debbie Long, instructor
- August 16—Paper
  (including books, prints, letters, manuscripts, maps)
  Sheila Siegler, instructor
- September 11—Digitization
  Preparing materials for inclusion in the Library Commission’s “Nebraska Memories” project.

For more information about the distance learning workshops or to request a satellite link in your community, e-mail treasures@nebraskahistory.org or call 402-471-3272.

A Web site, now in development will include expanded information introduced by the television program and the workshops. Watch for an announcement of the site’s Internet address.

Funding for “Saving Nebraska’s Treasures” comes in part from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.
Want to Run for the NSHS Board? Here’s How . . .

Ann Marsh, chair of the Nebraska State Historical Society Board of Trustees Nominating Committee, is seeking candidates for election to the NSHS Board of Trustees. Three members will be elected.

The board, the governing body of the NSHS, assists in setting policies, provides guidance in strategic planning, and offers overall support to the director, staff, NSHS members, and volunteers. Meetings are held quarterly at various locations across the state.

Twelve members of the fifteen-member board are elected by the NSHS membership; the governor of Nebraska appoints three. Four elected members must come from each of the state’s three congressional districts, but all are elected “at large” by the entire membership. The upcoming election, to be held by mail ballot in September, will elect one board member from each district. Incumbents Cheryl Clark of Elwood (District Three) and John Schleicher of Omaha (District Two) both plan to run for election to a second three-year term. Current board president Peter Bleed of Lincoln (District One) is not eligible to run for another term.

Members interested in running for the board must contact Ann Marsh by June 1, 2007, at 2325 Stagecoach Road, Grand Island, Nebraska 68801, telephone 308-381-0106. Any NSHS member who obtains the signatures of at least twenty-five other current NSHS members may run for the board by petition. For information about NSHS membership or the petition process for becoming a candidate for election to the board visit www.nebraskahistory.org or contact the NSHS at 1-800-833-6747 or 402-471-4955.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Lincoln, March 2007

Today is an unseasonably warm mid-March day. Soon it will be spring, summer, and then fall, each an important travel season. I hope you are planning some Nebraska travel in 2007. It is important that we visit our state, and especially that we exit the Interstate and four lane highways heavy with commerce. I suggest that each of us pledge to spend some time on the two-lane highways and county roads that wind across our plains and prairies. Nebraska travel is both instructive and delightful for people of all ages, from youngsters in car seats to the most senior among us. Strap on those seat belts!

Nebraska will greet you with some of the most striking landscapes in America’s midsection. Vast, expressive skies, green hills, fast—and slow—water, cropland, pastures, and much more await you.

When you are out in Nebraska focus your eyes and tune your ears to the past that is all around. Barns, plowed fields, town squares, railroad lines, windmills, schools both rural and urban, stores, and especially homes. Listen for train whistles, coyotes at night and church bells on a Sunday morning. Each scene, each sound has a story of the past—of Indian nations, pioneer farmers, town builders, teachers, physicians, business women, youngsters with dreams in their heads, and people with long lives mainly behind them. Look for landmark buildings, historical markers, roads that follow the rectilinear survey of the land, old trees and fencerows, castoff farm machinery, radio towers, and much more.

Imagine! Tie the experience to the history of your own family. Become a part of Nebraska through the stories of a special place and an incomparable people. The Nebraska State Historical Society invites you to know our history and to carry it forward to generations to come.

Happy Trails.

Michael J. Smith
Director/CEO
Nebraska Women Artists
Featured at the NSHS
Museum of Nebraska History

“Being a woman, I am always happy to see women get their due. It was fascinating and inspiring for me to uncover the hidden stories of these women. Many of them struggled in their positions as artists and art teachers in a state where an art culture was, for the most part, nonexistent.”

Sharon Kennedy, the guest curator of a new exhibition at the NSHS Museum of Nebraska History featuring work by Nebraska women artists, has other reasons, too, for her interest in the work. Kennedy, the director of the Statewide Arts Connection, an education program of the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery on the UN-L campus, commented by e-mail, “I think it is important for Nebraskans to view the fruits of their labor and appreciate the quality of the work. The fact that women artists played such a major role in developing the art culture in Nebraska… is also significant.”

The exhibition, “Nebraska Women Artists: 1885–1970,” is a collection of work by artists who were seldom able to make a living from their art, despite training in prestigious American and European art schools. Said Kennedy, “They struggled to perfect their skills and gain notoriety while holding down full time jobs to support themselves.”

Kennedy is uniquely qualified to curate the exhibition, having conducted extensive research into Nebraska women artists while writing a thesis on the subject for her Master of Fine Arts degree. An article distilled from the thesis will appear in an upcoming issue of Nebraska History.

The bulk of the work comes from the collections of the NSHS Museum of Nebraska History. The Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, the Great Plains Art Museum, the Museum of Nebraska Art in Kearney, and private collectors also loaned work.

The exhibition opened March 1 in conjunction with Women’s History Month. It will remain at the Museum of Nebraska History at Fifteenth and P streets in Lincoln through October 14. Museum hours are listed on page 8. On June 21 Kennedy will talk about the artist at a Brown Bag lecture at the museum. For more information call 402-471-4754 or visit the NSHS website at www.nebraskahistory.org.
Nebraska Diary Offers New Insights on Civil War History

In 1862 August Scherneckau, a twenty-five-year-old German immigrant from Grand Island, Nebraska Territory, enlisted in the First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry. His diary, recounting details of his three-year’s service as a Union army private, is the most important firsthand account of the Civil War by a Nebraska soldier that has yet come to light.

Marching with the First Nebraska: A Civil War Diary, by August Scherneckau, translated by Edith Robbins of Grand Island and edited by Robbins and Nebraska State Historical Society Senior Research Historian James E. Potter, has now been published by the University of Oklahoma Press. NSHS members can purchase it at a discount from cover price at the NSHS Museum of Nebraska History Museum Store.

Scherneckau (1837–1923) was one of many German immigrants who fought for the Union during the Civil War, but he was one of the few soldiers, German or otherwise, who served from Nebraska. Because he wanted to share his experiences with friends and relatives back home, he wrote extensive, detailed diary accounts of a soldier’s life and mailed the installments to Grand Island before they could be lost. He supplemented the diary with occasional long letters.

Scherneckau provides a German immigrant’s perspective on the Civil War in Missouri, Arkansas, and Nebraska Territory, and on campaigns, military strategy, leadership, emancipation, and a host of other topics.

He served as a provost guard in St. Louis, where he helped save a former slave from kidnappers and observed the construction of Union gunboats. He describes the process of transforming the First Nebraska from an infantry to a cavalry regiment in the fall of 1863, and his account of the First Nebraska’s pursuit of enemy partisans in Arkansas is an exciting portrayal of the guerrilla warfare typical of the Trans-Mississippi Theater. These aspects of the First Nebraska’s wartime service had been little known before the discovery of Scherneckau’s diary.

_Marching with the First Nebraska: A Civil War Diary,_ 368 pages, 21 illustrations, 2 maps, is available from the Nebraska State Historical Society Museum Store in hardcover at $31.45 for NSHS members or $34.95 for non-members. Order from the Museum Store at 1-800-833-6747 or 402-461-3447, major credit cards accepted. For information on this and other publications available from the Museum Store see the online catalog at [www.nebraskahistory.org](http://www.nebraskahistory.org).

Gifts and Volunteers Build Ford Center Library

One of the hidden treasures of the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center in Omaha is its library. The collection of more than three thousand volumes specializes in preservation and conservation, materials and technology, art and art history, and chemistry.

Also remarkable is the library’s genesis. Not long after the center opened, Julie Reilly, chief conservator, showed a tour group the empty shelves awaiting books. Tour member David Friedland of Omaha said to Reilly, “I hate to see empty library shelves.” Giving her his card, he asked for a list of the books needed, and through the Friedland Family Foundation the Ford Center began a library including all the volumes most critical to its work.

Continued on page 6
In 2001 the library grew again. During her distinguished career Kendra D. Lovette, a paper conservator in Baltimore and Washington, DC, had built a personal library of more than a thousand volumes. Her health declining, Lovette wanted a new home for her legacy.

Since the East and West coasts had better access to conservation resources, she wanted the collection to be in the center of the country, and she wanted it to be accessible to students. The Ford Center was a perfect fit, and in January ninety boxes of books arrived.

The shelves were full, but making a room full of books into a research library requires something more: cataloguing. Enter Dr. Nina Little.

In February 2003 Dr. Little came to the Ford Center after a long career with the Omaha Public Schools library system. With support from the Friedland Family Foundation, Dr. Little began organizing and cataloging the books into a library database system.

After the Friedland grant ended she has continued to work as a volunteer, becoming almost a de facto member of the Ford Center staff, and the Ford Center library has become an important resource for the region.

The Ford Center is open by appointment. For more information visit the NSHS website at www.nebraskahistory.org.

Bale Construction Wins Mainstream Endorsement

Straw bale construction, featured in the Spring 2006 issue of Nebraska History (“Bold and Daring: The Lone Oak,” by NSHS Senior Research Architect David Murphy) has gained significant recognition. Bale buildings, the earliest and most numerous of which were built in Nebraska between the mid-1880s and the mid-1930s, will be included in the eleventh edition of Architectural Graphic Standards (John Wiley & Sons), a reference work widely used by architects, builders, draftsmen, and engineers.

Murphy’s article featured The Lone Oak restaurant, a two-story bale building constructed near Lincoln in 1945. Its late date marks it as an early experiment in modernized bale construction. The recent revival of bale construction dates to the 1970s and also had its start in Nebraska, primarily from research by Dannebrog folklorist Roger L. Welsch. From fieldwork on Nebraska buildings, improvements were devised to facilitate modern construction. New straw bale construction already surpasses historic baled hay constructions in number and distribution.

First published in 1932, Architectural Graphic Standards has been an indispensable tool for seventy-five years. With the addition of bale construction the book now chronicles a sustainable building practice of international scope, with roots in Nebraska architectural ingenuity.
March 1–October 14
“Nebraska Women Artists: 1885–1970” Exhibition (see related story on page 4)
Museum of Nebraska History
15th & P streets, Lincoln 402-471-4754

April 19 • 12 p.m.
“The Quilts of Grace McCance Snyder”
Janet Price, intern, International Quilt Study Center, UN-L
Brown Bag Lecture Series
Museum of Nebraska History
15th & P streets, Lincoln 402-471-4754

April 19 • 12 p.m.
“Four-legged Soldiers: The Horse and the Mule in the Plains Wars and Beyond”
Sixth Fort Robinson History Conference
Fort Robinson State Park, Crawford (registration required) 402-471-3272

April 26–28
“Willa Cather and Material Culture”
Cather Foundation Spring Conference
Red Cloud (registration required)
www.willacather.org 402-746-2653
866-731-7304 (toll free)

April 28 • 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.
“Neihardt’s Heroes”
Annual Neihardt Spring Conference
John G. Neihardt State Historic Site
306 W. Elm Street, Bancroft (registration required)
neihardt@gpcom.net 888-777-4667

May 17 • 12 p.m.
“Resolution to Range War: The Remarkable Evolution of Nebraska’s Herd Laws”
Pippi Van Slooten, intern
Research & Publication Division, NSHS
Brown Bag Lecture Series
Museum of Nebraska History

June 21 • 12 p.m.
“Nebraska Women Artists”
Sharon Kennedy, statewide arts initiative coordinator, Sheldon Art Gallery, UN-L (see related story on page 4)
Brown Bag Lecture Series
Museum of Nebraska History

July 1 • 10 a.m.–5 p.m.
Genoa U.S. Indian School Celebration
Demonstrations, film, lecture, tours, Native American foods & crafts
Genoa
nfcarls@megavision.com 402-993-6055

Unless otherwise noted, all events are free and open to the public.
From the collection. . .

This Cushman Super Silver Eagle scooter, used by the Sesostris (Shrine) Motor Corps of Lincoln, was manufactured in the 1960s and has an air-cooled Husky engine. The Cushman Motor Works of Lincoln manufactured several motor scooter models and other small vehicles. The Eagles were adopted by many Shrine clubs, who were widely known for their public demonstrations of synchronized riding in parades and elsewhere.

Ken and Peggy McClure of Lincoln purchased this scooter in 1985 when it was retired by the Sesostris Motor Corps and used it for Cushman Club of America events. Peggy was a secretary at Cushman Motor Works for more than thirty years. The McClures donated the scooter to the NSHS.