Grant Gives New Life to Native American Collection

In the basement of the Museum of Nebraska History, two staff members are digging for treasure.

It’s not exactly buried treasure, but it has sometimes seemed buried to the museum staff and others who need access to the thousands of artifacts in the NSHS Great Plains Native American collection. Drawers and cupboards packed to the brim and lined up down narrow aisles have posed a problem, both for the objects and the people charged with taking care of them.

America’s Treasures” grant written by NSHS conservation and museum staff was funded, and the federal money, coupled with a private gift to the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation and internal in-kind contributions, will give new life to these irreplaceable objects. The NSHS still needs about $37,000 to complete the project.

About three thousand artifacts are being removed from their current cramped quarters, examined, stabilized, re-housed (placed in new archival boxes or folders), and re-cataloged before they move to a remodeled storage room with efficient and space-saving compacting storage units.

“It will also be a lot safer,” said Museum Registrar Laura Mooney, “for both the artifacts and for us. We won’t need to climb around on ladders anymore.”

Cashman and Mooney also say the artifacts will be easier to study.

“It will be easier and faster for us to access documentation for researchers and to answer calls from descendents of people who donated the artifacts,” Mooney said.

The new room is not quite finished, but Mooney and Cashman began work well

Continued on page 2
Lincoln, January 2008

As we begin 2008 I want to thank the members and friends of the Nebraska State Historical Society for your continuing support. The year 2007 was a challenging one. We were shocked as investigations by the Lincoln Police Department and the state auditor of public accounts culminated in charges of misappropriation of funds against the chief financial officer. That individual is no longer employed by the NSHS and awaits trial in district court.

The investigations led to an audit by the APA. As we began that process, the NSHS and the APA asked the attorney general to review the “private accounts” authorized for the NSHS by state statute. The attorney general ruled that we could maintain them, but the moneys must be handled like all other state funds.

The NSHS has served the people of Nebraska since 1878, much of that time as a state institution. In 1994, however, we became a state agency. Our business operations and accounting practices were not uniformly adapted to state standards at that time. I can report to you that we have now moved quickly to conform in all particulars with state of Nebraska policies and procedures. We have promoted an experienced and conscientious employee to lead our financial office.

Last year was anything but easy, but we are building a stronger, better-managed Nebraska State Historical Society to fulfill our mission of preserving our state’s history.

Before the new storage system’s installation, so the artifacts will be ready for transfer.

“We are prioritizing what needs treatment,” Cashman said. “We are concentrating on those [artifacts] that need help.”

Materials in need of treatment include shrunken leather, broken feathers, and damaged beadwork. The artifacts range from articles of clothing to weapons, and many are decorated with fragile materials such as porcupine quills, silk, shells, and beads.

“It seems like everything can be beaded,” Cashman said.

Conservators and curators are taking careful steps to ensure everything in the collection is accounted for.

“I go through everything, see what state of stability it’s in, and write down recommendations,” Cashman said. She made it clear that they are not “restoring” the artifacts.

“We’re not making anything look like new,” Cashman said. “Everything that is stable enough is vacuumed with a special vacuum and cleaned with special brushes,” she added. “But it’s not the ‘historical dirt,’ just dust.” Objects needing conservation are treated at the NSHS Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center in Omaha.

Mooney is checking the artifact tags to be sure objects and their documentation—description, donor, date of donation, materials—are accurate.

Cashman began work in October and estimates she is about half finished. Mooney has completed about 80 percent of the tagging and documentation. The entire project will take two years, and will bring the NSHS Native American Collection and its storage to state-of-the-art condition.

“It’s great to get to know one collection better,” she said. “And know that I’ve made a difference in the life of a collection.”
**Historic Preservation Adds Millions to State’s Economy**

A staggering $170 million per year. That’s how much historic preservation generates in the Nebraska economy each year according to a recent study. Researchers looked at the economic impact of rehabilitating historic properties, investing in “main streets,” designating properties as historic, and heritage tourism to come up with the figure.

The study, conducted by the Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University and the University of Nebraska Bureau of Business Research, was commissioned by the Nebraska State Historical Society’s State Preservation office. The first comprehensive analysis of preservation activity in the state, it is one of the most thorough to date, according to Bob Puschendorf, NSHS associate director and deputy preservation officer for the state.

“Preservation touches the lives of all Nebraskans,” Puschendorf said, “and now we can document that it is also an important source of significant economic contributions to the state.”

The study shows that historic rehabilitation, Main Street program activity, heritage tourism, and museum/historic site operations are the principal areas through which the economy is stimulated, and benefits accrue from direct income, spending in communities, state and local taxes, gross state product, and in-state wealth.

The study’s significant conclusions are:

- Rehabilitation of historic properties contributes substantially, some $46 million annually. Incentive programs such as property tax freezes on property under going historic rehabilitation attract significant investment in such work.

- Money invested in rehabilitation and “main streets” programs attracts reinvestment, contributing millions of dollars annually to the economy.

- Historic designation, such as listing on national or state historic registers, improves property values and produces additional tax revenue.

- Heritage tourism attracts tourists who spend more than $100 million annually at historic and cultural attractions. Museum and historic site operations contribute $19 million per year.

In addition, the study found that historic preservation supports 3,689 jobs in Nebraska, and for every one million dollars spent on historic preservation, 22 jobs are created.

The full study, “Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation in Nebraska,” is available at the Historical Society. A summary, “Preservation at work for the Nebraska Economy,” and additional information is available by mail at 1500 R Street, Lincoln, NE 68501; by telephone at (402) 471-3270; by e-mail at nshs@nebraskahistory.org; or online at www.nebraskahistory.org.
Hands-on Adventure at Museum “Investigation Station”

Gear up your sense of adventure and turn on your imagination. The Museum of Nebraska History is about to unveil its new hands-on exhibit, the “Investigation Station.”

The Investigation Station will replace the museum’s current kid-friendly exhibit, the more than ten-year-old “History Adventure Center.”

“Things have gotten really tattered,” said Museum Educator Judy Keetle of the current exhibit. In addition to giving it a fresh look, Keetle says moving from third to first floor will allow more children to enjoy what the museum has to offer.

“It’s a lot easier to ‘happen-by’ this room than the one on third floor,” Keetle said. The exhibits let visitors “experience” life in various periods in Nebraska’s history. They will be able to sit inside a tepee on a real buffalo hide, load a one-fourth-scale wagon with items pioneers often took on the Oregon Trail, plan a frontier town, camp in an auto touring camp of the 1920s, and participate in many other hands-on activities found in a variety of “Discovery Boxes.”

The Investigation Station is designed to cater to a variety of age groups.

“This room is for all ages,” Keetle said. “It’s not just kids who learn, but adults, too.” All aspects of Investigation Station have been carefully thought out.

“We’ve been talking about the need to move the room and create a whole new series for one-and-a-half to two years,” said Museum Director Ann Billesbach. The actual remodeling of the first-floor classroom began in May.

“Things are moving along pretty quickly now,” said Keetle. “But there’s so much that needs to be done.” Remaining projects include wall decoration and the transformation of a support pillar into a replica cottonwood tree. However, Keetle is confident the exhibit is nearing completion and hopes to hold the grand opening celebration in March 2008.

Keetle believes the new exhibit will be a valuable asset to the museum.

“We have a history of being family friendly and we are trying to be even more family friendly,” she said. “Hands-on has been a tradition here at the museum.”

Duck Creek Site Yields Unusual Artifacts

N

SHS archaeologists working in the Duck Creek watershed in Nemaha County in the summer of 2007 unearthed evidence of prehistoric human occupation, including unusual ceramic artifacts that promise to broaden our understanding of the early peoples who once lived in southeastern Nebraska. The objects are from the Central Plains Tradition, which flourished from about 1,000 to about 600 years ago.

The most unusual find is a ceramic object in the shape of a human face. NSHS archeologist Gayle Carlson and his crew
believe it was a decorative element on a ceramic vessel. NSHS archaeologists have never before found an “effigy” figure of this kind.

Carlson’s crew also found vessels and vessel fragments that show evidence of elaborately decorated collars that are unusual for Central Plains Tradition ceramics. They suspect a Mississippian connection, a supposition they will pursue through additional research.

The site northwest of Peru, which included several dwelling floors, will be inundated by a flood control dam on Duck Creek. The ten-week dig from May to August 2007 also included a public “open house” in June attended by some two hundred visitors.

January 20
Heartland • (1979) A series of letters written by Wyoming homesteader Elinore Pruitt Stewart was the basis for this story about the realities of homesteaders life.

January 27
How Green Was My Valley • (1941) Author Richard Llewellyn’s memoir of his native Welsh mining community was transformed into this Oscar-winning Best Picture.

February 3
I Remember Mama • (1948) Derived from Kathryn Forbes’s autobiographical work, this film portrays a family of Norwegian immigrants who settle in San Francisco in the early 1900s.

February 10
A Tree Grows in Brooklyn • (1945) Novelist Betty Smith’s memories of growing up in Brooklyn are reflected in this film starring Omaha native Dorothy McGuire.

February 17
Songcatcher • (2000) Though fictional, this film is loosely based on the life of Olive Dame Campbell, who recorded the music handed down through generations of Appalachian inhabitants.

February 24
A Midwife’s Tale • (1998) The diary of Martha Bullard, a Maine midwife of the eighteenth century, provides the context for this documentary.

March 2
How to Make an American Quilt • (1995) The blocks of a friendship quilt form the backdrop for this film’s narrative.
Upcoming Events

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

January 13 • 2 p.m.
“Neihardt and Hopkins: The Poet as Historian”
Nancy Gillis, director, Neihardt site

Sunday at the Museum Series
John G. Neihardt State Historic Site
306 W. Elm Street, Bancroft
neihardt@gpcom.net 888-777-4667

January 17 • 12 noon
“The Nebraska Beef Project”
John Carter, senior research folklorist, NSHS

Brown Bag Lecture Series
Museum of Nebraska History
15th & P streets, Lincoln 402-471-4754

January 20 • 1:30 p.m.
“Heartland”
The NSHS Film Series
Museum of Nebraska History

January 27 • 1:30 p.m.
“How Green Was My Valley”
The NSHS Film Series
Museum of Nebraska History

February 3 • 1:30 p.m.
“I Remember Mama”
The NSHS Film Series
Museum of Nebraska History

February 10 • 1:30 p.m.
“A Tree Grows in Brooklyn”
The NSHS Film Series
Museum of Nebraska History

February 17 • 1:30 p.m.
“Songcatcher”
The NSHS Film Series
Museum of Nebraska History

February 21 • 12 noon
“A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Oregon,” Stories From Oregon Trail Diaries
Loren Pospisil, Chimney Rock National Historic Site

Brown Bag Lecture Series
Museum of Nebraska History

February 24 • 1:30 p.m.
“A Midwife’s Tale”
The NSHS Film Series
Museum of Nebraska History

March 2 • 1:30 p.m.
“How to Make an American Quilt”
The NSHS Film Series
Museum of Nebraska History

March 16 • 2 p.m.
Reading
Desmond Egan, poet
Sunday at the Museum Series
John G. Neihardt State Historic Site

March 20 • 12 noon
“Deployment and Activities in Afghanistan”
Col. Thomas Schuurmans, Nebraska National Guard

Brown Bag Lecture Series
Museum of Nebraska History
Widowed and pregnant with her twelfth child, Mary Norris took over the family's Ohio farm in 1864. She saw that her children all received an education, and when her son, future U.S. Senator George Norris, established a law practice in Nebraska, Mary deeded him eighty acres of land near Tecumseh. George's oldest daughter, Hazel, received this quilt from her grandmother, who had not only overcome personal loss and hardship, but also found time to create beauty. Recently it was on loan to the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., where it was among fifty quilts in an exhibition titled Going West! Quilts and Community.