A Powerful Partnership

Ken Burns, documentary film-maker and longtime friend of the Nebraska State Historical Society, shared excerpts from his forthcoming film, The National Parks: America’s Best Idea, with some 500 history buffs on October 16 at the Rococo Theater in Lincoln.

Slated for broadcast in fall 2009, the new Burns epic relates the saga of the National Park system in nine episodes. One will feature the photographs and words of Nebraskans Edward and Margaret Gehrke, who began in the 19-teens to “collect” National Parks. Ed’s compelling photographs and Maggie’s lyrical journals convey the awe, excitement and challenge of discovering the treasures preserved in our national parks.

Burns told the audience his film company has used more material from the NSHS than any other institution in the United States. He lauded the partnership that has helped him tell a richer version of America’s great stories.

Underwriting from the Dillon Foundation and other generous supporters of the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation helped raise thousands of dollars to support NSHS image and manuscript collections.

The evening began with jazz performed...
Lincoln, October 2008

On August 27, 1858, a place and a political debate combined to make national history. Freeport, Illinois, where I was born and raised, is the place. The famed debate: Abraham Lincoln vs. Stephen A. Douglas. My wife and I were there for the celebration of its 150th anniversary. Four days of activities marked that confluence of national, state, and local history.

The Nebraska-Kansas Act of 1854 heightened tensions between the free North and the slaveholding South and brought into question the future of the Union. Fear of civil war was in the air. The 1858 Illinois U.S. Senate campaign featured seven debates between Douglas, national leader of the Democratic Party and U.S. Senator, and Lincoln, a leading member of the Illinois Republican Party on the critical topic of slavery and whether its spread should or could be controlled. Douglas’s position split the national Democratic Party and put Lincoln in the White House in 1861.

Skilled actors carried the audience back in time. The “candidates” used careful quotations from the debate and the era’s humor. They took questions from today’s reporters. In 2008 we gained insights into the concerns of 1858 and the real danger to the American polity from enslaving African peoples. Whites and Blacks, old and young, knowledgeable and neophytes, all gained from reenactments, a parade, the drama Mrs. Lincoln, exhibits, and a two-year community beautification effort.

The Nebraska-Kansas Act led to Freeport, then to the 1860 election and the Civil War. State and community history always matters. Freeport shows how to keep history’s lessons alive in our minds and hearts. Energized by my experience, I encourage Nebraskans to use similar celebrations to share our important stories.

Michael J. Smith
Director/CEO

“Douglas’s position split the national Democratic Party and put Lincoln in the White House in 1861.”

Michael Smith, NSHS Director/Ceo, and Ken Burns.

by Swing Ambience. Violinist David Fowler of Lincoln performed on the instrument commissioned from Nebraska-born David Wiebe by the NSHS and funded by the Lux Endowment of the NSHS Foundation. After introductory remarks by NSHS Director/CEO Michael Smith, friends of Nebraska history enjoyed a rare opportunity to hear firsthand from America’s master storyteller, and become better acquainted with their own history in the process.

For a glimpse of photographs and words from the Gehrke collection, visit www.nebraskahistory.org/sites/mnh/gehrke.htm.
When This You See, Remember Me

To remember and to be remembered are nearly universal human desires. But the ways people use to document their pasts and send messages to the future vary widely. From tribal stories depicted on buffalo hide to Facebook pages flashed on computer screens, Nebraskans have created many memorable mementos. Saving Memories: Scrapbooks, Photo Albums, Home Movies, and Ledger Drawings offers a glimpse at Nebraskans’ commemorative efforts.

The exhibit at the Museum of Nebraska History features a hide painting and Native American ledger book drawings, autograph and photo albums, diaries, quilts, home movies, and scrapbooks, all created by Nebraskans to document their lives and times.

J. Sterling Morton’s 1874 diary makes note of the first official “Arbor Day, an invention of mine, now become a public holiday, destined to become a blessing to posterity as well as to ourselves.” Willa Cather’s childhood scrapbook, “made by little Willie/ When he was rather young & silly (sic)” bears a strong resemblance to the compilation she would later describe in her novel My Antonia. And the scrapbook by Nan Aspinwall, exotic dancer, sharpshooter, and vaudeville performer who once rode on horseback from San Francisco to New York and back to win a bet from Buffalo Bill, extends to six volumes. Signature and friendship quilts, photograph albums and home movies and more commemorate milestones in the lives of more average Nebraskans.

Saving Memories will be on exhibit through September of 2009. A presentation, “Memories in Cloth” by UNL doctoral student Jonathan Gregory, is scheduled for 12 noon on Thursday, November 20. Special family workshops will be offered beginning November 23 and continuing bi-monthly through summer 2009. For more information visit www.nebraskahistory.org or call 402-471-4754.

NSHS Awards Scholarship, Service, Historic Preservation

The NSHS annually recognizes individuals or organizations for contributions to the preservation and interpretation of Nebraska history. The 2007 awards were presented October 10, 2008, in conjunction with the NSHS annual meeting in Lincoln.

The Robert W. Furnas Award for significant contributions to the NSHS went to Cynthia E. Monroe, Lincoln, for decades of service. She served on the Board of Trustees, is an active volunteer, and stimulated efforts which evolved into Nebraska cemetery registry legislation. The registry is a valuable tool to those researching family history.

The James L. Sellers Memorial Award goes to the author of the best article in the previous year of Nebraska History. Patricia C. Gaster, Lincoln, received the award for “Bad Grammar and Sensation Style: The Daily Bumble Bee and the Fight for Prohibition in 1890,” printed in the Spring/Summer 2007 issue. The article focused on whether Nebraska would permit or limit manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcohol.

Doane College History department faculty selected the work by Gaster, who is assistant editor for the NSHS Research and Publications division and compiles the weekly Nebraska Timeline newspaper column.

The Nebraska Preservation Award for outstanding accomplishments in the field of historic preservation went to Grace Carmody of Trenton, a supporter of Nebraska history for more than seventy years.
years. A passionate advocate for the preservation of the Stolley House in Grand Island, Carmody has ensured its preservation and restoration. Built in 1858-59 by her grandfather, William Stolley, an early settler of Grand Island, the house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The award was accepted by Mrs. Carmody’s daughter and granddaughter.

The Addison E. Sheldon Memorial Award for significant contributions to the preservation of Nebraska history went to Frank and Betty Pothoff of Palisade and Bonnie Luckey of David City. The Potthoffs cared for William L. Bostock’s glass plate negatives for more than thirty years before donating them to the NSHS. The images enhance the historical record of southwestern Nebraska from 1900–1930. Bonnie Luckey spearheaded the digitization of the Boston Studio Project. The Butler County photograph collection spans years 1893–1979 and includes 100,000 negatives; 68,000 have been scanned.

The James C. Olson Memorial Award goes to a Nebraska teacher for engaging, inspiring, and guiding students in discovering the important histories we share. Jim Barstow of Lincoln teaches at Lincoln’s Science Focus Program at the Zoo and was formerly Social Studies chair at Lincoln High School. An educator for more than 30 years, he has guided students to many successful National History Day competitions, especially in the area of documentaries.

Museum Store Discount Day

Just in time for the holidays, a chance to see great exhibits and save! Plan a visit to the NSHS’s museum stores on Thursday, December 4, 2008 and receive a 25 percent holiday discount. A wide selection of Nebraska-related books and unique merchandise are offered at the NSHS museum stores, so don’t miss this December discount day.

Holiday Greetings and Saving Memories exhibits at the NSHS’s Museum of Nebraska History in Lincoln, are complemented by a full-scale museum store. The Fort Robinson Museum near Crawford, and Chimney Rock National Historic Site near Bayard also offer entertaining exhibits and related items at their stores. Smaller selections are available at Neligh Mill State Historic Site in Neligh and the Senator George W. Norris State Historic Site in McCook.

If you can’t visit us in person, please visit www.nebraskahistory.org and click on the museum store button, or give us a call at 1-800-833-6747 or 402-471-3447 to place your order or to ask for store hours. All purchases must be made on December 4 to receive your discount. Your store purchases help the Nebraska State Historical Society in its efforts to collect, preserve, and share the history of this rich state.
Library/Archives Reference Room Closing—Please Plan Ahead

Beginning January 2009, the NSHS headquarters at 1500 R Street, Lincoln, will undergo a two-year renovation project to bring life/safety and HVAC conditions up to current standards. Researchers planning to work with collections housed in the facility should note that there will be extended time periods during 2009–2011 that the Reference Room will be closed and research materials will be unavailable.

Please check the NSHS website often for updates on the closure of the Reference Room, or call 402-471-4771 or email lanshs@nebraskahistory.org for information.

Family Workshops Save Memories

The art of saving memories is the focus of several hands-on classes and workshops for all ages at the Museum of Nebraska History this fall and winter.

The first workshop, “iQuilt,” was offered October 29, public school fall break. Taught by Sheila Green, the class demonstrated a European method of preserving memories through pictures. Children learned the basics of quilt design, designed and helped sew their own nine-piece quilt block, and learned the symbolic significance quilts have held in the past.

The class complements the new museum exhibit Saving Memories. Additional family workshops are planned to include both parents and children. Adults will experience a 20–30 minute presentation on the workshop subject while their children work on projects related to the theme. Parents will join children after the adult program to help them complete their projects.

The first family workshop, “O the Stories We Tell: Did That Really Happen?” will be offered Sunday, November 23, 2008 at 2 p.m. at the museum. Dr. Bill Kloefkorn, Nebraska State Poet and noted author, will talk to parents about ways storytelling can spark their own memories. Following his presentation, families can work together to make a sack puppet to help tell their family stories anytime from 2:30–4 p.m. The program is supported by the Nebraska Humanities Council’s Speakers Bureau program and is open to the public free of charge.

Other no-cost or low-cost workshops planned for 2009 include: January 17 Scrapbooking and March 1 Memory Quilts. Workshops on autograph albums, photo albums, and memory boxes are planned for spring and summer of 2009.

For more information about the workshops, email jkeetle@nebraskahistory.org or call 402-471-4757.

New Curator Welcomed

Gayla Koerting is the new curator of government records at the NSHS. She is a native Nebraskan who was raised in the Norfolk area. Koerting earned a doctorate in history from Kent State University (1995), with a specialization in nineteenth century U.S. military history, and her MLS from Indiana University-Bloomington (2002) emphasizing archival studies and records management/electronic records preservation. She served as special collections librarian at the University of South Dakota for six years before joining the staff of the NSHS.
UPCOMING EVENTS

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

November 2 • 5 p.m.  
“The Laureate’s Laureate”  
John G. Neihardt Foundation  
dinner & auction fundraiser  
(Registration required)  
Metropolitan Community College  
Fort Omaha Campus  
1-888-777-4667  
Nancy Gillis neihardt@gpcom.net  
Walt Duda Waltmduda@aol.com

November 16 • 2 p.m.  
Vietnam Veteran’s Experience  
Ralph Swain  
Sunday Afternoon at the Museum  
John G. Neihardt State Historic Site

November 20 • 12 noon  
“Memory in Cloth”  
Jonathan Gregory, doctoral student, UN-L  
Brown Bag Lecture Series  
Museum of Nebraska History

November 23 • 2–4 p.m.  
Family Storytelling Workshop  
Bill Kloefkorn, Nebraska State Poet  
For kids and adults (includes puppet-making activity)  
Museum of Nebraska History

November 23 • 2 p.m.  
Interviews with eastern Nebraska veterans of WWII and Korea  
Norma Farrens  
Sunday Afternoon at the Museum  
John G. Neihardt State Historic Site

November 23 • 6:30–9 p.m.  
“Fantasy of Trees”  
Holiday entertainment  
Burt County Museum  
319 N. 13th St., Tekamah  
402-374-1505

November 26, 2008–January 5, 2009  
“Holiday Greetings from the Nebraska State Historical Society Collection”  
Holiday display  
Museum of Nebraska History

December 1–31 • Mon–Fri. by appt.  
“Victorian Holidays Past”  
Thomas P. Kennard House  
Nebraska Statehood Memorial  
1627 H. St., Lincoln  
402-471-4764  
(Admission charged; NSHS members free)

December 4  
Discount Days at NSHS Museum Stores  
Museum of Nebraska History, Chimney Rock, Ft. Robinson, Neligh Mill, Norris Site, and online

December 7 • 1–5 p.m.  
Free Open Houses  
Kennard House  
1627 H. St., Lincoln  
402-471-4764  
Ferguson House  
700 So. 16th St., Lincoln  
402-471-5417

December 14 • 2 p.m.  
A Touch of Brass Holiday Concert  
Sunday Afternoon at the Museum  
John G. Neihardt State Historic Site

December 18 • 12 noon  
“Treasures from the Collections”  
Tom Mooney, NSHS curator of manuscripts  
Brown Bag Lecture Series  
Museum of Nebraska History

Save the Date: April 23–25, 2009  
Seventh Fort Robinson History Conference  
(Registration required)  
Fort Robinson State Park, Crawford  
nshs@nebraskahistory.org  
402-471-3270

November 26, 2008–January 5, 2009  
“Holiday Greetings from the Nebraska State Historical Society Collection”  
Holiday display  
Museum of Nebraska History

Streetscape of Norfolk, published by the Norfolk Post Card Company. Private Collection
An Evening with Lasting Impact

The Foundation is still receiving gifts and processing expenses, but we estimate “An Evening with Ken Burns” raised nearly $25,000 for projects relating to the Nebraska State Historical Society’s image and manuscript collections.

This shining fundraising success was due in large part to Don Dillon and the Dillon Foundation, longtime friends and supporters of the NSHS and the NSHS Foundation. The Dillon Foundation provided a generous gift to sponsor the expenses for Burns’s Lincoln appearance, as it did for his visit in 2004, allowing the income from ticket sales to go directly to support the NSHS collections.

For many years Don Dillon and the Dillon Foundation have helped financially to enhance and expand the NSHS’s ability to fulfill its mission to preserve and share the history of our state. Their contributions have aided various NSHS programs, including the endowment for the Paintings Conservation Laboratory at the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center in Omaha. We are pleased and honored to have had the privilege of working with them.

Thanks, too, go to Marilyn Forke, Joan Gibson and Donald Wurster, Jim Harris, Kissel/E&S, Ann Mactier and J. Michael Moriarty, Diane Oldfather, Allison and Gary Petersen, Ann Rawley, and Union Pacific Railroad. These NSHS Foundation trustees and friends helped create an evening with lasting impact.
From the collection. . .

This modest dwelling in Lincoln was home to Ed and Margaret Gehrke. Ed, known as “The Bungalow Man,” and his wife Margaret were blessed with adventurers’ spirits. They began in the nineteen teens to strike out in their automobile “collecting” national parks. Ed photographed and Margaret kept eloquent diaries of their experiences.

After her death in the late 1970s, the photos and journals came to the Nebraska State Historical Society. Writer Dayton Duncan, a partner of Ken Burns, was captivated by the collection, and it is now the focus of one episode in their forthcoming film on the national parks.

Because the Gehrkes’ work came to the NSHS, where it was preserved and made available to researchers, the Nebraskans who lived in this humble home will become the voice for the American traveler.