

Society archives rekindle history

By John Kalkowski

A copy of a historic document is as valuable as the document itself, according to James Potter, Director of Archives at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

In the archives at the State Historical Society Museum at 15th and R Sts., Potter said there are 17,000 microfilm rolls of documents ranging from governmental and public record to almost all Nebraska weekly newspapers.

The archives at the State Historical Society contain information which relates to all of Nebraska's history, he said.

When the Legislature passed a law in 1905, it made the State Historical Society the official state archivist. Now, Potter said, no public record can be destroyed without the State Historical Society having a chance to file it or microfilm it.

In their manuscript division, the archivists collect personal letters, congressional records, business records and other private items of historical interest to Nebraskans.

The State Historical Society also has been collecting Nebraska newspapers since 1890. The newspapers are donated by private citizens, according to Potter. The society films 232 newspapers.

When his department collects enough copies of a newspaper, they begin microfilming, he said. Potter added that because the newspapers are donated, there are often gaps in the issues which are collected. In some cases, the gaps cannot be filled, he said.

Still, the newspapers keep coming in and the State Historical Society is having a difficult time keeping up with the microfilming of the papers, he said.

The State Historical Society has been doing its own microfilming since 1951, Potter said. It has one microfilm camera which is kept busy filming newspapers eight hours a day, he said.

The filmed documents are easier to preserve, space saving and easier to distribute, he said.

According to Potter, space is a major problem for the archives. In some of the stacks, records and documents are spilling over, he said.

The documents require certain environmental controls to keep them from perishing and are kept under lock and key, he said.

Potter said he hopes the present museum can be used entirely for archives in the future. The State Historical Society may move its museum closer to the state capitol, he said.

Being close to the university is an ideal location for the archives, according to Potter.

The archives, although open to the general public, are generally used for scholarly research. He added that they receive many requests from the public for such things as aiding in establishing the genealogy of a family.



The Kennard House, 1627 H St., home of Nebraska's first secretary of state, is operated by the State Historical Society

... Historical Society

Continued from p. 9

But the museums are not the Society's only contact with Nebraska's people, or even persons outside of Nebraska, according to Kivett.

Letters received

As he thumbed through his mail, Kivett displayed letters from all over the country requesting aid from the Society. Letters came from a high school in New York and individuals in Illinois, California and Michigan.

A letter from a university professor in Germany asked for information about Rose and Winetoon, Neb., two Indian villages.

Another letter asked for information on building sod houses. That letter came from a Peace Corps volunteer in Yemen. He was looking for an economical means of providing housing there.

A major concern of the Society is offering educational experiences to Nebraska's youth, Frantz said. But, he added, they are trying to reach even those who cannot come to the museum.

As one of its projects, the Society constructs portable displays of historic interest which can be loaned to the schools. They also have a program called Young Historians to increase interest in history among Nebraska youth.

UP collection

The State Historical Society almost never buys any of its historical items, Kivett said. It relies on donations from the general public.

Recently, the Union Pacific Railroad donated its entire archives to the Society. Kivett said the railroad's archives are an important addition to Nebraska history.

Much of written Nebraska history is available through Society publications. The State Historical Society publishes *Nebraska History*, a quarterly magazine, a newsletter, and various books dealing with Nebraska history. Being reprinted are copies of *Andreas' History of the State of Nebraska*, originally published in 1883.

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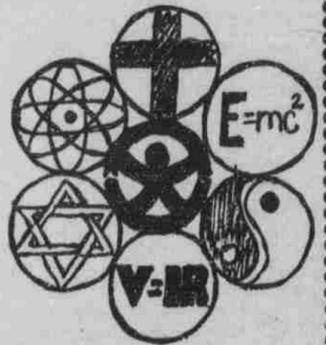
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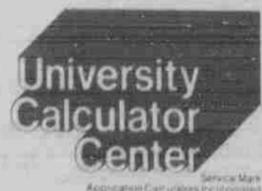
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