

The Question of Secession

Annexation pleas rise once again

By Melinda Norris

When voices from the Panhandle, chanting secession to Wyoming, were heard in Lincoln last week, Sen. William Nichol of Scottsbluff didn't think the Nebraskans were serious. But when he returned to his district for the Presidents' Day weekend, Nichol said he had a "big surprise."

"Most people seem to be serious," he said.

Nichol said he didn't think much of the talk at first because the issue has cropped up twice before.

About 1962 the idea of secession was suggested by Scottsbluff disc jockey Gary Lopez, and was "batted around in jest", Nichol said.

In 1973, Western Nebraskans were screaming secession in anger about the Nebraska Legislature's refusal to accept the bankrupt Hiram Scott College near Scottsbluff as a Panhandle campus of the University of Nebraska. Built in 1967, the college cost \$8 million and the Legislature "wouldn't even accept it as a gift," Nichol said. Eventually, the state took the campus under its belt, establishing the University of Nebraska Panhandle Station.

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Citizens serious about sucession

By Mary Louise Knapp

The transformation of Western Nebraska Cornhuskers into eastern Wyoming Cowboys could become a reality if residents of the Nebraska Panhandle have their way.

Panhandle residents have discussed the possibility of seceding from Nebraska for about 20 years. The matter has usually been treated as a joke, but this time it's serious, according to some Western Nebraskans.

Sentiments in the Scottsbluff and Kimball areas of the Panhandle are favorable to secession, according to a poll taken by the *Scottsbluff Star-Herald* last week.

Of the 2,000 people polled, 85 percent said they wanted the Panhandle to become part of Wyoming.

John Jirton, owner of a feed corporation in the area, said secession would be beneficial to both the Panhandle and Wyoming.

"The general economy here is more compatible with Wyoming's," Jirton said.

Crops grown in Western Nebraska and the elevation and type of soil are more like that found in Wyoming than in the rest of Nebraska, Jirton said.

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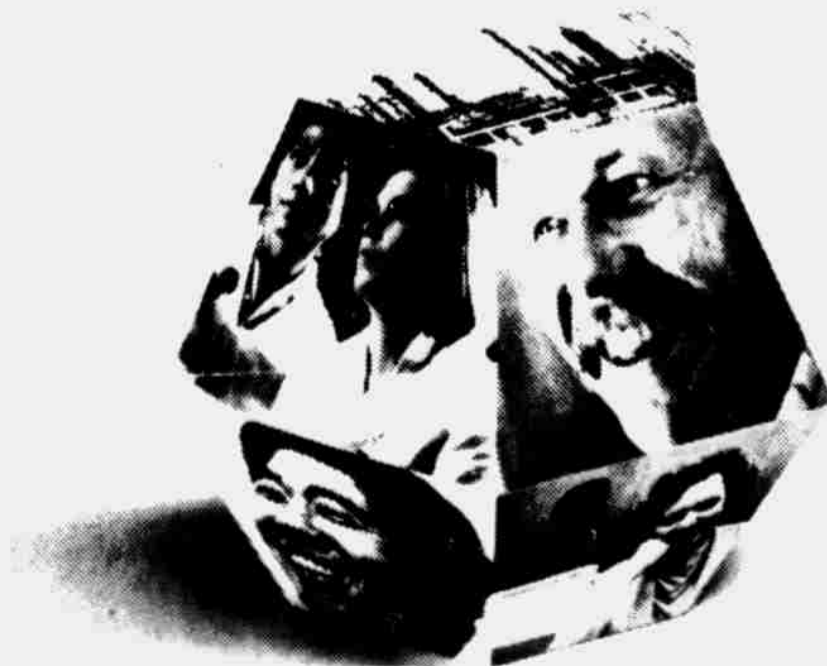
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