

History made Local

Photographer,
writer tells
Lincoln's story

BY JOSH KRAUTER
Staff writer

James McKee realized he wanted to be a historian when he was 10 years old.

He's one of the few who made his childhood dream a reality. McKee has published six books of Nebraska history and photography, written a column for the Lincoln Journal Star and taught history at Southeast Community College. And he owes it all to the Cub Scouts.

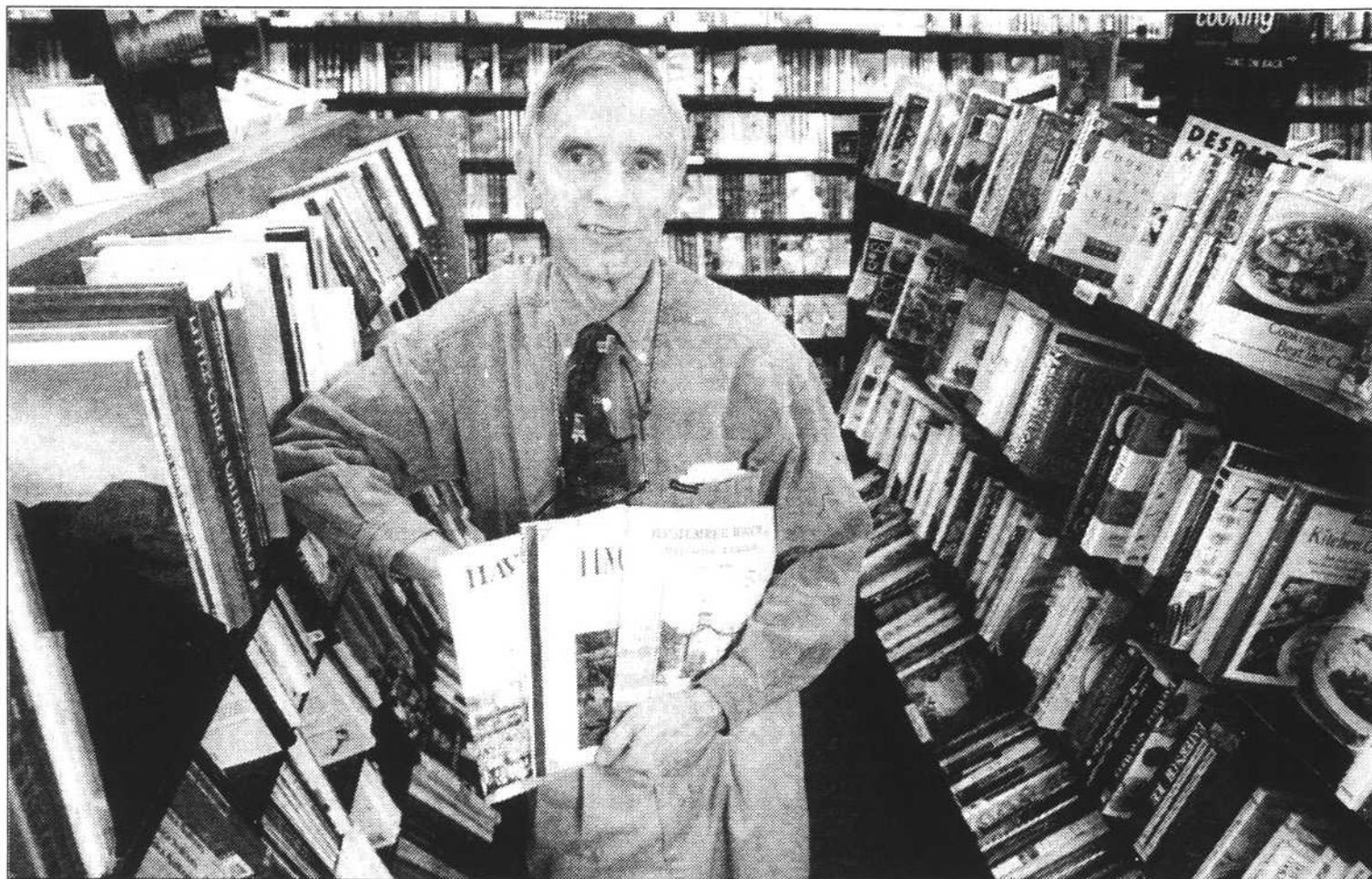
As a Scout in 1950, the young McKee had to trace his family's genealogy. He delved into his grandparents' and great-grandparents' pasts and has since been obsessed with the history of Nebraska, particularly Lancaster County, since then.

His interest must run in the family. McKee's ancestors founded the Havelock neighborhood, which McKee has documented in one of his earliest books, "Havelock: A Photo History and Walking Tour."

"My parents were born in a foreign country: Havelock," he jokes.

McKee says his combination of writing and photography is what makes history survive.

"I very, very much believe photography makes history more interesting and accessible."



LINCOLN NATIVE James McKee has written several historical books documenting Lincoln communities and the state of Nebraska. McKee, a UNL alumnus, said he became interested in history as a boy after he discovered his great-grandfather was the first settler in what is now the Havelock neighborhood.

SANDY SUMMERS/DN

Since the early 1960s, McKee has been documenting the history of the region, but he's hard-pressed to pick out what he likes best.

"Literally everything in Lincoln interests me: the people, the heirs who are still here, the buildings."

People and buildings are what McKee says usually initiate his projects, and he proceeds from there. However, as the population of Lincoln continues to grow, he says, old buildings and friendly people may soon become history.

"Lincoln is very good at tearing down old buildings and making parking lots out of them," he says.

As a historian and resident, McKee laments Lincoln's growth and sees a loss of the city's small-town feeling.

"It's a sad commentary, and it distresses me," he says. "It changes the sociological makeup of the city. It's no longer a little town where everybody knows everybody."

This small-town, nostalgic attitude is prevalent even in how McKee writes.

"I write with a fountain pen. I'm just beginning to learn how to use a computer."



Ironically, what McKee loves about Lincoln is also what may be causing it to grow: the educational system.

He says UNL, Nebraska Wesleyan University and Southeast Community College, where he has taught for 25 years, have contributed much to a city he says is educated and well-read. He also says the educational opportunities and lack of an industrial complex here have kept the city better than it would have been with the same growth.

Despite his concerns, he still is active in the community. He still teaches and writes a column for the Lincoln Journal Star. Column subjects alternate between Nebraska and other states, and a collection of 107 of his columns, "Remember When,"

was published last year.

McKee's next project is one of his most expansive. He is writing and photographing a history of the county seats of Nebraska, and he plans to visit every single one. Already well over half done, he says the project can be a chore at times.

"Some of the (counties) are pretty boring," he says. "The old counties are interesting, but with some of the newer counties, there's little you can take hold of and make stories about."

McKee has no immediate plans to document regions other than Nebraska, but he says he would someday like to study neighboring states that share Nebraska's Midwestern heritage.

"Kansas is tied to our rich history, and Colorado is a fun place to go on vacation," he says.

For now, McKee will continue to focus on the state he loves best, the one he was born and raised in and the one he has seen dramatically change.

"I was born in a house at 216 S. Old Corner," he says. "We were right in the middle of the country. It's phenomenal how it's changed. Cornfields have turned into hospitals and malls."

And children have turned into historians, dedicated to the memory of the places that shaped them.

The Roots deliver hip-hop classic

BY PATRICK MINER
Staff writer

Over the past two decades, artists including the Sugar Hill Gang, Run-DMC, KRS-One and A Tribe Called Quest created a wide fan base for hip-hop.

Unfortunately, none of these acts received the artistic credit they deserved, especially around Grammy time.

When Lauryn Hill won this year's Grammy award for best album, she received the credit hip-hop has warranted for 20 years.

"I think rap elevating to that level is a good thing," Rahzel, a member of The Roots, said in a phone interview. "There is a possibility that hip-hop can be one of the strongest musical forces we know of. I commend Lauryn, and that inspires me."

Now that hip-hop can be viewed as a creative and legitimate genre, The Roots, a Philadelphia-based rap group, have taken the opportunity to show what hip-hop can do.

Two weeks ago, The Roots released one of the most creative hip-hop records in the last five years with its fourth album, "Things Fall Apart." The Roots recorded an astonishing 145 tracks for the record, with the 18 greatest hits making the final cut, including a poem by



IN THE WAKE OF their recent success with the acclaimed album "Things Fall Apart," The Roots discussed their album with the Daily Nebraskan.

COURTESY PHOTO

Poet Goldbarth uses disparate themes in work

BY BRET SCHULTE
Senior editor

I'm the triangle - that's right I'm the triangle.

Poet Albert Goldbarth is also the author of nine collections of poetry, winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award and a recipient of the elite Guggenheim Fellowship.

He is also the guest speaker today at the Georgian Room of the Nebraska Union.

"He is one of the most original voices in modern poetry," said Grace Bauer, assistant professor of English. "He doesn't sound like anyone else; it's because of his wild style."

She is referring to Goldbarth's frequent allusions to science fiction, human discomfort, natural settings and romantic foibles.

His latest collection, "Troubled Lovers in History" (available at bookstores around Lincoln), plods through these topics with a deliberate levity

Please see GOLDBARTH on 13

Please see ROOTS on 13