

# Historical Connections

NEWS FROM THE NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY FOUNDATION

## My goodness, what a year!

by Leslie Fattig, Executive Director

Although we tried to schedule an annual meeting – twice, and an event at Chimney Rock to commemorate the opening of the newly renovated Visitors Center, our event preparations were halted by the pandemic.

Facebook and other social media outlets work well to keep some of you informed, however, there are many who do not follow social platforms and so, to keep you involved and updated, we are sending you this packet of information. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me, either by cell phone 402-209-9140 or by email [lfattig@nshsf.org](mailto:lfattig@nshsf.org)

Since the beginning of March, my husband, a healthcare professional, has charted the pandemic on a daily basis. He never thought he would still be tracking the virus after all this time.

Numbers continue to increase, especially in our small town of Auburn. We can only hope and pray a vaccine is discovered soon.

This is our history.

And just like fresh donuts, history is made every day.

I hope all of you are doing well and I wish you all good health and happiness as we anticipate the arrival of fall and the

Pete Peters, Trustee Marvin Stumpf, Leslie Fattig, Trustee Jim Marsh, and Jordan Maassen at the top of O'Fallons Bluff, Sutherland, Nebraska. (A metal buffalo stands behind overlooking I-80)

Foundation's 78th anniversary on September 25.

### Board of Directors

It has been an honor and privilege for us to have James Hewitt Chair the Board of Directors for the last 18 months. His wisdom, guidance and limitless institutional knowledge have supported us during many challenges. We are eternally grateful for his service.



James Hewitt

Many of you know that Jim was a NSHS Foundation Board member and served as President in the 1990s, he also was a Trustee for the Nebraska State Historical Society for many years. We are thankful that he chose to "do something serious" as his wife Marjorie suggested.

### OUR 2020 – 2021 DIRECTORS ARE:

Rod Basler	Martin Massengale
Sue Clement	Gail DeBuse Potter
Nancy Davis	Trixie Schmidt
Allen Dayton	Robert Shively
Kirk Jamison	L. Joe Stehlik

We welcome two new Directors; they are Trustees John Strobe and Andrew Loudon.

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## My goodness, what a year! *(continued)*

### JOHN STROPE

If you have attended any of the meet and greets throughout the years, you probably have met John Strobe, for John knows no strangers. John and Gloria have organized mailing parties, handed out name badges, and taken photos at events. For the last four years, John volunteered his time to manage the Brown Bag presentations at the Nebraska History Museum.

John and Gloria have been married since August 13, 1967. They have two children, John and Laura, and six grandchildren. They have lived and worked in Omaha and Lincoln for twelve years before spending 25 years “in exile” living and working in Mobile, AL and Louisville, KY (1979-2004).

Early retirement in July 2004 brought Gloria (a Falls City girl) and John (a Lincoln boy) home to Nebraska giving them time to put their interests and talents to work for their family and for others. They wanted to enjoy Nebraska and travel. John and Gloria particularly have enjoyed the Happy Jack Chalk Mine, Cowboy Poetry in Valentine, and the Oregon Trail Pageant at Ash Hollow State Park.

John graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1979 receiving his Ph.D. and his J.D. in the same year.

John was elected to serve as president of the Board on September 1, 2020.

### ANDREW LOUDON

Andrew M. Loudon is a partner with the law firm of Ball, Loudon, Ebert & Brostrom, LLC in Lincoln. Andrew has practiced law since graduating from the Nebraska College of Law in 1998, and he specializes in wills, trusts and estates. Andrew has been married for 24 years to his wife Anne, and they have two

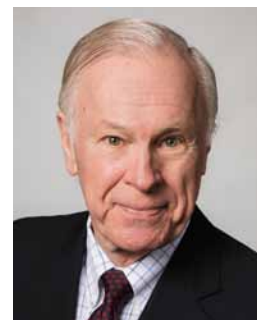
children, Kristen (age 21) and John (age 19), both of whom are current UNL undergraduate students. Andrew has a love for history and is looking forward to serving on the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation’s Board of Directors.

### RETIRING DIRECTORS

In 2020, Lizabeth Bavitz, Michael “O. J.” Nelson, Sue Tricker and Carol Zink retired from the Board of Directors. They will continue to serve on the Board of Trustees. We are grateful for their service, their dedication and their guidance.



Lizabeth Bavitz



Michael Nelson



Sue Tricker



Carol Zink

The Board of Trustees recognizes the following retiring trustees. We thank them for their service.

Robert and Helen Bartee  
Virginia Coulter  
David Levy  
Mary Ann May-Pumphrey

Timothy Otto  
Pam Snow

John  
and  
Gloria  
Strobe

Andrew Loudon  
and family

## Alkali Station

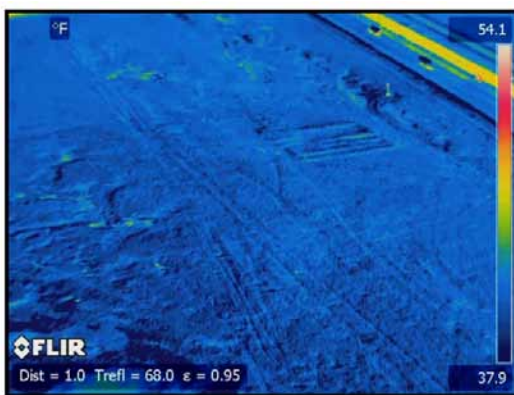
In the summer of 2019, we were notified that an important piece of Nebraska history was coming up for sale. A 215-acre parcel of land south of I-80 has been purchased by the Foundation from private owners for \$250,000. The Foundation will derive income from pasture grazing and a cell tower lease.

Our plan was to launch a fundraising campaign in the spring, however, we decided to wait until now to share the news with our trustees. We hope you will support our preservation of this important stop on the Overland Trail.

This parcel is located entirely south of the Interstate and contains the majority of the significant archeological features that remain as well as clear swales and ruts left by the wagon traffic of the 1800s. There are in the vicinity of Alkali Station, several sites said to be trading posts and road ranches dating to the active period of the Trails.

As described in the nomination of Alkali Station to the National Register of Historic Places (on which it has been listed), "Alkali Station is an archeological site located approximately 3 miles southeast of Roscoe, Keith County, Nebraska. The site consists of open, unplowed prairie that preserves the site of Alkali Station, a stop along the historic Oregon Trail and the Pony Overland Express. To the south of the station is an

open field that served as a cannon range for the military units stationed here during the Indian conflicts of the 1860s. To the east and northeast, historic trail ruts lead to the station, indicating its importance along the trail.



Alkali Station first enters the historical record via John J. Thomas, an employee of the Overland Mail company who helped to construct log cabins at Akali station in 1859. The Military Post outline and the trail ruts are visible in these photographs.

Interstate 80 bisects the site from east to west, but manages to avoid the station site and most of the archeological features. As the site has not been excavated or placed into cultivated agricultural use, it retains a high degree of integrity."

The nomination goes on to note that Alkali Station was of historical importance between its construction in 1859 and its abandonment in 1867 with the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, the route of which lay across the Platte River to the north. Alkali Station has two

primary function for its time. First it was a road ranche, a private enterprise offering specific services to those traveling the west/east trail at this point. Those services mirrored the modern motel, restaurant and gas station with horses rather than motor vehicles. In the mid-1860's, the United States Army moved combat units to the site charged with protecting the traffic on the trail as the Plains Tribes launched raids after the Colorado militia massacred occupants of a peaceful Southern Cheyenne band at the place known

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## Alkalki Station (continued)

as Sand Creek in modern Southeast Colorado  
in 1864.

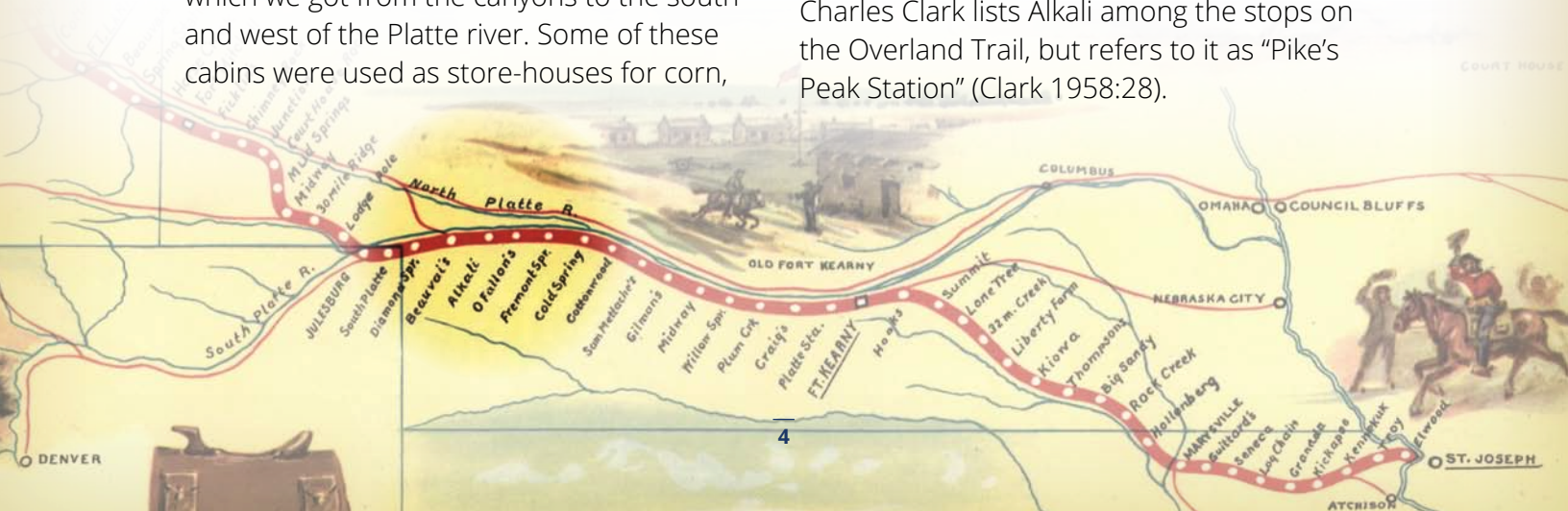
Buildings at the site, both civilian and military, were of the common sod structure pattern found on the Plains, and the same material was used for corrals and other animal shelters. Today, with the channels of the river shielded by trees and other trees surrounding modern farmsteads, it is important to note that historically, little timber was found in the area, the result of the recurring prairie fires. This is an archeological site with foundations, trenches, wagon ruts, mounds that indicate the remains of fortification berms, walls, and other original features being the only on-the-ground visible features. A privately-owned collection of artifacts of the civilian and military uses of the site has been assembled and it includes shrapnel from the cannon balls fired in training by the troops.

The earliest mention of the Alkali Station was set down by John J. Thomas who worked for the Overland Mail Company. In addition to ox driving, he built stage relay stations in the present-day states of Colorado and Nebraska in 1859. He set his recollections down many years later and remembered only a few details of the stations he helped build. His brief account does show, however, that Alkali was a named and known locale by 1859:

"The houses or cabins were of cedar logs which we got from the canyons to the south and west of the Platte river. Some of these cabins were used as store-houses for corn,

some for horse-shelters, and others for living and sleeping quarters. We built fifteen cabins in all, including Plum Creek and Midway Stations down the river from Box Elder, and Lillian Springs and Alkali Stations up the river" (Thomas 1910:5).

Two travelers specifically mentioned their visits to Alkali in 1860. One of these visitors was Sir Richard Burton, a famous British traveler who crossed through the area on his way to Salt Lake City (Burton 1963). Sir Richard noted that at 5 P.M. on August 11, 1860, “we arrived at Alkali Lake Station and discovered some ‘exiles from Erin,’ [Irish] who supplied us with antelope meat and the unusual luxury of ice taken from the Platte” (Burton 1963:67). The individuals described by Burton were probably a certain Mr. Felton, his wife, Mary, and their two-year-old daughter. According to John Clopper and the 1860 census of the Platte River settlement, Mr. Felton was the keeper of the station in late August of that year, and he and his family provided board for one stage driver (Clopper 1860). Burton’s account also exposes some complexities in the treatment of the Station’s name. A salty pond seems to have been at least periodically present near the Station. For that reason, some travelers referred to the facility as “Alkali Lake Station.” The other visitor of 1860 only added to the terminological complexity. Without any description, a Dr. Charles Clark lists Alkali among the stops on the Overland Trail, but refers to it as “Pike’s Peak Station” (Clark 1958:28).



## Cut in Stone, Cast in Bronze: Nebraska's Historical Markers and Monuments

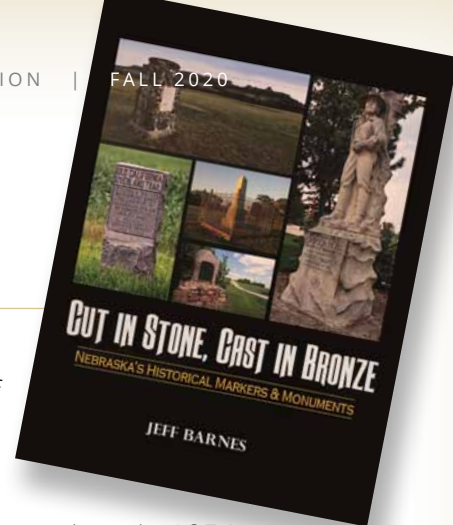
The Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation is working with Nebraska Book Award-winning author Jeff Barnes to produce *Cut in Stone, Cast in Bronze: Nebraska's Historical Markers and Monuments*, the first book to feature these touchstones from the past. Besides the history of each monument and how they came to be, the location and GPS coordinates of each are included to allow the reader site visits of their own.

We need your help to publish this addition to the state's written heritage. The Foundation raises money in support of the cause of Nebraska history from individuals and organizations across the state and beyond, who value Nebraska's unique heritage and wish to play a personal role in assuring that heritage is accessible to future generations.

This new book will capture an aspect of that history never before recorded!

From establishing the territory in 1854 to celebrating our state's centennial in 1967, Nebraskans united to mark their history. Scattered across our state are more than 250 monuments, markers, statues, and plaques to the exploration, the cultures and their conflicts, the settlement, and the organization of Nebraska. They are found in our cities and along our highways and country roads, but also in our forests, our fields, and our hills. They mark history where it happened.

If you would like to own a copy of this great book, you will find a flyer in this packet to order your copy today.



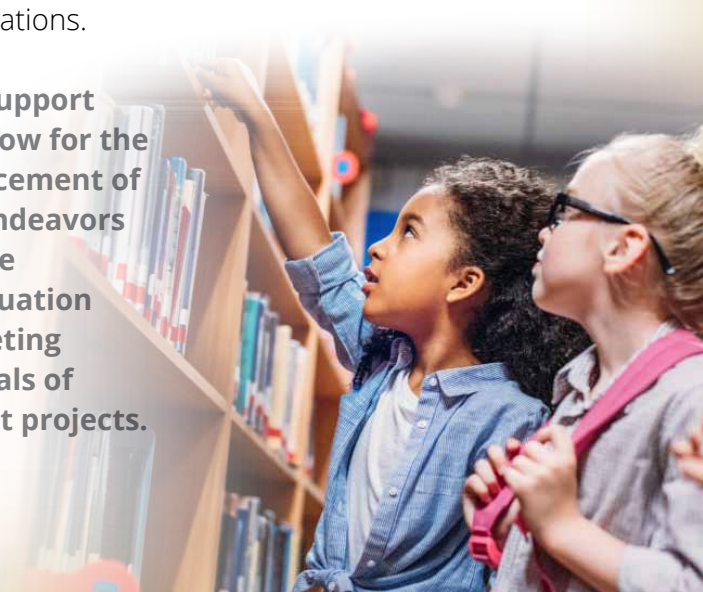
## Statewide Grants Program

The Foundation is excited to announce the launch of the Foundation's Statewide Grants Program. Donations to the Statewide Grants Program will help NSHSF provide grants that would benefit local historical and educational organizations providing programming and learning opportunities in community history. Examples of applying organizations include museums, historical societies, and libraries that use core educational, preservation and interpretive programs. Grants up to \$5,000 will be available.

For a limited number of organizations that do receive some government support from counties or municipalities, funds are universally applied to operating expenses such as a salary for a director, utilities, insurance, or maintenance. This focused

allocation leaves the organizations searching locally for funds to serve school classes, prepare exhibits, process and preserve artifacts, and undertake activities such as lectures and museum festivals. There is a tremendous statewide need for education, outreach and interpretive funding in these organizations.

**Your support will allow for the advancement of new endeavors and the continuation of meeting the goals of current projects.**



## Sculpture Dedication Planned for 2021

Rhonda Seacrest, a generous statewide philanthropist and long-time supporter of the foundation, recently commissioned a beautiful bronze sculpture by Trustee Dr. David Biehl to be placed on the grounds of the Ethel S. and Christopher J. Abbott Visitors Center at Chimney Rock. The sculpture will be entitled "We Stayed" in honor of those first non-native Nebraskans who had the courage and resilience to start a life in the state.

*"Few residents of the Cornhusker State possess her generosity, her vision, and her awareness of*

*the courage and tenacity our early residents showed in creating a new state on the windswept prairie. She is an inspiration to us all. We are very grateful."*

Jim Hewitt, President,  
Nebraska State Historical  
Society Foundation

Joseph, a member of the pioneer family in the art installation "We Stayed," will be depicted sowing seeds behind his father's plow.



## The Nebraska Marker Project

In 2016, the Foundation started the Nebraska Marker Project to repair and replace some of the 500 historical markers spread out across the state, worn down by weather or damaged by vehicles and vandals. So far, the generosity of citizens of Nebraska and beyond have raised over \$110,000 to fund the repair or replacement of more than 40 Nebraska markers. Your contribution preserves these stories from the past and will share Nebraska's story with future generations.

Our sincere thanks to all the donors who have already helped us to repair and replace damaged historical markers in Nebraska. A complete list of donors and more information can be found on our website under the Nebraska Marker Project.

In 2016, the Foundation held a Nebraska Marker photo contest to promote the Nebraska Marker Project.

Although Mr. Franklin did not finish in the top 15

we thought we would share his lovely, heartfelt story.

"I would like to enter your historical marker photo contest. The story on the marker is self explanatory. However a point of interest is the fact Dr. Frank Brewster's grandson, Robert "Bob" Brewster. Bob and I were classmates from kindergarten through our senior year at Holdrege High School in 1955. Bob asked me to take the picture and enter the contest. The Dr. Brewster story is quite fascinating in the fact he was the world's first flying surgeon and first to own a car in the area where he practiced medicine. When I arrived at the site (about two miles east of Beaver

City) I discovered weeds had grown up in front of the monument. The only thing I had in the trunk of my car was my golf clubs. Using the sand wedge as a sickle I cut down the weeds before shooting the picture.

Thanks,  
Franklin "Dee" Swanson





## Nebraska's Post Office Murals by L. Robert Puschendorf

Earlier this year, all annual appeal donors giving \$100+ received a commemorative tile with an image taken from the book, *Nebraska's Post Office Murals* by L. Robert Puschendorf.

To thank our trustees for your on-going support we have chosen to reproduce the twelve images from the book as bookmarks. The images celebrate something of Nebraska's rich culture and history and represent examples of some of Nebraska's finest works of public art.

The New Deal offered hope in a time of despair. Among its most enduring visual legacies was government patronage of the arts. In one such program, the U.S. Treasury Department commissioned talented artists to paint murals for post offices across the nation, bringing art directly to the people. The Treasury's program favored regional topics familiar to local patrons, such as agriculture, small-town life, and local history. Nebraska is home to twelve post offices with murals,

completed between 1938 and 1942. They display the artistic legacy and the spirit of the times from which the murals emerged.

An illustrated book, *Nebraska's Post Office Murals: Born of the Depression, Fostered by the New Deal*, by L. Robert Puschendorf, now retired from the Nebraska State Historical Society, tells the story behind these murals. The book was published in 2012, with funding from James C. and Rhonda Seacrest.

We hope you enjoy and treasure this heart-felt token of our appreciation for your loyal annual support of the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation. Nebraskans recognize the importance of our shared history and we hope you will continue to support our mission. Through your efforts we will continue to build a stronger Foundation, ready to take on the challenges and embrace opportunities that will unfold as we celebrate its 78th year.



## Our continuing support of History Nebraska

### Chimney Rock

With your support, the Foundation raised \$1.8 million dollars for the renovation of and the addition to the Ethel and Christopher J. Abbott Visitors Center at the National Historic Site Chimney Rock. A special open house event is tentatively planned for the spring of 2021.



Visitors to the Ethel S. and Christopher J. Abbott Visitors Center will see many new amenities and features, including new exhibits, a newly expanded education room for school programs, new theater space, and the addition of new space to act as a storm shelter. An open house event is tentatively scheduled for spring, 2021.

### Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center

Art and artifacts have woven the tale of human history for thousands of years. Preserving art is one of the best steps we can take in ensuring Nebraska's history and heritage. The Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center is a regional art conservation facility, part of History Nebraska, (formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society) committed to the preservation of art and artifacts. Services of the Ford Conservation center are offered to private individuals,

museums and libraries, corporations, and state and federal agencies. Objects, paintings and paper works can be examined and treated. Conservation assessments are available for collections as well as studies on the treatment needs of individual items. The team members of the Ford Conservation Center have years of specialized study, ongoing professional training and great experience in conservation.

### Your Support Helps

Partial support of the Ford Conservation Center comes from gifts and bequests from Omaha businessman James M. Paxson to the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation. Your donation to the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center supports the preservation of treasured Nebraska art and artifacts for generations to come.



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The Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation raises money in support of the cause of history, including the support of the Nebraska State Historical Society. The Foundation solicits funds and support from individuals and organizations, across the state and beyond, who value Nebraska's unique heritage and wish to play a personal role in assuring that Nebraska's history will be accessible to future generations. The Foundation is a 501(C3) not-for-profit corporation.