

# A PLACE IN HISTORY: *Researching Your Nebraska Property*



W. + wife	Amanda J. Bundeau	Feb.	17	1910	1 30	Jan
nie + husb.	Chas. A. Gerlach	"	18	"	9 40	Mar
etal	William F. Gerlach	"	"	"	9 40	Dec
H.	Addison S. Tibbats	"	"	"	4 10	Jan



wife	Marietta Vanderlip	"	21	"	9 30	"	21
+ wife	Geo. L. Long	"	23	"	9 30	"	18
M. + wife	August Anderson	"	"	"	12 24	Sept	1 15
R.	William H. Boney etal	"	25	"	11 20	Feb.	25 19

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# **A PLACE IN HISTORY:**

## ***Researching Your Nebraska Property***

Reference Information Guide No. 12

January 2010

Nebraska State Historical Society

Lincoln, NE

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## **WHERE to START**

### **Who built it? Who has lived or worked here? When was it built?**

These questions arise whenever researching a house, place of business, or other property. Histories, government records, maps and pictorial sources are some of the tools used in researching Nebraska properties. Local sources and those of the Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS) can offer many resources to researchers who want to find out more.

Researching a building is often a “two steps forward, one step back” process that leads to more avenues of inquiry with every gain of information. Researchers should start first with the most available research materials, which are often found from local sources. Many sources of information are available to assist in learning about your historic place, and many of these can be found at a local repository, whether that be the county courthouse, the town library, or a local historical society. Many resources are also available from the Nebraska State Historical Society, and many finding aids are available on its website.

### **Internet**

The Internet has become a popular source for beginning research. There is a large amount of genealogical and historical data freely available there. However, a researcher is seldom going to find a fully-researched property by searching any one source. Remember that what is found there is only what someone has digitally entered or scanned. Many times Internet sources are not accurate. The “web” should complement, rather than replace, research in libraries, historical societies, and courthouses.

### **Local Historical Societies**

One of the best sources in a search is a local or county historical society or museum. Since these organizations collect material related to a locale, they have a host of research materials. Just as helpful are the people. Historical society employees and volunteers are most knowledgeable about the history of the area and can point researchers in the right direction. To view a list of local historical societies in Nebraska with current contact information, visit this link at the NSHS website:

[http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/services/refrence/la\\_pubs/historg8.htm](http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/services/refrence/la_pubs/historg8.htm)

### **Local Libraries**

Local libraries will hold material that can be helpful to the researcher. These may include local histories, newspapers, city directories, subject files, photographs, and indexes. Some libraries have entire rooms or sections on regional or local history. When sources are not available locally, some libraries may have online catalogs available to search for resources held in other research centers. Several colleges and universities permit local residents who are not students to access library collections services. Check with nearby college and university libraries for their rules pertaining to public access for research.

Some books can be shipped to a researcher's library through interlibrary loan, but some original primary sources are often too fragile or rare and cannot leave their repositories. In some cases libraries may have major online subscription databases available at no charge to the public (such as Ancestry.com and Heritage Quest Online). The Nebraska Library Commission has some subscription databases that are available to all residents and libraries in the state via Nebraska Access.

<http://nebraskaccess.ne.gov/>

### **Genealogical Societies**

There are a number of local and regional genealogical organizations in Nebraska. They assist in locating or compiling source information useful in researching family histories. These may include immigration records, biographies, directories, and cemetery records. Another resource worth



investigating is the Nebraska GenWeb Project, whose volunteers have set up websites for most counties in Nebraska with information related to local research. These may include links to newspaper indexes, city directories, cemetery records, local histories, and many other historical records.

<http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ne/state/>

For a link to Nebraska genealogical societies go to:

[http://nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/services/refrence/la\\_pubs/geneal5.htm](http://nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/services/refrence/la_pubs/geneal5.htm)

### **Local Preservation Organizations**

Some local governments have enacted a local historic preservation program, which is staffed and overseen by a preservation commission. The commission is comprised of local citizens knowledgeable about historic preservation. These local programs conduct surveys of historic places, research buildings in the community, and designate properties for local landmark status. Here a researcher may find walking tour booklets, research, and survey information on buildings that may already have been collected. Several of the local government programs provide information and contacts online:

Omaha: <http://www.ci.omaha.ne.us/landmarks/default.htm>

Lincoln: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/plan/hist/index.htm>

Plattsmouth: [http://www.plattsmouth.org/historic\\_preservation.asp](http://www.plattsmouth.org/historic_preservation.asp)

Red Cloud: <http://www.redcloudnebraska.com/Historic%20Preservation%20lr.htm>

North Platte: <http://www.ci.north-platte.ne.us>

Sidney: [http://www.cityofsidney.org/index\\_files/Page583.html](http://www.cityofsidney.org/index_files/Page583.html)

The cities of Omaha, Lincoln, and Plattsmouth also have nonprofit preservation organizations. In some cases, these organizations can guide the researcher to sources of further information or local people knowledgeable about community history.

Lincoln:

Preservation Association of Lincoln

The Rogers House

2145 B Street

Lincoln, Nebraska 68502

<http://www.preservelincoln.org/>

Omaha:

Landmarks, Inc.

3902 Davenport St

Omaha, NE 68131-2316

<http://www.omahalandmarks.org/>

Omaha's Landmarks, Inc., has produced a research guide and list of sources in Omaha:

[http://www.omahalandmarks.org/assets/files/kimballprize/Honebrink\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.omahalandmarks.org/assets/files/kimballprize/Honebrink_Guide.pdf)

2020 Omaha

106 S. 89<sup>th</sup> Street

Omaha, NE 68114

<http://2020omaha.net/>

Plattsmouth:

Plattsmouth Conservancy

437 Main St

Plattsmouth, NE 68048-1961

<http://www.plattsmouthconservancy.org/>

### **Heritage Nebraska and Nebraska Main Street**

Heritage Nebraska is a statewide non-profit preservation organization dedicated to historic preservation. Heritage Nebraska can put you in touch with resource material, preservationists and other preservation organizations. Affiliated with Heritage Nebraska is the Nebraska Main Street program, which works with local communities to revitalize their downtown business districts through historic preservation. Nebraska Main Street can also put you in touch with local preservation advocates who may know about the community's history and buildings in its downtown. Go to:

Heritage Nebraska

<http://www.preservationnation.org/contacts/statewide-local-partners/heritage-nebraska.html>

Nebraska Main Street

<http://www.nebraskamainstreet.org/>

### **National Park Service**

The National Park Service was established to administer historic preservation programs authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and maintains the National Register of Historic Places. At the statewide level it works with State Historic Preservation Offices in programs to survey historic places and conduct other preservation programs. A guide to researching historic places published by the National Park Service can be found at:

[www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb39/nrb39.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb39/nrb39.pdf)

### **Nebraska State Historical Society**

After you have checked local sources, contact the Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS) or plan a visit. The NSHS collects materials specific to Nebraska history and the Great Plains, including library material, public records, manuscripts, photographs and a historic buildings survey. The NSHS staff will assist in all of your research efforts.

The NSHS Library/Archives is the source for research into documents, histories, photographs, and many of the items the researcher may not be able to find locally. The Library/Archives has a large local history collection including published and unpublished material:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/index.htm>

There are numerous in-house and online finding aids that have been developed to assist the researcher. Some finding aids are available by going to following website:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/databases/index.html>.

Microfilm of Nebraska newspapers and other source material may be available through interlibrary loan. However, the large collection of books and manuscripts are not available on interlibrary loan and are accessible only for use onsite.

The NSHS State Historic Preservation Office conducts historic buildings surveys, which now include every county of the state. Over 72,000 properties (as of 2009) have been recorded in the Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey, which is an ongoing effort. While not every property has been researched, at a minimum a contemporary photograph of most properties included in the survey will be available. With the help of the office, a photograph may help to place a general construction date, an architectural style, and building materials, which can indicate a general timeframe for a property. For most counties, written reports have been published and are available on the website.

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/histpres/reports/index.htm>

The office also coordinates the nomination of properties to the National Register of Historic Places. Buildings, sites, structures, and objects can be nominated to the National Register. A property must have historical or cultural significance, such as an association with an historical event or prominent person, or have architectural or engineering importance. An eligible property must also retain enough historical integrity so that it appears much as it did during its period of significance. Archeological properties may also be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Contact the NSHS Archeology Division for more information regarding archeological resources and their nomination to the National Register at 402-471-4760. Information on the National Register program and the criteria for listing a property is found at:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/histpres/nrhp/>

Short histories of all individual properties and districts listed in the National Register are located on the NSHS website. This listing is sorted by county.

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/histpres/nebraska/index.htm>

If a property owner is interested in having a property or historic district listed in the National Register, a detailed nomination must be prepared, taking into account the ability of the property to portray its time and place. Detailed research will be necessary to determine if a property is a good candidate for listing in the National Register. Submittal of the “Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey Form” begins the process of evaluating a property for potential listing, so it needs to be accurate and informative. The form may be found at:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/histpres/nehbs.htm>

Before coming to Lincoln to do research, it’s a good idea to check the availability of NSHS resources online or to call the Library/Archives Reference Room (402-471-4751) or State Historic Preservation Office (402-471-4787) for the hours of operation and availability of these materials. Some of the research material may not be onsite and require a special request to view it. It is best to make an appointment so staff members can be available in guiding research efforts and materials can be pulled for the researcher’s use.

## **WHERE to SEARCH**

Again, researchers should start with the most available research materials, which are often found in local sources. When researching, always keep track of where the information was found and the name of the publication, collection, and repository. Without careful notes, it will be difficult to look up the source later or verify the accuracy of the material.

## **BOOKS and DIRECTORIES**

### **Local Histories**

Histories of communities are often available for researchers. They will contain early photographs and histories of the local government, schools, businesses, and churches. These were often produced to celebrate a centennial or other special event. Biographical sketches of people were often solicited from family members for inclusion in local histories. These may not always be complete, since many families may not have contributed their own histories. However, they offer great insight into local history, and often include a wealth of historical photographs. Some companies also produced histories of their businesses.

### **Biographical Books**

In the late 1800s and early 1900s various publishing companies sold illustrated books of the biographies of prominent residents. The books were financed through subscriptions sold to patrons living in the area. Canvassers traveled the rural neighborhoods to collect subscriptions, collect information from subscribers, and later sell their work. These books may also have included pictures

*The “Elmwood Dairy Farm, Residence of Frank Birch,” located in Pierce County. This biographical book provides not only a sketch of Mr. Birch’s farmstead, but also an accompanying narrative detailing his war record, education, previous employment, and a description of livestock.*



Reprinted from *Compendium of History, Reminiscence, and Biography of Nebraska* (Chicago, 1912), facing p. 154. (Both images)

*The “Home of J.L. Buffington,” located in Antelope County. Besides a photograph of the farmhouse, a short family history is provided in this biographical book.*



of people and their farms or homes. Even if a sketch or photograph of an individual's property is not included, a description of the person's business ventures will be described. The book may not always be complete, since many could not afford to be included. Libraries, historical organizations and genealogical societies frequently hold these materials. To search for biographical histories available at NSHS, visit this link to our online catalogue. Include the city or county when your property is located as a search term.

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/databases/librarycatalog.htm>

For Lincoln and Omaha, "Who's Who" books of prominent residents were published. These include biographical sketches, business affiliations, hobbies, and may also include photographs. *Nebraskans: 1854-1904*, published by the *Omaha Bee* newspaper in 1904, provides over 1,200 portraits of Nebraskans and is available on-line at several locations:

<http://www.archive.org/details/nebraskans18541900omah>

<http://www.memoriallibrary.com/NE/History/1904/>

A 1940 *Who's Who in Nebraska* includes prominent citizens from every county of the state and can be found on the Nebraska GenWeb site:

<http://www.usgenet.org/usa/ne/topic/resources/OLLibrary/who1940/whowho40.html>

### **City Directories**

City directories are one of the first sources to examine when researching a residence or building in larger cities. City directories were and still are published yearly or every two years and serve a number of purposes, chiefly to find any given person, spouse, business, occupation, and address in a given city. After 1900, most city directories also featured a "reverse" directory in which the address can be looked up by street address along with the occupant's name.

When using city directories the researcher should note that an explanation of any symbols in an entry is usually provided in a "key" at the front of the directory. There are usually various codes and



symbols that should be looked for, such as if the person owned the building or rented. Occupants are not always owners, so the researcher is advised to note this distinction, as it may make a difference in conducting further research.

In using city directories, a researcher can leapfrog backward or forward, at first checking every five years or so, and recording the city directory information about a property. Thus one can compile a pool of occupants/owners at any address, be it a business or residence. City directories included businesses and show when they existed: one year a business will appear and eventually it does not.

Again, take the time to look at the front and back of the directory. In some years the city directory might even have a list of new buildings completed that year, another time-saver for the researcher. Some properties are easily researched, but researchers should be prepared for surprises. The names of streets were sometimes changed, especially if the area was annexed by a larger city. House numbers might be changed as additional houses were built on a block, or in the case of corner houses, the street address would change if the “front” door switched to another side. The city directory will also serve as a key to looking in tax records and censuses, which will be described below. To view a list of Nebraska city/county directories available at NSHS, visit this link at our website:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/databases/city.shtml>

### **Telephone Books**

While not as helpful as city directories, telephone books will give the name of the person and address and will fill in the gaps for when city directories are not available. By searching telephone books, the researcher can find the name(s) and date(s) of people that occupied a house. For business buildings, they will list the name of the business for the year the telephone book was published. Advertisements found in telephone books may also reveal information on businesses. To view a list of Nebraska telephone books available at the Nebraska State Historical Society go to:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/databases/phone.shtml>

### Gazetteers and Business Directories

Gazetteers and business directories for Nebraska were published irregularly between 1879 and 1917. Compiled to provide an authoritative list of businesses and their location in the state, these are useful to historic building researchers by providing corroboration of businesses, though not specific addresses. These sources will provide the researcher with information when city directories are not available, particularly for small towns.

The 1879 gazetteer is arranged alphabetically by county and then by town within the county; all of the others are arranged alphabetically by town. Each entry provides a descriptive sketch of the town and an overview of the town's resources, including important commercial enterprises. An alphabetical listing of all of the business owners and the types of businesses will follow. An additional business

Reprinted from *Wolfe's Nebraska Gazetteer and Business Directory* (Omaha, 1879), p. 172.

Dooley T. E., propr Dooley House	Turner & Kennedy, dry goods, groceries, etc
Eldridge E. E., hardware, stoves, etc	Wallace J. H. & Co., dry goods, groceries, etc
Fairbury Gazette, Cross & Stevens, publishers	Watson W. W., real estate agt
Freeman W. P., attorney at law	Weeks M. H., lumber
Gould W. A., ag implements	Wert E. & Co., furniture, and undertaker
Gourley Bros., carriage painters	Western House. W. T. Davis, propr
Graves Horace, dry goods and groceries	Wilcox & Butler, physicians
Gregg H. & Bro., elevator and grain	<b>Wurtenberger Gottfried</b> , propr
Harbine Thomas, banker	Farmers' House, and saloon
Henry Isaac, blacksmith	

*The above excerpt demonstrates a variety of people and business that were operating in the town of Fairbury in Jefferson County. The information from a directory, combined with a map, can be a vital tool for identifying the context in which a historic property was constructed or occupied.*

directory at the back of each volume is arranged first by business type and then alphabetically by post office. The 1886 and 1890 volumes contain an alphabetical list of farmers by county, a real help for rural properties. The gazetteers and business directories are available on microfilm at NSHS, or microfilm can be accessed by interlibrary loan. A place/name index for the 1890 and 1911 gazetteers is available on the NSHS website:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/databases/gazetteer.shtml>

## MAPS

While rural residences and buildings are not documented in city directories, there are specific publications that can be useful for researching them. One of the foremost is county plat books and atlases, which began publication around 1870. You must have the legal description of the property to begin.

### **Plat books**

These are maps of townships that show land ownership and locations of farm buildings, railroad lines, bridges, roads, schools, cemeteries, churches and other natural features. They are invaluable for researching rural properties. Usually plat maps were produced by the county surveyor and kept with county records. The researcher should realize that these books were not published every year. For interim years there are other resources to search such as deeds and tax lists, which will be discussed later.

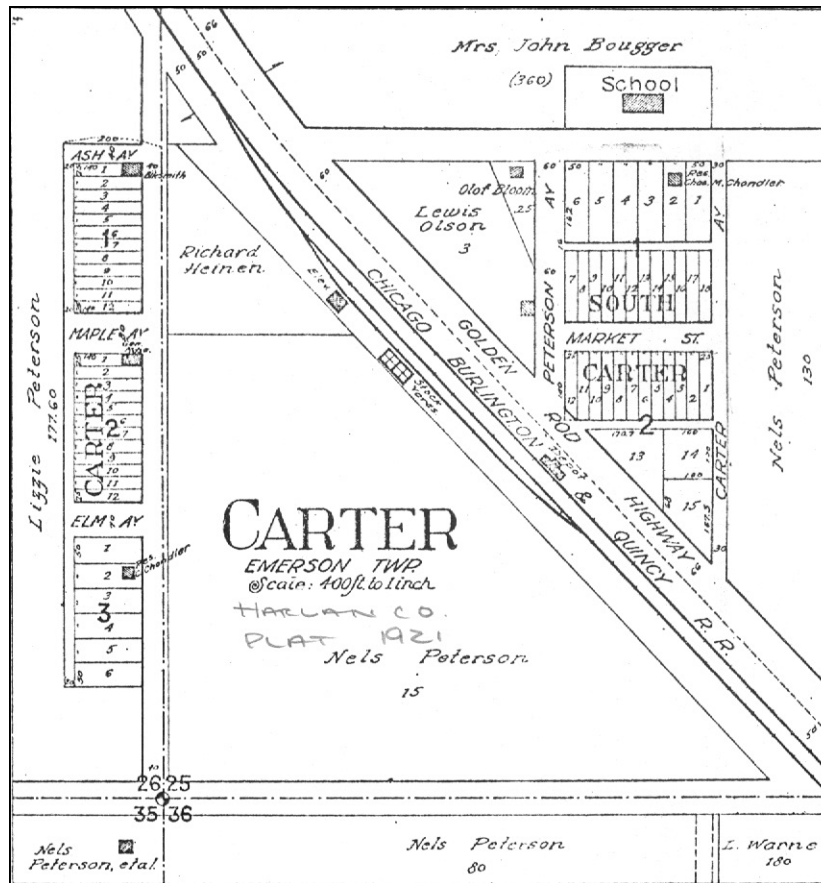
Note that most of the maps will designate dwellings with specific symbols, verifying that as of that printing a residence was there. On the sides of the map the range, township and section are shown, which will help pinpoint the property by legal description.

### **County Atlases**

County atlases with ownership directories will be available for most counties, dating from the 1890s to the present. Two of the early distributors of these in Nebraska were Everts & Kirk Company and George Ogle.

Like plat books, a county atlas will show land ownership and locations of farm buildings, railroad lines, bridges, roads, schools, cemeteries, churches and other natural features. These will be important for the researcher of a rural property.

For cities, a county atlas will include a plat showing the layout of streets and lots upon which upon which houses, business buildings, and public buildings were built. Other features include parks, the county courthouse, schools, and other major public buildings. Streets and public rights of way,

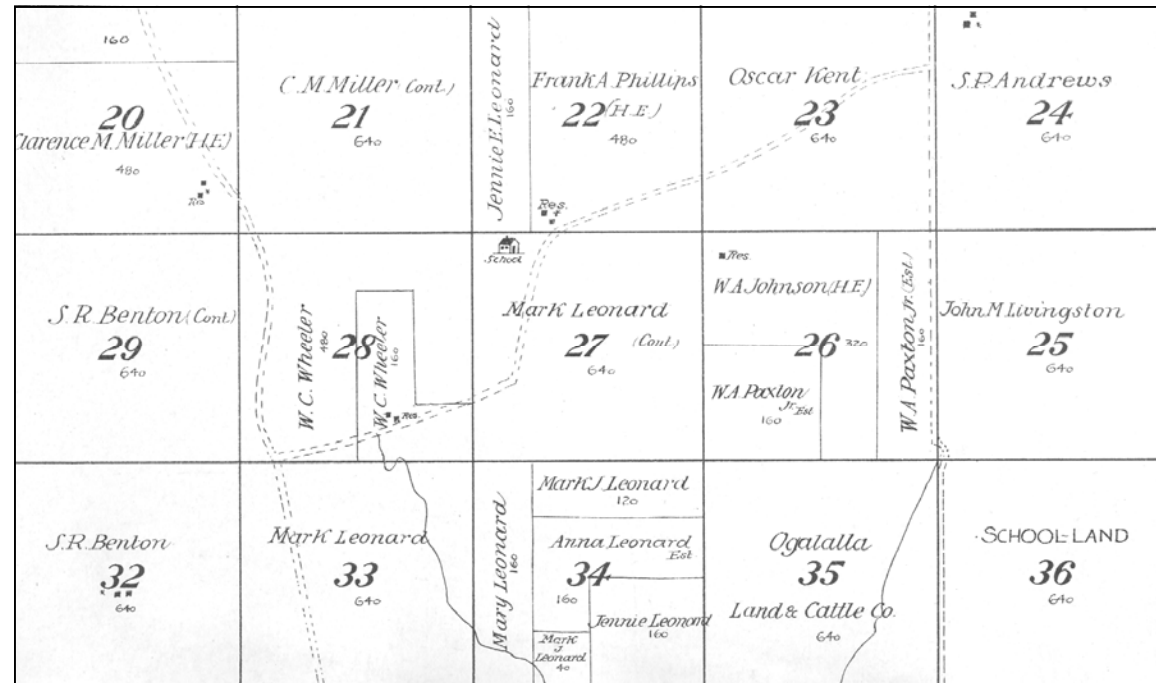


1921 plat map of Carter, Harlan County, Nebraska , Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office Map Collection.

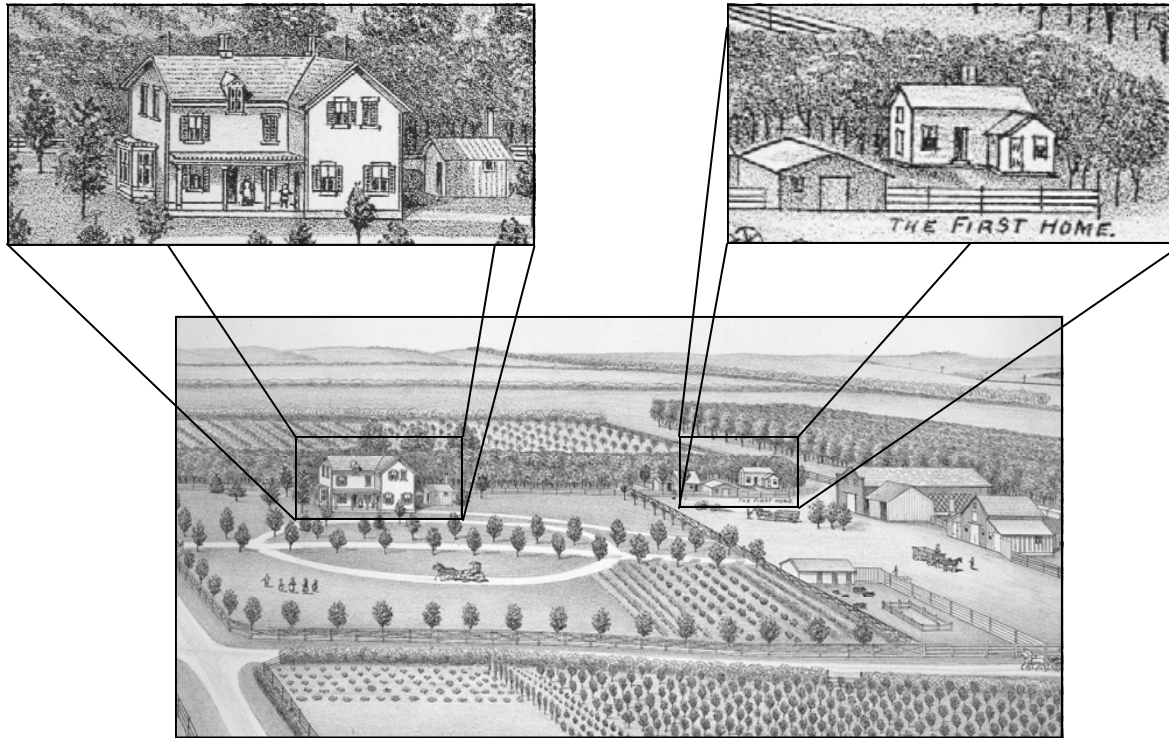
1921 City Plat Map of Carter, Harlan County

*In this plat map of Carter, several residences are identified as well a grain elevator and depot located along the railroad, and a blacksmith shop on the corner of Ash Avenue.*

Reprinted from *Standard Atlas of Keith County, Nebraska* (Chicago, 1913), p. 47.



*In the above example from Keith County, residences and associated farm buildings are identified as black rectangles, and the road system is demarcated by the parallel dotted lines. The map also features the acreage of each parcel and the name of the owner. A rural school can be seen located on the northwest corner of Section 27.*



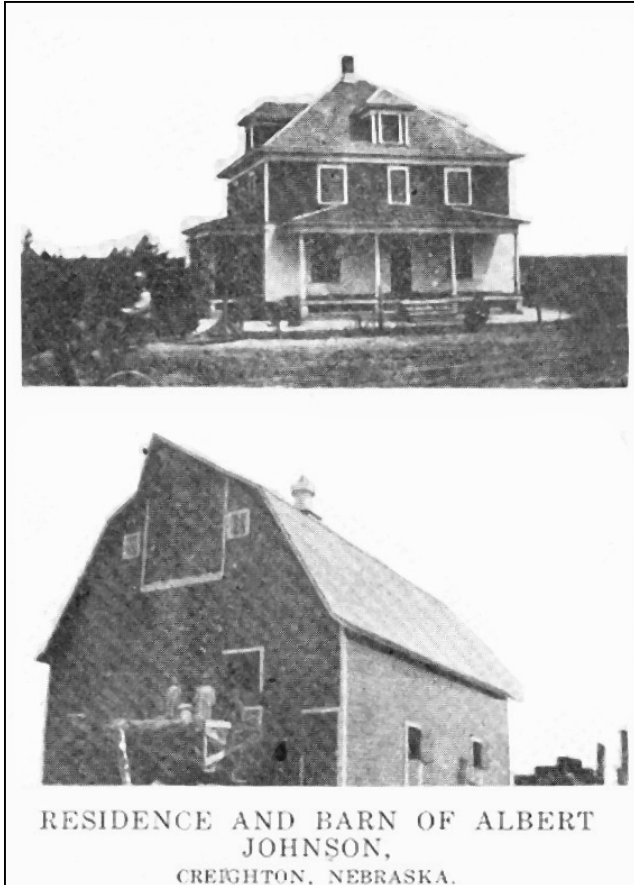
Reprinted from *The Official State Atlas of Nebraska* (Philadelphia, 1885), p. 92.

*Many atlases provided sketches of homes and farmsteads. In the above example, the Silver Creek Stock Farm in Saunders County, the detailed arrangement of the farmstead can be seen. Numerous barns, windbreaks, fences, and crops are depicted around the two residences. The first house on this farmstead is identified to the right and was probably constructed shortly after the property was acquired. As their family expanded and the farm became more prosperous, a larger home was often built, such as the one on the left. The prosperity of the owner can be seen in the newer home with its shutters, decorative woodwork on the front porch, and bay window on the side. The first home, by comparison, is smaller and more austere. Illustrations such as this can be an important source for understanding the story of a historic property.*

Reprinted from *Standard Atlas of Antelope County, Nebraska* (Chicago, 1922), p. 51.

Jensen, Levi H., Farmer, Stockraiser and Breeder of Duroc Jersey Hogs and Buff Orpington Chickens, S. 9, T. Royal, P. O. Royal. 1896.  
Johnson, Albert, Farmer, Stockraiser and Feeder, S. 21, T. Bazile, P. O. Creighton. 1910.  
Johnson, Guy, Assistant Cashier, Farmers and Merchants Bank, and Clerk of Logan Township, Elgin. 1896.

Reprinted from *Standard Atlas of Antelope County, Nebraska* (Chicago, 1922), p. 59.



*Atlases often will provide a list of prominent residents, listing their occupation and address. In this example, Albert Johnson, whose farmstead is shown below, is listed as a farmer, stockraiser and feeder. At the end of the individual's entry is the year when they settled in Antelope County.*

*Many atlases will have photographs of buildings owned by prominent residents. In the photographs to the left, the residence and barn of Albert Johnson from Creighton, Nebraska, are shown.*



lots, and parcels reserved for public use were mapped. The first plat of a town was usually identified as “original town.” As the town grew, subdivisions or additions were included.

In many cases, the atlases’ publishers employed a photographer, whose subjects included local residents, their homes, farms, or businesses. Advertisements and biographical sketches of prominent citizens may also be included in atlases.

NSHS has a series of plat books, county atlases and maps on microfilm, which can be obtained through interlibrary loan. Most are dated before 1930. Researchers can contact NSHS Library/ Archives reference staff, or check online to see if the available editions of these publications are available.

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/databases/atlas.shtml>

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/databases/atlas.shtml#nameidx>

Many maps are available to the researcher onsite. They can be found in inventories kept by NSHS. The researcher can view a selection at:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/research/public/maps/index.htm>

Plat books, atlases or other maps may also be found in local historical societies, libraries, genealogical societies, or at the Register of Deeds in a particular county. The following list includes a few of the Nebraska county atlases, plat books or maps that are available from various websites. Researchers can search an online list of plat books that are available from other sources by going to these links.

The following site from the Nebraska GenWeb project has various map collections pertaining to Nebraska. Go to:

<http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ne/topic/resources/OLLibrary/maps.html>

Individual plat books, county atlases are found at the following locations:

Boone County, 1920

[http://www.pbase.com/yogib/boone\\_county\\_nebraska\\_plat\\_maps](http://www.pbase.com/yogib/boone_county_nebraska_plat_maps)

Buffalo County, 1919

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nebuffal/atls1919/index.htm>

Cass County, 1866

[http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map\\_010.jpg](http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map_010.jpg)

Cedar County, 1911

[http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map\\_011.jpg](http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map_011.jpg)

Dawson County. 1904

<http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ne/county/dawson1/04platbk/1904plat.html>

Dawson County, 1920

[http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map\\_017.jpg](http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map_017.jpg)

Dixon County, 1919

[http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map\\_021.jpg](http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map_021.jpg)

Douglas and Sarpy Counties, 1889

[http://www.omahalibrary.org/earlynebraska/atlas\\_001.html](http://www.omahalibrary.org/earlynebraska/atlas_001.html)

Douglas County, 1900

[http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map\\_026.jpg](http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map_026.jpg)

Douglas County, 1937

<http://www.memoriallibrary.com/NE/Douglas/1937/toc.htm>

Douglas, Sarpy and Washington Counties, 1913

[http://www.omahalibrary.org/earlynebraska/atlas\\_003.html](http://www.omahalibrary.org/earlynebraska/atlas_003.html)

Franklin County, 1905

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nefrankl/platmap.html>

Furnas and Buffalo Counties, 1916, 1919

<http://www.nebraskagenealogy.com/maps.htm?kearney>

Gage County, 1922

<http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ne/county/gage/1922at/index.htm>

Hall County, Map of Squatters, 1860s, 70s.

<http://www.hallcountyne.gov/content.lasso?page=7429>

Hall County, 1909

[http://www.hallcountyne.gov/links/Deeds/Atlas/Grand\\_Island/Hall\\_County\\_1909\\_1of2.pdf?-](http://www.hallcountyne.gov/links/Deeds/Atlas/Grand_Island/Hall_County_1909_1of2.pdf?-)

Harlan County, plats of all townships

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~neharlan/platmap.html>

Hitchcock County, 1917

[http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map\\_047.jpg](http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map_047.jpg)

Kearney County, 1937

<http://www.usgwarchives.net/ne/kearney/mapimages.htm>

Knox County, 1920

<http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ne/county/knox/1920atlas/index.htm>

Lancaster County, 1908

[http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map\\_058.jpg](http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map_058.jpg)

Phelps County, 1916

[http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map\\_172.jpg](http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map_172.jpg)

Polk County, 1919

[http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map\\_178.jpg](http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/galleries/earlyneb/maps/map_178.jpg)

Red Willow County, 1905

[http://www.nesgs.org/~swngs/red\\_willow/index.htm](http://www.nesgs.org/~swngs/red_willow/index.htm)

Saunders County, 1907

<http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ne/county/saunders/1907plat/1907platcvr.html>

Thayer County, 1900

<http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ne/county/thayer/1900plat.htm>

Washington County, 1908

[http://www.blairhistory.com/projects/plat\\_map/default.asp](http://www.blairhistory.com/projects/plat_map/default.asp)

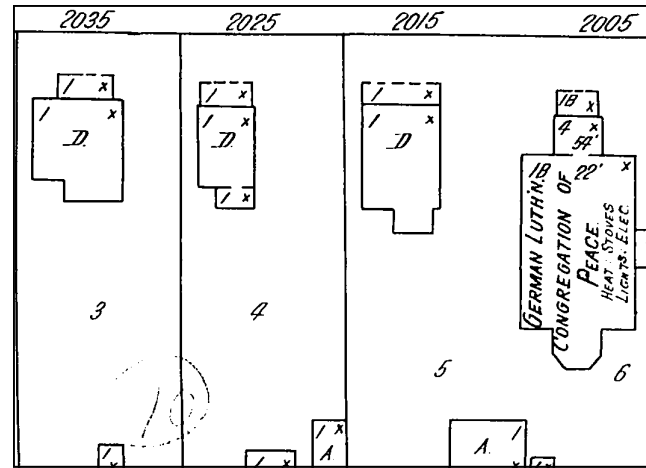
### **Sanborn Maps**

Originally created for assessing fire insurance liability, Sanborn™ maps date from the early 1880s through the present and were compiled for a number of Nebraska cities, towns and villages. The first maps generally showed the business “core” of the community, and later versions were expanded as the town grew. A particular map diagrams each block, the buildings on them, and a “footprint” of each building. Outbuildings, cisterns, underground pipes, coal chutes, carriage houses, garages and other features are shown on the map. Sometimes the type of building is indicated on the map, such as a gas station, blacksmith, livery barn, hardware store, or warehouse. Also printed on the map were notations to indicate brick, frame or other construction types. The originals were color-coded to indicate construction materials, but have been microfilmed and digitized in black-and-white.

The researcher can be sure the building had been established by the year of the particular map’s publication and see at a glance what major renovations the property has undergone by looking at subsequent maps. These may include additions, changes to porches, and other alterations that were

made to the property. Usually the address is printed on a building's diagram. Often through the years street names underwent name changes, especially if located in a suburb annexed by a larger municipality. On occasion the address of a house might change. The researcher will find these were published with great accuracy.

*The Sanborn map segment to the right, from Gering in 1928, displays a great deal of information. The roads and house numbers listed toward the top make finding exact properties easy. The outline of the buildings is provided along with the stories and building use, such as "D" for dwelling. The church to the right identifies stoves for heat and electricity for lighting.*



*Sanborn Map Company. Gering 1928. Nebraska State Historical Society, Digital Map Collection.*

The major finding aid to the series of Sanborn maps is *Fire Insurance Maps in the Library of Commerce: Plans of North American Cities and Towns Produced by the Sanborn Map Company*. This is a list compiled by the Reference and Bibliography Section, Geography and Map Division (Washington: Library of Congress, 1981). However, the entire Sanborn collection of some 660,000 maps is available online via a subscription database titled "Digital Sanborn Maps, 1967-1970" by ProQuest. It is available at the University of Nebraska for faculty and students online, but may be used by the public at any time onsite at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Love Library or Architecture Library. Sanborn maps may also be found at local historical societies and larger libraries. Also see:

<http://sanborn.umi.com/HelpFiles/about.html>

To view NSHS holdings of Sanborn maps, visit the online catalogue at this link. Use 'Sanborn' for your search term. If a map is not listed, verify with the NSHS Library/Archives staff.

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/databases/librarycatalog.htm>

## GOVERNMENT RECORDS

### Abstracts of Title

Sometimes a property owner will have an abstract. For the researcher, this can provide historical and legal detail about property ownership. An abstract of title is a written report, taken from county government records, that provides a history of the transfers of a piece of land, including all claims that could have been made against it. Such claims could include easements on the property, loans against it, deeds of trust, mortgages, liens, judgments and real property taxes. If the researcher does not have an abstract, the information will be gleaned from records at the county courthouse, but this can be time-consuming.

### Deeds

Deeds are invaluable in researching a property. To begin, the researcher should know the legal description of the property. In a city, town or village, a property will have a lot number, block number and plat name. In rural areas, numbered townships consist of 36 sections subdivided by halves and quarters. A description of a farmstead might read “SW ¼, Sec 4, T 8 N-R 9 W,” which means the southwest one-quarter of section 4, township 8 north, range 9 west.

Deeds give the names or corporate businesses that owned the property. They state all legal transfers of the property from grantor (seller) to grantee (buyer). They provide a chain of ownership back to the original homestead or government land acquisition and the original town site company or subdivision. Deeds are found in the Register of Deeds or County Clerk’s office. Inspection of deeds can reveal unexpected details.

Although the owner of a particular parcel of land changes, its legal description does not. And since the deed record shows only the chain of title to the land, it will not necessarily indicate when a building or improvement was built on the site. Entries in the deed may lead to other documents that will be helpful, however, in pinpointing this.

First the researcher will need to view the deed reference in the index of lots and lands. A good starting point in researching a deed and related records is to search the *General Index to Deeds*, which

is indexed by name of individual. If no information can be found in the *General Index to Deeds* or *Grantee/Grantor* index, the researcher must know the legal description of the property.

Often deed books are not indexed by grantor/grantee and it will be necessary to know the legal description of a property to look up the deed references in the *Numerical Index to Lots and Lands*. In a city, town, or village, a property will have a lot number, block number, and plat name. In rural areas, the legal description consists of township, range, section, and parcels such as quarter and half sections.

Careful deed research can provide valuable information, such as the names of successive owners. Changes in value of property (mortgages and/or sale prices) offer clues to dates of major improvements such as building construction. When supplies and materials used in construction of a building were not paid for or were in dispute, a supplier, such as a lumberyard or contractor, may place a lien on the property. This will indicate that a building or improvement was made to a property. A “quit claim deed” will identify persons who have relinquished an interest in the property.

GRANTEES	GRANTORS	DATE OF FILING				DATE OF INSTRUMENT		
		Month	Day	Year	Hour	Month	Day	Year
McKee John W.	James A. Gibson et al	Oct.	16	1877	5PM	Oct.	2	1877
McCannell John L.	Hamilton H. Gray et al	"	18	"	3PM	"	18	"
Marshall W. J.	William Reed et al	"	"	"	5PM	"	18	"

Reprinted from, *Lancaster County, Nebraska, General Index of Deeds, Vol. D.*

*Deeds are a vital source for tracing the ownership of property. In the above excerpt, it is revealed that John McKee purchased property from James Gibson on October 2, 1877. Below is the corresponding page which identifies the exact property by its legal description and acreage.*

CHARACTER OF INSTRUMENT	WHERE RECORDED		DESCRIPTION - PART OF SECTION	Section	Township	Range	Acres	REMARKS
	Book	Page						
Warranty Deed	21	3814	Tract 268 <sup>th</sup>	19	11	8	140.7 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub>	
W. C. W.	21	394	Lots 1 & 2 Blk 97					Revised
W. C. W.	21	395	Lot 11 Blk 111					"

A mortgage is acquired at the date of purchase or when taking out a second loan on a property. An increase in mortgage amounts from one purchaser to another may reflect that a building was built on the property. When a property was subject to a second mortgage, this may indicate additional construction, remodeling, or other improvements were made.

Deeds and mortgages can also yield information on previous landowners, since wills and other legal instruments are sometimes filed with the deeds. Wills will show the transfer of properties to beneficiaries and possibly descriptions of properties.

Early deeds occasionally had brief descriptions of standing buildings. In cities, be sure to find the entry of when the land was subdivided. If a building was built soon after a subdivision was platted, a date may be pinned down.

### **Court Records**

Other governmental records may yield valuable information about the people who once owned a building or those associated with the property, such as family members. District court records may provide information on disputes over a property and civil actions by those who made a claim to the property. When property is disputed in a divorce suit, records documenting that disagreement are also found in district court records. Probate records and land condemnation files can be found in the local county court records. Generally these cases are indexed alphabetically by both plaintiff and defendant.

Some court records are found in the collections of NSHS. For locating court records unavailable at NSHS, this link provides contact information for courts throughout Nebraska:

[http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/services/refrence/la\\_pubs/cthou10.htm](http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/services/refrence/la_pubs/cthou10.htm)

Information about NSHS holdings of county and district court records can be found at:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/research/public/county.htm>



## County Tax Assessments

Assessments are usually divided into “real” and “personal” property. Real estate taxes are compiled by the county assessor to determine the value of property for a given year and are indexed by legal description. They can be a key in determining if an occupant owned or rented the property and will most often include descriptions or sometimes drawings of dwellings and outbuildings. They will indicate any improvements or new construction that took place during the previous year. Generally kept in books divided by precinct, the yearly record from the assessor usually will note the features of the house that added to its value. The yearly property assessment can help researchers determine who resided in buildings during years between censuses. When the assessment on a property jumps up in value, this may mean that a significant improvement was made, such as a house, outbuilding, or a remodeling. A tax assessment may not always indicate when a building or improvement was made, since assessments may have just been reflected in property tax increases.

Personal property assessments often describe such valuables as carriages, horses, business inventories, furniture, automobiles, pianos, and even the family dog. These can help the researcher put the property and residents in historical context.

NSHS holds real estate and tax assessment records for specific counties and municipalities in Nebraska. Before visiting, researchers can determine if the NSHS has the records or whether a visit to a county courthouse is necessary. To view NSHS inventories of assessments online, researchers can visit this link at the NSHS website:

[http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/research/public/county\\_finding\\_aids/index.htm](http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/research/public/county_finding_aids/index.htm)

Some counties will offer recent assessment records online, and, if not, in digitally archived form. Recent assessment records have useful information such as the estimated year of construction, or at least contact information for the officer in charge of the records. However, the year of construction or age of buildings will most often only be estimates.

## **Homestead Records**

Researchers may benefit by investigating homestead records, particularly for properties in rural areas. Most property in Nebraska was at some point claimed under the provisions of federal land grants to railroads, or the federal Homestead, Timber Culture, or Kinkaid acts.

Homesteads are filed in the U.S. General Land Office Tract Books for Nebraska. They are indexed online; by typing in the name, the researcher will find the legal description of the land claimed by the homesteader.

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/databases/tractbooks.shtml>

The index can be reversed so that the legal description is entered and the search result will list the original homesteader. Further information on how homesteads were registered and purchased can be found in NSHS reference guide #7.

[http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/services/refrence/la\\_pubs/landlaw7.htm](http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/services/refrence/la_pubs/landlaw7.htm)

Once the tract books have revealed the legal description, certificate number and claimant/patentee's name, the researcher will need to contact the National Archives for copies from the property's "Land Entry Case File." These contain more significant biographical detail about the homesteader and substantial descriptions of dwellings and outbuildings built on a claim, often including hand-drawn diagrams of these structures.

<http://www.archives.gov/genealogy/land/index.html>

## **Census Records**

Census records may yield valuable data on the occupations of residents, the names of family members and boarders, ethnic backgrounds, place of birth, ages and education levels of residents. Thus censuses are an excellent way to research who was living on the property. Most censuses have been microfilmed or scanned onto CDs and in some cases are transcribed. They are available at the NSHS and often at public libraries or genealogical societies.

Federal censuses are taken in decennial years, though there are a few that were taken through local governments in non-decennial years. NSHS census holdings are shown at:

[http://nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/services/refrence/la\\_pubs/census2.htm](http://nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/services/refrence/la_pubs/census2.htm)

Unfortunately, the 1890 census was destroyed, but Nebraska did have a census for 1885. Researchers should note that due to privacy laws, the enumerations of a given federal population census cannot be released until seventy-two years after the census is recorded. Census data less than seventy-two years is only available to family members upon request to the National Archives.

Page No. 18  
 Supervisor's Dist. No. 1  
 Enumeration Dist. No. 262

Note A.—The Census Year begins June 1, 1870, and ends May 31, 1880.  
 Note B.—All persons will be included in the Enumeration who were living on the 1st day of June, 1880. No others will. Children BORN SINCE June 1, 1880, will be OMITTED. Members of Families who have DIED SINCE June 1, 1880, will be INCLUDED.  
 Note C.—Questions Nos. 13, 14, 22 and 23 are not to be asked in respect to persons under 10 years of age.

SCHEDULE I.—Inhabitants in Plattsmouth Precinct, in the County of Cass, State of Mo  
 enumerated by me on the 28 day of June, 1880.  
*W. S. G. H. S.*  
 Enumerator

1880 U.S. Federal Census of Cass County, Nebraska. National Archives, Microfilm.

In Cities	Name of Street	House Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Health				Education		Nativity						
																	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	
		153 161	Bryan Thomas	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	42	Blind	Deaf and Dumb	Idiotic	Lame	Married, Single, Widowed, or otherwise disabled	Attended school within the Census year	Cannot read	Cannot write	Penn	Pa	Pa	
			Clorsia T	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27									Ind	Ohio	Ohio	
			Sarah C	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6										Mo	Pa	Ind

In this excerpt from the 1880 Federal Census, the Bryan household was the 153rd dwelling in the Plattsmouth Precinct, Cass County, visited by the enumerator. The census provides the names, race, sex, age, occupation, and origins of the individual and of their parents. For example, Thomas Bryan, a farmer, age 42, originally from Pennsylvania, is listed as the head of a household. Clorsia Thomas, Bryan's wife, age 27, originally from Indiana, listed her occupation as "keeping house." Their daughter, Sarah, age 6, was born in Missouri.

The town or rural area enumerated in a census was divided into wards or precincts. The census-taker, or enumerator, would then travel house-to-house and farm-to-farm to record the aforementioned information on the enumeration sheet. Unfortunately, for the purpose of researching a given property, there are few census indexes that are searchable by name or address. If an enumeration sheet does not include the exact address, the address or legal description of a residence can still often be verified through tax records or deeds. Using censuses, tax records, and deeds in tandem can help the researcher “fill in the gaps” and avoid making the mistake of researching the wrong property.

### **Building Permits**

These were often required in larger cities. The dates when building permits were required will vary. A building permit will include clues to when a property was built or when an addition or other building was constructed on the property. It may include the builder or architect and the type and cost of a building proposed for construction. It may also include dimensions of the property and type of construction material. Sometimes a public works department issued building permits.

For Lincoln properties, early building permits can be located at NSHS, under the collection RG 301 (Lincoln, NE, collection), SG7, Building and Safety Division, 1904 – 1970 (on microfilm) and originals through 1980. These records index all construction done on private properties in the city of Lincoln. The index on microfilm lists the properties by street number. Using this index, the researcher can trace the construction of a home to the original builder, contractor, or sometimes architect. This collection also includes some architectural drawings, but only for public and commercial buildings. Researchers can contact NSHS reference staff for information. Building permits for Lincoln, Nebraska, prior to 1904 can be found in RG301, SG1, City Council Proceedings.

Building permits for the City of Omaha are not available, except for a few neighborhoods. A limited number of drawings taken from building permits are available on microfilm from the Omaha City Planning Department. However, another source is available if a researcher can pinpoint when a property was built or when an addition or other building was to be constructed on the property. The *Omaha Daily Record* will list the building permits issued on a given day. Since this information was published daily, research may be lengthy, so the researcher should have a timeframe as to when a building permit was issued.

In some towns, individuals were required to seek permission of the city council to construct buildings within the city limits. Entries often offer details such as dimensions, materials used, and contractor or architect employed. An approximate date of construction expedites the search, as the researcher can find these permissions only by reading the minutes. City council minutes can be found with the clerk. A partial index of holdings at NSHS is available. Further information on city government records available at NSHS can be viewed at:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/research/public/city.htm>

In later years, city planning commissions approved land-use within their jurisdiction. Minutes of these actions can reveal information about the platting of subdivisions. These can be found locally in at the planning department.

### **HABS/HAER**

The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) have documented some buildings and structures through photography and drawings. Although the collection is small, those documented can be found at:

[http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/habs\\_haer/](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/habs_haer/)

A few Nebraska buildings and structures have been documented to HABS/HAER standards and are found in the collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office. However, most of these properties are no longer standing and this documentation was made as a final record before demolition.

## MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

### **Cemetery Records**

Local cemeteries may give important information that will allow the researcher to find out more about the former owner of the property and the family. For larger cemeteries, a superintendent, custodian, or church will have lists of burials. It is sometimes difficult to locate the caretaker of small cemeteries or the records may have been lost. Unless records are available and the holder of these records can be found, the researcher may have to visit the cemetery to locate burials that have been marked by a headstone. These will include the birth and death dates and perhaps military service or fraternal affiliation. With these dates, the researcher can go to local papers for obituaries and birth notices.

The Nebraska Statewide Cemetery Registry is maintained by the NSHS. The database for the registry is currently only accessible at the NSHS Library/Archives. It is primarily a listing of all known cemeteries, available records, and in many cases the existence of tombstone transcriptions. The NSHS Library/Archives maintains a large collection of cemetery transcriptions for most counties in the state. Some genealogical societies have surveyed and recorded headstones for local cemeteries.

### **Organization Minutes**

Organizations such as churches, clubs, libraries, or fraternal societies kept minutes of their business meetings. These will often reveal the architect or builder commissioned for their building, costs, and other information. The organization may also have a scrapbook of newspaper clippings or photographs.

### **Land/Town Company Records**

The records of the Lincoln Land Company are found in the Library/Archives of NSHS. The Lincoln Land Company was incorporated at Lincoln, Nebraska, March 7, 1880, to purchase and sell real estate and plat towns and villages in Nebraska. The original incorporators were officers of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad. Among its auxiliary companies was the South Platte Land Company, whose files in this collection date back to 1874. Of interest to researchers are the company's

“town files,” which have been microfilmed by NSHS. Each town file generally includes an original plat of the town site, showing block and lot numbers and often the owner of the property. The plat map indicated lots for business development and often lots that were reserved for public buildings. Included with the plats is correspondence from local boosters documenting the construction of buildings in the town site. The files include nearly 300 town sites in Nebraska, South Dakota, Kansas, Wyoming, Colorado and Montana – a few of which were abandoned and survive only in memory as “paper towns.” The cities included in the town site files are:

Abbott	Bostwick	Dickens
Adelia	Bradshaw	Diller
Alliance	Brandon	Dunning
Allis	Brayton	Edgar
Alma	Brewster	Edison
Angus	Bridgeport	Ellsworth
Anselmo	Broken Bow	Elsie
Ansley	Bruning	Elwood
Arapahoe	Burchard	Elyria
Arcadia	Burwell	Enders
Archer	Butler	Endicott
Ashton	Cairo	Ericson
Atlanta	Cambridge	Eustis
Auburn (formerly Calvert)	Campbell	Farnam
Aurora	Castor (Tobias)	Farwell (formerly Posen)
Axtell	Central City	Filley
Bartley	Chalco	Germantown (renamed)
Bayard	Chase	Garland)
Beaver City	Chester	Giltner (formerly Huntington)
Belfast	Comstock	Gerard
Belvidere	Crab Orchard	Graf
Benkelman	Crawford	Grant
Berea	Culbertson	Greeley Centre
Bertrand	Curtis	Gretna
Berwyn	Cushing	Guide Rock
Beverly	Danbury	Haigler
Bladen	Deweese	Harbine

Hardy  
Hazard  
Heartwell  
Hemingford  
Hendley  
Henry  
Hildreth  
Holbrook  
Holdrege  
Horace  
Hubbell  
Hyannis  
Imperial  
Indianola  
Ingham  
Ives (formerly Parks)  
Johnson  
Kesterson  
Lakeside  
Lamar  
Lawrence  
Lebanon  
Liberty  
Lisbon  
Litchfield  
Loomis  
Loup City  
Madrid  
Malmo  
Mansfield  
Marquette  
Marsland  
Mason

Max  
Maywood  
McAlpine  
McCook  
Memphis  
Merna  
Minatare  
Minden  
Mitchell  
Moorefield  
Morrill  
Morris  
Morton  
Nelson  
Nimberg  
Odell  
Ohiowa  
Ong  
Orleans  
Oxford  
Palisade  
Palmer  
Phillips  
Prague  
Putnam  
Ravenna  
Red Cloud  
Red Willow  
Remington  
Republican City  
Reynolds  
Rosemont  
Rulo

Saint Michael  
Sargent  
Saronville  
Scottsbluff  
Seneca  
Shickley  
Shubert  
Smithfield  
Smyrna  
Somerset  
Stamford  
Stoddard  
Strang  
Stratton  
Sumter  
Superior  
Trenton  
Trumbull  
Upland  
Venango  
Verdon  
Wallace  
Wauneta  
Wellfleet  
Western  
Wilcox  
Wilsonville  
Wolbach  
Wymore



## Surveys, Maps and Field Books

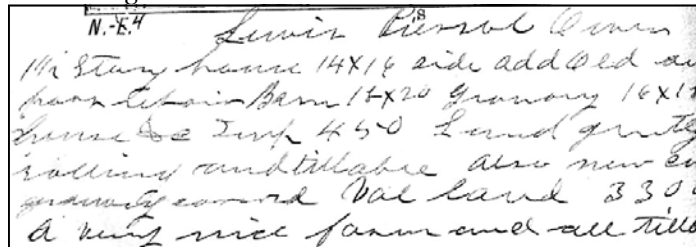
Whether produced by a government agency or land company, surveys can often be used to determine the location of buildings on property, and often descriptions and diagrams of dwellings and buildings are included.

One NSHS manuscript collection of note is the Robert E. Moore field survey notebooks (RG 2267). Moore's Security Investment Company, opened in 1886, received applications for real estate loans from over 70,000 Nebraskans. The collection includes 195 volumes of field books with hand-drawn maps (most of them showing dwellings and buildings) of selected sections in the following Nebraska counties:

Boone, Butler, Cass, Clay, Cuming, Fillmore, Franklin, Gage, Greeley, Hamilton, Howard, Jefferson, Lancaster, Madison, Merrick, Nance, Nuckolls, Otoe, Polk, Saline, Seward, Sherman, Stanton, Thayer, Valley, Webster and York.

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/databases/nhprc/display-collection.cgi?rn=61>

*In the example below, both the information possibilities and the difficulties in deciphering handwriting are illustrated.*



*“Lewis Piersol Owen”*

*1 1/2 Story home 14 x16 add Old and in frame (illegible) Barn 18 x 20 granary 16 x 18 Hog house and (illegible) 450 Land gently rolling and tillable also new corn granary (illegible) Val land 3300 a very nice farm and all tillable”*

Excerpt from *Robert Moore's field survey notebook RG 2267*. Nebraska State Historical Society Archives.

## Genealogies

Connecting people and places is an important part of researching a historic place. There is a large amount of genealogical and historical data freely available on the Internet. Such sources as “Cyndi’s List of Genealogical Sites on the Internet” are a good starting point to locating this data:

<http://www.cyndislist.com/>

Another free source of genealogical information on-line is “Family Search,” hosted by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints:

<http://www.familysearch.org>

The Library of Congress also has resource material. Click on “Resources for Researchers under “General Collections,” then click on “Local History and Genealogy.”

<http://www.loc.gov>.

For the home page of its Local History and Genealogy Reading Room see:

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy>.

Major genealogical or archival subscription databases (pay-to-view) such as “Ancestry.com” and “Heritage Quest Online” are indispensable in accessing documents that might otherwise be unavailable online.

The NSHS has the largest collection of family genealogies in the state. “A Guide to Genealogical Research at NSHS” is found at the following website:

[http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/services/refrence/la\\_pubs/guide1.htm](http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/services/refrence/la_pubs/guide1.htm)

Some families have compiled genealogical information on their ancestors. Copies may have been donated to local organizations located near the property being researched. The Nebraska State

Historical Society has a large collection of family genealogies whose relatives were associated with Nebraska. By entering the family name on the research screen at <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/databases/librariycatalog.htm>, the researcher can determine if the library holds a family history. Sometimes, a family member associated with the property may be located and willing to share copies of their family genealogy.

### **Interviews**

Researchers are encouraged to look for clues that are often overlooked. Conversation with neighbors or former owners might lead to contacts who formerly lived in the house, and who may share anecdotal history of the house that is unavailable elsewhere. A local historical society may know of older residents in the community who may have recollections of the property or family descendants.

### **Newspapers**

If deeds, abstracts and censuses are the foundation of research on a property, newspapers can help put a face on the building and its former occupants. Obituaries or articles about former building owners can lead to clues that in turn lead to more significant information about the building. Such opportunities present themselves often and research will sometimes reveal unexpected rewards. Newspaper research can help put buildings in their historical context by telling the researcher what else was happening in towns. Small town newspapers sometimes mentioned the construction of a building at the time it was being built or upon completion. Newspaper research can be tedious, so it is best to have a range of dates. Small town newspapers, however, often used “boilerplate” news services that printed portions of the newspaper on national or international news, which will not be of interest to the researcher. The local newspaper then printed separate pages with reports of local news. Once the researcher becomes familiar with the format of the newspaper it becomes easier to skip to these pages. Photos of new buildings were also printed a few at a time throughout the year, or as buildings were finished. Local newspaper offices may have kept files on families, events, and photographs.

Many newspapers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries published a yearly summary of new buildings to profile the town’s growth in the past year. These special issues usually appeared in late December or early January editions of newspapers. If the researcher knows the general date of construction, local newspapers can be searched for that year. Fortunately both mansions

and modest homes, as well as businesses, churches, schools and even park development, were documented.

Other special issues of local newspapers, usually printed during a town's milestone anniversaries, include early photos of the town's homes, business buildings and public buildings. Contemporary descriptions of the town often include business buildings and public buildings that the town wanted to feature. Special "booster" editions of newspapers were often printed to celebrate a convention or special event being held in the town. They may also include the most prominent buildings, businesses and enterprises that reflected the town's pride.

Sunday editions of papers in many larger towns featured new construction, "model" house plans, and other items of interest for the researcher. An example of such a series was printed each first Sunday of the year in the *Daily State Journal* in Lincoln from approximately 1904-1939. An in-house index in the NSHS Reference Room allows researchers to search by the names of the house's owner or address to find a detailed article about the house, often including photographs. These most often included more prominent houses, houses that were being built of unique design, or "model houses." If the researcher is interested in a house built in Lincoln during that time span, this index may yield results.

In Omaha, the *Excelsior* printed articles about society events, but included articles on homes. A weekly edition of the *Sunday Omaha World-Herald* included "model" house plans offered by certain architects.

In cities and towns, finding out the year that the property was built may yield the best results. As construction of buildings progressed, photos of those completed or still under construction may appear in local newspapers. Upon completion of a prominent public building or church, the newspaper printed detailed descriptions.

Researchers whose homes are in larger cities may want to search local publications for the lumber and construction trades, where architects, developers and homebuilders could showcase their then-current projects. While researching older local newspapers, be alert for ads selling home accessories and accents found in your historical home. Then, as now, they were advertised in the Sunday edition where homeowners would notice them. These may have included "model" kitchens,

building materials and interior descriptions. These ads can give the researcher a greater sense of context regarding the property.

Starting in the 1950s, residents who were proud of their new house, business and remodeling often invited the newspaper in to take interior and exterior pictures for the newspaper. These are often featured in a Sunday home and garden section or business section.

Photography was an important addition to newspapers as early as the 1910s. If a researcher has learned from deed records the dates a building may have been constructed, it is useful to check the local newspapers. Then, as now, photographs were used in advertising and can show the house as it appeared at those times. The ad might also mention amenities or features, such as a carriage house, arbor, fish pond or porch that have since been removed or hidden.

Without specific dates to investigate, newspaper research can be lengthy. Any leads that can increase the chances of finding articles pertaining to a given property or individual should be utilized, including newspaper indexes, which can make finding specific articles much easier. Researchers should take advantage of any local newspaper indexes that are available, whether in digital or card form, and have in hand a list of names of previous owners of a property. Dates of a property are important, since some indexes were entered by year. The researcher should look for obituaries and other newspaper entries that may pertain to a family. Be advised that any index is going to cite what the indexer cared to extract. Few indexes are absolutely complete, but the odds are good that references to an early owner, business building, or other prominent public building in a community may have been indexed. A prominent news story, such as a fire, remodeling, a new business or industry, or other event may have been included. Depending on the way newspapers were indexed, the researcher may be able to find references by looking at indexes to subject matter.

Indexes of some Nebraska newspapers can be found on the Internet, as made available by volunteers or as part of subscription genealogical or archival databases such as Ancestry.com. Researchers can check with their local public library to see if it offers access to such databases to its patrons. Libraries and genealogical societies are worth consulting to see if they have an index to newspapers. Newspaper clippings may have been collected in some libraries and by local historical societies.

Local newspaper offices may have kept files on families, events, and photographs. Sometimes a local newspaper kept clippings, which were organized in files (called “morgues”).

Larger libraries will have local newspapers on microfilm. The NSHS has a comprehensive collection of newspapers on microfilm and a list of those available through interlibrary loan from the NSHS is available at:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/research/library/newspapr.htm>

Please note that this is a basic list of newspaper titles, and only gives the earliest and latest dates of issues on the reel. Before requesting microfilm through interlibrary loan or visiting NSHS, the researcher should confirm that the desired range of dates for a given newspaper is available for viewing.

The Library of Congress provides links to “Newspaper Archive Sources on the Web” at the following site:

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/oltitles.html>.

The Library of Congress sponsors the “Chronicling America” project that includes several Nebraska newspapers that have been digitized, available on this link:

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/newspapers/>

The following link is to an index of various newspaper transcription projects done by volunteers and contributed to the Nebraska State Newspaper Project, sponsored by the Nebraska State Historical Society and the Nebraska State Genealogical Society:

<http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ne/topic/newspapers/NSHS/nshsnews.htm>

## PICTORIAL RESEARCH

### Photographic Collections

In addition to documents and newspapers, the researcher should investigate photographic resources for representations of buildings. Photographic images can be a valuable reference tool for those researching the history of a house or building. They may show details of the building that are no longer present or which may have been changed through the years.

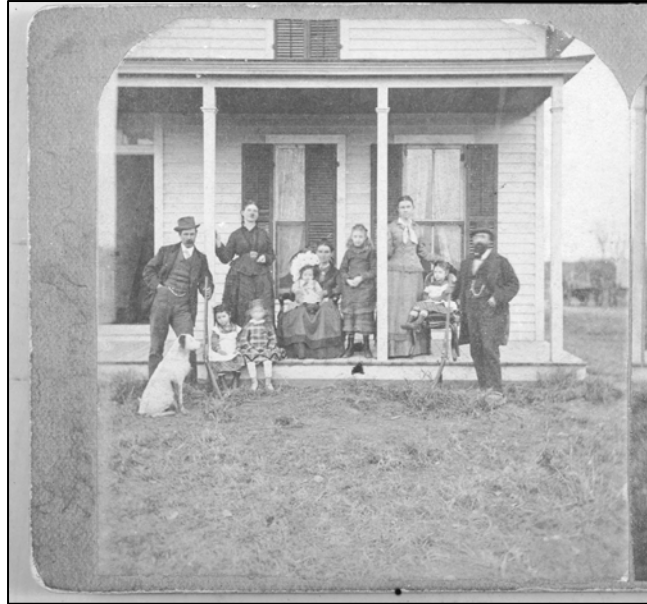
It may take some persistence to locate an image of a specific building. Many historical societies, museums, or public libraries have special collections of local photographs. However, researchers should be aware that it will require some time to search through these collections. It is unlikely that a researcher can simply walk in and be pointed directly to an image of a particular residence or business. The institution may or may not have a complete index of their photograph collections. In addition, images can be described in varying amounts of detail and the subjects of some images may not be identified at all. Many times the photograph was not dated, but the name of the photographer is identified. City directories will reveal when that photographer was in operation, helping to date the photograph.

Before looking at a collection of historic images, it is a good idea to first gather as many facts as possible about the property and its history. When searching an index, a researcher should think of a number of possible keywords to use in the search. For example, it may be possible to search a photograph collection index for a family name or business name. Using several keywords will increase the number of potential matches found. The original images can then be examined in more detail by the researcher.

Sometimes, previous owners or residents may have family photographs showing the people and their homes. Even a family snapshot may show details of a building. Pictures that neighbors have of the neighborhood may yield additional photographic information about a property. Genealogical research may help locate family members that have collections showing the people and the buildings.

The Nebraska State Historical Society has extensive photographic collections. The NSHS's Library/Archives Division has numerous photograph and moving image collections, including

NSHS RG2341-820, Nebraska State Historical Society.



*An example of a photograph that may be found. Note the details that are revealed, such as the porch and shutters.*

collections of still photographs of all Nebraska counties and of many individual Nebraska towns. NSHS staff can refer a researcher to other relevant collections related to specific towns or historic sites. For example, a local photographer may have donated a collection of images of his/her hometown.

The NSHS has collections arranged by county of photographs and postcards. These are located on microfiche. Special collections are also held by NSHS. The Lincoln, Nebraska, photograph collection (RG2158.PH) includes images of many Lincoln businesses and landmarks. There are also many street views, especially of downtown Lincoln. The MacDonald Studio photograph collection (RG2183.PH) includes many images of Lincoln businesses and scenes of life in Lincoln. NSHS has images from the MacDonald Studio dating from 1920 to 1956.

An NSHS collection of Omaha, Nebraska, photographs (RG2341.PH) includes images of many Omaha businesses and buildings. These mainly date from the 1860s to the 1960s. The Nathaniel Dewell photograph collection (RG3882.PH) is held by NSHS. Dewell photographed events and locations in Omaha, mainly in the 1920s and 1930s.



*To the right is a Lincoln street scene taken in 1931 by the MacDonald Studio.*



RG2183:1931-0410-1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

A large collection of early photographs of Omaha is found in the Bostwick-Frohardt photograph collection, on permanent loan to the Durham Museum from KMTV-Channel 3, part of a collection of over 200,000 images in the museum archives depicting the history of Omaha. Information regarding the photo archives is available from the Durham Museum in Omaha: <http://www.historicomaha.com/dwhmpics.htm>

### **Postcards**

Postcards were especially popular from about 1905 – 1917. Postcard publishers took local views of prominent buildings, such as businesses, courthouses, depots, and schools. Street scenes included the local “main street” and residential neighborhoods. Local events, such as floods, fires, or snowstorms were also published and may show a building.

### **Bird's-Eye Views**

In the late nineteenth century, publishers produced what were called “Panoramic” or “Bird’s-Eye Views.” The lithographer would first hire artists to walk each block of the town with notebooks, making first-draft sketches of the each block and its buildings, all from one perspective. The sketches were then “reassembled” into what would appear as a view of the town from the perspective of a bird (hence “bird’s-eye” view), with the surrounding topography. The view was purposely skewed so that buildings in the distance are still easily viewed. Names of streets are printed on the view and prominent buildings are identified.

These drawings are remarkably accurate as to a building’s shape, window arrangement, barns, carriage houses, walkways, outbuildings and porches, more often than not falling into line with contemporary or historic photographs of the buildings. Panoramic views were especially popular from the late 1870s to the 1890s, and many views of Nebraska towns can be found in local history books or at local libraries or historical organizations. Verifying the existence of a structure at a given time can make these views a worthwhile study for the researcher.

Two sources that may be consulted for bird’s eye views are *Viewmakers of Urban America: Lithographs of Towns and Cities in the United States and Canada, Notes on the Artists and Publishers, and a Union Catalog of Their Work, 1825-1925* by John W. Reps (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984). It includes a detailed listing of Nebraska bird’s-eye views and where they are located. Also see *Checklist of Printed Maps of the Middle West to 1900: Nebraska and Kansas*, volumes 12 and 13, (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1981). These two books may be obtained on interlibrary loan from a local library. Besides the Library of Congress, the NSHS Library/Archives has many of Nebraska’s bird’s-eye views available.

Digitized scans of a number of panoramic views of selected Nebraska cities, including Omaha (1868, 1905), Lincoln (1889), Nebraska City (1868) and Kearney (1889) can be viewed online at The Library of Congress’ American Memory website:

[http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgibin/query/S?ammem/gmd:@filreq\(@field\(STATE+nebraska\)+@field\(COLLID+pmmmap\)\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgibin/query/S?ammem/gmd:@filreq(@field(STATE+nebraska)+@field(COLLID+pmmmap)))

Two views of Grand Island from 1874 and 1880 can be found at this link:

<http://www.hallcountyne.gov/content.lasso?page=7429>



Norfolk, Nebraska, Bird's Eye View Map, 1889. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/S?ammem/gmd:@filreq\(@field\(STATE+nebraska\)+@field\(COLLID+pmmmap\)\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/S?ammem/gmd:@filreq(@field(STATE+nebraska)+@field(COLLID+pmmmap)))

*The above bird's eye view of Norfolk circa 1889, is just one of many bird's eye view maps available. These maps can be remarkably detailed, and accurate.*

### **Aerial Views**

In the 1950s and 1960s commercial pilots and photographers often took pictures of farmsteads by air to sell to the owner. These are invaluable in documenting the farmstead, complete with house, barns, granaries, and other outbuildings. Sometimes these can be obtained from former residents.

### **Architects and Blueprints**

The most valuable documentation of a historic building is architectural blueprints. It is rather rare that these can be located. They are sometimes left with the building by previous owners. Only a very limited number are available at NSHS. Perhaps an architectural firm whose predecessor was an early architect will have copies or a list of architectural commissions.

The NSHS has the licensee files of Nebraska architects on microfilm in RG 81, Board of Professional Engineers and Architects, 1937 – 1975. These may shed light on architectural work produced by the architect of the building under investigation and the dates that the architect was in business.

The NSHS State Historic Preservation Office has created files on Nebraska architects. Sometimes these include biographical sketches of the architect or lists of buildings that can be attributed to an architect. A small number of blueprints are on file at the NSHS State Historic Preservation Office. The architect and blueprint files held at the NSHS are continually being expanded, and any information concerning Nebraskan architects, or blueprints of buildings are always welcome for submission.

## PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

### Materials and Construction Techniques

The availability of construction materials can help date a building. In the absence of other building materials, many pioneers found they could construct a building out of sod, logs, locally quarried stone, and even baled hay or straw. As a community grew, local brickyards or cement plants were established. A wide range of construction materials were made available to settlers as rail transportation expanded and manufacturing increased. Milled lumber became the most popular and necessary of construction materials with the advent of balloon framing techniques. Other building materials were often available from local millwork and hardware companies that supplied windows, doors, decorative brackets, and various other furnishings for buildings. Many local quarries were established to provide stone for nearby construction projects. Commonly, brick was shipped in from other locations, if not manufactured nearby. A particular stamp on a brick found on your property might reveal the kiln where it was made, and in turn the city directory would tell what years the kiln was in business.

*Horizontal log construction, originally brought to the United States by Finno-Swedish immigrants in the 1600s, was adopted by many other immigrant groups who spread this form of construction technology across rural America. The ease of log construction led to its survival into the early 1900s. To the right is the corner of a log cabin constructed in the early 1900's in Banner County, Nebraska.*



BN00-042, Banner County, NeHBS Collection, State Historic Preservation Office, Nebraska State Historical Society.

Construction techniques, such as braced framing and balloon framing were used at various times and can help date a building. Braced framing was often used by immigrants who were familiar with such construction in their home country, but increasingly throughout the last half of the 1800s balloon framing became popular due to the ease of construction and availability of material. Ethnic groups often carried traditional techniques and forms of buildings when they came to America.

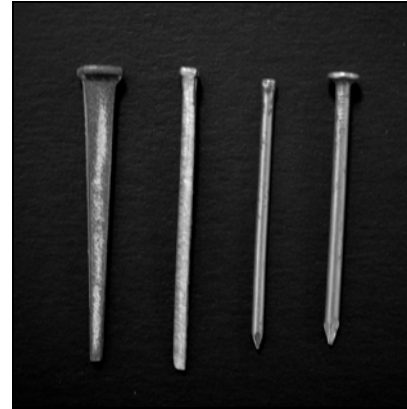
Often overlooked, nails can be a vital tool for establishing the age of a house. As manufacturing technology improved, machine cut nails replaced hand wrought nails. Due to mass production cut nails were cheaper and more accessible to the common person by the mid 1800s. The availability of cut nails combined with the “new” balloon framing construction technique to become one of the most popular construction methods. Between the 1890 and 1900 the cut nail was largely replaced as the wire nail surpassed the cut nail in the speed and cost of manufacture. Cut nails became relegated to specialty purposes in home construction. This change in nail technology can help date a house and subsequent additions.

SA00-007, Saline County, NeHBS Collection, State Historic Preservation Office, Nebraska State Historical Society.



*One example of traditional construction is the Germanic Fachwerk, which is a variation of braced framing. In Fachwerk construction large squared timbers are joined by means of pegs with mortise and tenon joints. The voids between the beams are then filled by wattle and daub, nogging, or stucco. In the example to the left from Saline County, the exterior was subsequently clad in wood siding.*

*The two nails on the left, are machine cut and thus have rectangular shanks with wedge shaped points. This shape is a result of the machine shearing the nails from a sheet of metal with a large cutting blade. At first, nail heads were attached by hand, but eventually the heading process was mechanized, further speeding the manufacturing process. Cut nails are still used today for specialty applications in home construction. The two nails on the far right are wire nails. Easily distinguished by the round shank and point, wire nails are constructed by machines pinching steel wires and then affixing heads to them.*



State Historic Preservation Office,  
Nebraska State Historical Society.

### **Other clues**

Changes in utility materials may reveal a general date of construction, additions, or major renovations. Even a toilet tank cover has a date pressed on the inside bottom, which can determine the date of the toilet's manufacture and is often linked to the date of major renovations. A small handprint in the driveway with "Orville – 1935" written in the cement might be overlooked by some researchers, but such clues can document the associated improvement made to the property.

### **A PLACE in HISTORY**

Researching a historic property can be challenging but exciting. Knowing the people, history, and architectural style associated with the property gives pride in ownership. With this guide in hand, the researcher can reveal unexpected details about connecting people and places.

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<i>J.R. Benton</i> <b>32</b> 640	<i>Mark Leonard</i> <b>33</b> 640	<i>Mary Leonard</i> 160	<i>Anna Leonard Est</i> <b>34</b> 160	<i>Jennie Leonard</i> 160	<i>Ogata</i> <b>35</b> Land & Cattle Co. 640	SCHOOL LAND <b>36</b> 640	<i>Mary Leonard</i> 160	<i>Frank A Phillips</i> <b>22 (H.E.)</b> 480	<i>Oscar Kent</i> <b>23</b> 640	<i>J.P. Andrews</i> <b>24</b> 640
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<i>W. + wife</i>	<i>Amanda J. Bundeau</i>	<i>Feb.</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>1910</i>	<i>1 30</i>	<i>Jan</i>
<i>nie + husb.</i>	<i>Chas. A. Gerlach</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>9 40</i>	<i>Mar</i>
<i>etal</i>	<i>William F. Gerlach</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>9 40</i>	<i>Dec</i>
<i>H.</i>	<i>Addison S. Tibbets</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>4 10</i>	<i>Jan</i>



<i>wife</i>	<i>Marietta Vanderlip</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>9 30</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>+ wife</i>	<i>Geo. L. Long</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>9 30</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>M. + wife</i>	<i>August Anderson</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>12 24</i>	<i>Sept</i>	<i>1 15</i>
<i>R.</i>	<i>William H. Boney etal</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>11 20</i>	<i>Feb.</i>	<i>25 19</i>