



Nebraska State History ~ In a Nutshell ~

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Nebraska State History In a Nutshell
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What is the "In a Nutshell" series?

This is a series of concise, easy to understand information on many popular topics. You will find that many of products in this series can also be found as part of larger publications and/or curriculum on the publisher's website. At the end of each book, you will find a list of questions that may be used to help you review the material.

Nebraska State History Lapbook Journal Study Guide



The Great Seal of Nebraska

Welcome to Nebraska, a land of distinct natural beauty. Prairies extend for miles, pine-covered buttes dot the landscape, endless fields of wheat bend in the breezes, and huge herds of cattle roam on vast grazing lands.

It is easy to visualize the Old West in the land of Nebraska. This is the territory of the Pony Express, the Overland Stage, Boot Hill, the Oregon and Mormon Trails. This is where the mighty Missouri flows, and where the Sioux and the Omaha have flourished. This is where historical figures, like Crazy Horse and Chief Red Cloud, Walter Reed, and Lewis and Clark played out the early history of the American West. The stagecoaches and steam locomotives may be gone today, but the days of trappers and traders, of pioneers and explorers, remain in the spirit of Nebraska.

The state of Nebraska is actually named after the Platte River from the French meaning "broad river." The Omaha Indians called the river "ibôápka" also meaning "broad river."

In 1842, John Charles Frémont used the word Nebraska in referencing the Platte River and this was the name that was given to the territory when it was created in 1854.

People who live in Nebraska or who come from Nebraska are called Nebraskans.



Map of Nebraska – Capital, Major Cities and Rivers

STATEHOOD

On March 1, 1867, Nebraska became the 37th state to be admitted into the Union.

STATE CONSTITUTION

Nebraska's first constitution, adopted in 1866, served as the basis for Nebraska to be admitted to the union in 1867. This constitution was replaced in 1875 by one that limited state government power. In 1920, Nebraskans approved amendments proposed by a constitutional convention.

Constitutional amendments may be proposed by the state Legislature, by a constitutional convention or by the people. Amendments must be approved by voters at a regular or special election in order to be adopted.

The state constitution gives the people the power of initiative, which allows them to propose, by petition, constitutional amendments or statutory changes. The people also have the power of referendum, which may be invoked, by petition, against acts of the Legislature.

Source: <http://nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/bluebook>

PREAMBLE: *We, the people, grateful to Almighty God for our freedom, do ordain and establish the following declaration of rights and frame of government, as the Constitution of the State of Nebraska.*

STATE GOVERNMENT

Like the federal government, Nebraska's government is divided into three branches: legislative, executive and judicial. Nebraska is the only state in the nation with a unicameral (one-house) legislature and the only state with a nonpartisan legislature.

Before 1937, Nebraska had a two house, partisan legislature. In 1934, Nebraska voters adopted a constitutional amendment providing for a one-house, nonpartisan legislature. This proposal was submitted to voters through an initiative petition effort. Nebraska's 49 legislators, called state senators, are elected from 49 districts, each with approximately the same number of residents. The 49 legislators serve four-year terms. Senators are elected with no party affiliation next to their names on the ballot, and the Legislature's speaker and committee chairpersons are selected without regard to their party membership.

Nebraska's chief executive is the governor, who is elected for a four-year term. Other elected four-year term officials are the lieutenant governor, secretary of state, auditor of public accounts, treasurer and attorney general. Within the executive branch are various departments and agencies that perform a variety of functions.

Nebraska's judicial system is lead by a Supreme Court, comprised of a chief justice selected at large and six judges selected from six judicial districts in the state. Beneath this court are the Court of Appeals, district courts, county courts, a workers' compensation court, and separate juvenile courts in Douglas, Lancaster and Sarpy counties. Judges are appointed by the governor and must be approved periodically for retention by voters.

Since Nebraska's constitution allows no indebtedness, government expenses must be met on a pay-as-you-go basis. Most state revenues are generated through sales and income taxes. Other revenue sources include taxes on insurance premiums, gasoline, tobacco and liquor.

Source: <http://nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/bluebook>

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Nebraska has 93 counties, 67 of which have a commissioner form of government. These 67 are each governed by a board of commissioners with three, five or seven members, elected for four-year terms. The rest of the counties have a supervisor-township form of government. These are governed by seven-member boards of supervisors, also elected to four-year terms.

There are 530 cities and villages, or municipalities, in Nebraska. Most cities have a mayor-council form of government, while exceptions like Nebraska City have a commissioner form of government, and several others use the council-manager form. Most villages are governed by a five-member board of trustees. Nebraska's constitution grants the option of home rule to cities with more than 5,000 residents, meaning they may operate under their own charters. Only Lincoln and Omaha use this option.

Source: <http://nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/bluebook>

Tribal/Sovereign Governments

Within Nebraska are four sovereign Native American tribes that have democratic forms of government. These tribes are the Omaha, Ponca, Santee Sioux and Winnebago. Tribal governments are governed by tribal constitutions, bylaws, ordinances and laws. The governing bodies are the tribal councils, made up of elected council members who serve a term as determined by the tribal constitution. Elections are held regularly as dictated by the tribal constitution, and tribal members are allowed to vote. Membership for the Omaha, Santee Sioux and Winnebago tribes is determined by a set blood quantum percentage, as determined by documented lineal descent. Membership in the Ponca Tribe, which has no blood quantum requirement, is determined solely by documented lineal descent.

Nebraska is a Public Law 280 state and did assume Public Law 280 jurisdiction over the tribes. Public Law 280 is the federal law that gave the states extensive jurisdiction over tribes, if the state chose to assume such jurisdiction. Nebraska has chosen to retrocede some Public Law 280 jurisdiction back to the federal government. The effect of this retrocession is that the Omaha, Winnebago and Santee tribes have their own judicial and law enforcement agencies, and the Ponca tribe has no such agencies.

Source: <http://nebraskalegislature.gov/pdf/bluebook>

U.S. CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION/FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The legislative branch of the United States government makes laws for our nation and raises and distributes money to run the United States government. The most evident part of the legislative branch is the United States Congress. Congress is divided into two parts, called houses. The two parts are the Senate and the House of Representatives. Congress is referred to as a bicameral body because it is made up of two houses. The Latin roots of the word bicameral, "bi" and "cameral," mean two chambers or rooms.

Members of the Senate are called Senators and members of the House of Representatives are called Representatives. Senators and representatives serving in these two bodies are sometimes referred to as congressmen, or women, and sometimes as legislators because their business is to legislate or make laws. The role of the legislative branch is defined in the United States Constitution.

Each state elects people to represent them in the United States Congress in Washington, DC. The citizens of each state elect two senators to represent them in the Senate. They also elect representatives to represent them in the House of Representatives. The number of representatives each state sends to the House of Representatives is not a specific number like the Senate, but is based on the population of the state. The people, that are elected to represent the state's citizens in the United States Congress, are referred to as the Congressional Delegation.

There are 100 senators in the U.S. Senate. Each is elected to a term, in the Senate, of six years. There are 435 representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives. Each is elected to a term, in the "House," of two years.

The citizens of Nebraska elect two people, like every other state, to represent them in the Senate and three people, based on Nebraska's current population in the most recent federal census, to represent them in the House of Representatives.

Nebraska members of Congress have offices and residences in Nebraska as well as in Washington, D.C. The federal executive branch is represented in Nebraska by agency branch offices and other entities, many of which are in Lincoln and Omaha. Cabinet-level agencies with a presence in Nebraska include the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, Transportation, Treasury and Veterans Affairs.

A major federal presence in the state is Offutt Air Force Base, which employs approximately 12,000 military and civilian personnel. Offutt, located near Bellevue, is home to the Air Force's 55th Wing, as well as the U.S. Strategic Command, which manages the nation's strategic forces in order to deter attacks on the United States.

STATE SEAL

Nebraska gained statehood as the 37th state in 1867, and the state's first legislature established Nebraska's official seal in the same year.

The themes of transportation, industry, settlement, and agriculture are depicted on Nebraska's seal.

A railroad train steams across the background, with mountains in the distance. A steamboat plies the waters of the Missouri River.

A simple cabin and sheaves of harvested wheat portray the importance of settlers and agriculture. A blacksmith works at his anvil in the foreground.



At the top of the seal a banner holds the motto "Equality Before the Law", and around the outside of the seal are the words "Great Seal of the State of Nebraska, March 1st, 1867".

STATE CAPITAL (Lincoln)

Lincoln is the capital city of the state of Nebraska. It is also the county seat of Lancaster County and the second most populous city in Nebraska.

The first State Capitol in Lincoln was constructed between 1867 and 1868. It was a two story building with a central cupola, made of native limestone. This first State Capitol soon began to crumble, the result of poor construction and inferior building stone.

In 1881 the first wing of a second State Capitol was completed and the entire building finished in 1888. This second Capitol suffered the fate of poor construction and was settling structurally when talk began of building a third State Capitol in 1915.

In 1919 the Legislature passed a bill to provide for the construction of a new Capitol, including provisions for a Capitol Commission to oversee construction. The building's construction was overseen by the Capitol Commission composed of the governor, the state engineer and three members appointed by the governor.



The Nebraska State Capitol, the product of a nationwide design competition won by New York Architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue in 1920, is described as the nation's first truly vernacular State Capitol.

Constructed in four phases over ten years from 1922-1932, the building, with furnishings and landscaping, was completed at a cost just under the \$10 million budget. The money was secured by a special capitol levy, and all building expenses were paid upon completion in 1932.

To decorate the building, Bertram Goodhue selected Lee Lawrie, sculptor; Hildreth Meiere, tile and mosaic designer; and Hartley B. Alexander, thematic consultant for inscription and symbolism.

The present building, the third to be erected on this site, was the nation's first statehouse design to radically depart from the prototypical form of the nation's Capitol and to use an office tower.

Built of Indiana limestone, the Capitol's base is a cross within a square with four interior courtyards. The square base measures 437 feet on each side. From the base's center rises a 400-foot domed tower, crowned with a 19-foot bronze figure, designed by Lawrie, called "The Sower," which represents agriculture, Nebraska's chief industry. The building's exterior stone carvings represent historic events in the 3000 year evolution of democracy as a form of government. The ornamental interior features numerous marble-columned chambers with vaulted

polychrome tile ceilings, marble mosaic floors and murals depicting the natural and social history of Nebraska's Native American and Pioneer cultures.

The Nebraska State Capitol has been honored by the National Park Service, the American Institute of Architects, the Building Stone Institute and other groups.

STATE MOTTO

"Equality before the law"

The official state motto of Nebraska is "Equality before the law." The state motto also appears on the state seal and state flag:

STATE FLAG

Nebraska was one of the last states to adopt a State Flag

Representative J. Lloyd McMaster introduced a bill in 1925 to designate a state banner. The bill was passed - the law describes the banner as "a reproduction of the Great Seal of the State charged on the center in gold and silver on a field of national blue."



In 1963, the Nebraska State Legislature designated the state banner the official State Flag of Nebraska.

STATE NICKNAMES

The Cornhusker State (Official)

"The Cornhusker State" officially replaced "The Tree Planters State" in 1945 in recognition of The University of Nebraska football team, the Cornhuskers. It is now more generally associated with all University of Nebraska athletics. It is also said that this nickname refers to the corn that supports Nebraska beef cattle and another state nickname; "The Beef State." "Cornhusker State" appeared on Nebraska license plates from 1969 to 1975.

The Tree Planters State (Prior Official)

Officially designated by an act of the Nebraska legislature on April 4, 1895, "The Tree Planters State" nickname was offered as a more fitting representation of the state than others that were in use at the time. This name refers to the millions of trees planted by early Nebraska settlers as windbreaks, orchards and fuel woodlots. Arbor Day was founded in 1872 by J. Sterling Morton of Nebraska City and Nebraska's U.S. Senator Phineas W. Hitchcock introduced the Timber

Culture Act in 1873. "The Tree Planters State" was officially replaced by "The Cornhusker State" in 1945.

The Beef State

This nickname is in reference to one of Nebraska's main industries; beef. With about 2 million head of beef cattle, it's easy to understand why Nebraska is sometimes referred to as "The Beef State." "The Beef State" was carried on Nebraska license plates from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s.

The Antelope State

This nickname was given to Nebraska, around 1870, to honor the abundant antelope that graced the state's prairies.

The Bug-eating State

It is said that this nickname is in reference to the abundance of bull bats that gobble up insects in the state. These bats are called "bug-eaters" by some Nebraskans.

The Blackwater State

Nebraska was sometimes called "The Blackwater State" because of the rich black Nebraska soil that darkened the streams.

STATE BIRD



The western meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*) was adopted by the Forty-fifth Session of the Nebraska Legislature as the official state bird of Nebraska by Joint and Concurrent Resolution on March 22, 1929.

The Western Meadowlark is a familiar songbird of open country across the western two-thirds of the continent and is in the same family as blackbirds and orioles. Adults have a black and white striped head, long, pointed bill, yellow cheeks, bright yellow throat and a distinctive black "V" on the breast.

Western meadowlarks forage on the ground and beneath the soil for insects, grain and weed seeds (it's estimated that at least 65-70% of their diet consists of beetles, cutworms, caterpillars, grasshoppers, spiders, sow bugs, and snails). They also nest on the ground - constructing a cup of dried grasses and bark woven into the surrounding vegetation. This nest may be open or have a partial or full grass roof, and sometimes a grass entry tunnel several feet long.

Below, you will find 15 general questions to help review what you have learned. Use the following page(s) for documenting your answers. Older students may choose to write a State Report as well.

Review Questions:

1. List the states and/or bodies of water that border this state.
2. What was the date of statehood?
3. What is the state capital?
4. What is the state motto?
5. Name at least one state nickname.
6. Describe the state flag.
7. What is the state bird?
8. What is the state flower?
9. List at least 5 other state symbols.
10. Describe this state's government.
11. Name the major imports and exports for this state.
12. Describe the weather and climate in this state.
13. List at least 5 famous people from this state.
14. Describe at least 5 significant events in this state's history.
15. What other interesting information have you learned about this state?

Answers to Review Questions:

