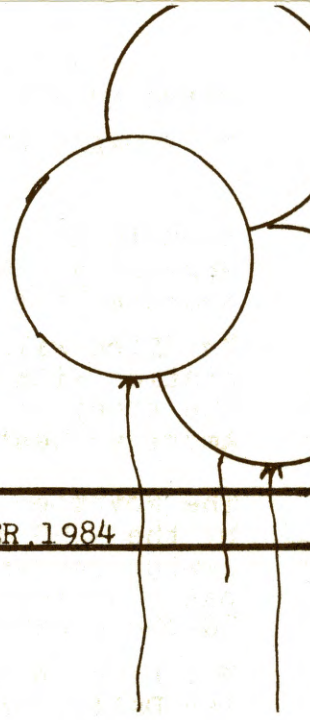




Nebraska Jewish Historical Society  
333 South 132nd Street  
Omaha, Nebraska 68154



# NEWSLETTER

VOLUME II, NUMBER 2

NOVEMBER 1984

## WE'RE 2 YEARS OLD!

WE'RE CELEBRATING WITH SPECIAL EVENTS, SPECIAL GIFTS, AND GREAT PLANS!

NJHS MUSEUM TO OPEN  
IN 1984 AT THE J.C.C.

Mary Fellman, president of NJHS, announced that the first display of artifacts and data collected by the society has been made possible by recent action of the J.C.C. Executive Committee.

The committee "unanimously and enthusiastically" voted to make space available for a temporary museum in an area between the J.C.C. lobby and the Livingston Plaza. Plans are to have the "Corridor of History" open by the end of 1984.

Mrs. Fellman said, "We are delighted with this development. We have acquired so many fascinating documents, photographs and items which we want to display so that the Jewish community can share them. Now, we have a great spot! It is well-lit, easily-secured, and within easy access to all visitors."

Save November 13!  
See Story inside  
on Kenneth Libo

CARL FROHM FOUNDATION  
GIVES SOCIETY \$25,000

Announcement was made at the October 16 meeting that the Carl Frohm Foundation has given NJHS a five-year aggregate grant of \$25,000.

Lou Lipp, an administrator of the Foundation, presented the grant and noted that it was "the kind of philanthropy Carl Frohm would endorse." The late Mr. Frohm stipulated that foundation funds were to be limited to local Jewish projects and organizations and were "intended to strengthen Judaism in his adopted city." The funds will be used to continue the work of the society and to help translate the information and data collected into concrete form.

Carl Frohm, who moved to Omaha as a young man, was a co-founder and eventual sole owner of the Union Packing Company, the largest independent meat-packer in Omaha. In 1983, the Foundation built the Carl Frohm Pavilion on the grounds of the J.C.C. for use by children and adults.

Mary Fellman also announced a gift of 500 shares of Seldin Company stock by Ruth Raskin and expressed appreciation for all gifts such as these.

NOTED AUTHOR KENNETH LIBO  
TO ADDRESS OMAHA COMMUNITY

Kenneth Libo was co-author with Irving Howe of How We Lived and was chief researcher for Howe's World of Our Fathers.

Mr. Libo will speak on his latest collaboration with Howe, We Lived There Too, the story of Jewish pioneers in the American West.

The November 13, 1984 talk, sponsored by the NJHS as a thank-you to the Omaha Jewish community for its support these past two years, will also feature a 30-photo exhibit of Jewish pioneers.

Mr. Libo is a former editor of the "Jewish Daily Forward" and has written for the "New York Times," "Saturday Review of Literature," and "American Jewish History."

In a letter to NJHS Executive Vice-President Oliver Pollak, Mr. Libo wrote about how he researched his American Jewish roots. Excerpts from this letter follow:

When I first met E.J. Stern, a pioneer New Mexico businessman, some years ago, he was in his nineties but could still recall, as though it were yesterday, "arriving in New York City in January 1903 from Hungary with the total sum of \$2.50 left over from my journey."

Like countless others during this period of mass European migration to America, Stern went west to make his fortune. His first job was as a delivery boy for an El Paso grocery store owner, also Jewish, who had arrived several years earlier in much the same condition as Stern, and was by now an integral part of a prosperous Jewish community. Stern worked for the Joe Nation Company...for six years...subsequently sold insurance by going with a horse and buggy from house to house...Always on the lookout for bigger and better opportunities, Stern next tried his hand at farming together with the former Mabelle Lull, "a young girl I ran into and married from the State of Nebraska."

...Stern's account of his slow and dogged climb to success was the first of scores of personal histories Irving Howe and I listened to or read in the course of a number of trips taken to every section of the country. Wherever we went, we sought out the voices of pioneer Jews

in memoirs, both oral and written, journals, diaries, letters and newspaper account. We found a staggering number of them in archives, libraries and private collections, along with a multitude of pictures, the best of which helped us better understand the vital role Jews have played at a number of crucial stages in the history of this country. Jews were here, too, we discovered, from the days when the eastern seaboard was the western frontier of Europe to the conquest of the "Wild West" more than two centuries later.

Much of what we came across is simplicity itself, honest and heartfelt accounts of hope and suffering as in the recollection of Sarah Thal, a North Dakota homesteader's wife who describes the death of a Jewish neighbor and her child during a howling blizzard that "lasted three days," and Anna Solomon who with her husband Isadore settled in Arizona's Apache country and eventually put Solomonville on the map.

Such accounts forcefully convey the gritty texture of the lives of Jews who shared in the totality of the American experience as Indian fighters, prospectors, ranchers, cowboys, soldiers, homesteaders, sheriffs, gamblers, mayors and legislators.

Other accounts by people like Abraham Isaacson, a merchant for over forty years in a small town in western Mississippi and Oscar Strauss, the first Jew to occupy a post in the cabinet of an American president, reveal a rare knack for storytelling.

We value accounts like these from all sections of the country not only for their local color but also because they reinforce our own sense of rootedness to a nation in which pioneer Jews, while struggling to create a new civilization with their Gentile neighbors, forged new and vibrant communities of their own, often in the wilderness.

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Come Hear Kenneth Libo

November 13, 1984

J.C.C. 7:30 p.m.

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## NJHS LOOKS AT NEBRASKA CITY HISTORY

In recognition of the contributions that Jews of Nebraska City made in its early years, we reprint these articles sent by Norma Novak. They are from the Nebraska City News-Press, dates unknown.

### WESSEL'S OLDEST STORE IN STATE TO HAVE CENTENNIAL IN 1955

Nebraska's oldest store--Wessel's, will celebrate a centennial of its own in 1955. The Nebraska City institution, which has been a fixture on Main Street since before the wagon trains started pushing westward from here in territorial days, was founded in 1855.

And what is more remarkable, from the day in 1855 when Lewis Wessel opened the store to this, the store has been in the same family hands. It is now owned by the Walter Wessel estate, with Mrs. W.A. Wessel, Jay Cherniack and R.M. Gladstone as trustees.

The manager of the store is R.M. Gladstone whose wife, Louise, is a granddaughter of the founder. Lewis Wessel came to Nebraska City from St. Louis as a young man of 19 to try the new community. That was in 1855, the year in which Nebraska City became an incorporated place in the new territory. The first Wessel store, with G.H. Kalkman as a partner of the founder, was opened in Kearney Addition in May, 1855, on what is now the triangular piece of ground near the foot of Kearney Hill. Young Lewis Wessel was attracted to Nebraska City by a conversation he heard on arriving in St. Louis--"Nebraska City is the fastest growing town on the river."

It is interesting to note that the era in which the Wessel and Kalkman store started was a time of fluid population, when men wore whiskers and high boots, carried weapons and used them, and Kearney Hill and the "flats" at the foot of what now is Central Avenue comprised the business district. Nebraska City at that time was the largest city between St. Joseph and Denver.

Mr. Wessel often remarked that he was the first Jew to enter the territory of Nebraska. His partner, B.H. Kalkman, a capable and shrewd businessman, was one of the pioneers in early Catholic history. He was the first to sign a paper to raise funds for construction of a church in Nebraska City.

In 1869 Mr. Wessel moved his store to Sixth and Central. This was a brick building built for the store at a cost of \$19,000 and with the steel being shipped from New York to St. Joseph and then upriver to Nebraska City. The building had two floors, the first floor utilized as the retail outlet and the second floor carried the wholesale stock and carpets. For many years, Wessel's was the exclusive drygoods and carpet house in Nebraska City.

As L. Wessel and C. M. Kohn was the resident manager. The store maintained a buyer in New York. In about 1890, the store moved a block up the street, to Seventh and Central and in 1913 moved to its present location at 911 Central Avenue. In 1902, two sons of the store's founder bought out their father. The store then became known as L. Wessel's Sons and C., the owners being Walter Wessel, Milton Wessel and I.D. Iseman. In the late twenties, Walter Wessel bought out the other two partners and operated the store until his untimely death in 1937.

At one time the store's motto was "Where a child can buy as cheap as a man."

In the early formative years of Nebraska City, the Wessel store grew with the community, moved "uptown" as the business section moved westward, and became known far and wide as an excellent place to trade. It is Nebraska City's largest and best-known store, an institution in the business life of the community.

The store features men's, women's, boys', and girls' informal apparel, dry goods, piece goods and the other items handled in a department store.

Mr. Gladstone came here from Omaha in 1939. He is a native of Omaha, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Victor Gladstone. He attended the University of Michigan. Mr. Gladstone is a member of Rotary, Elks, Eagles, Chamber of Commerce and other local organizations.

Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone have two children, Victor, 22, a Rotary Fellow now studying in London, and Gretchen, 18, in the University of Nebraska.

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Following are two small excerpts from the Nebraska City newspaper:

A livery barn operated by Levi Brothers at Seventh street and First Avenue (now the Searle & Chapin Lumber Company) burned in a 6-below-zero temperature on Jan. 29, 1902. Two men were killed, 22 horses, many privately-owned and boarded in the stable, were lost, as well as 40 sets of harness, 14 buggies and carriages and a large quantity of feed.

#### JEWISH SERVICES

#### WERE HELD HERE

The only Jewish organization in Nebraska City was organized around or before 1900 and lasted only a few years. The few Jewish families of the community rented the Odd Fellows hall, where they held services only on special occasions. Lewis Wessel was president and read the services for these special meetings. There was never a rabbi in charge.

NEW PRICE ON NJHS

DONOR CARDS

\$3 each

Remember life cycle events in your friends' and relatives' lives by contributing to the Morris C. Fellman Memorial Fund of the NJHS.

Contact:

Evelyn Alperin  
6021 William Street  
Omaha, Nebraska 68106

WE'RE STILL LOOKING!

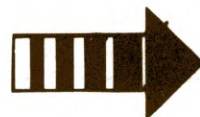
SEND NAMES AND  
ADDRESSES OF FORMER  
NEBRASKANS AND COUNCIL  
BLUFFS RESIDENTS TO:

GIANT ADDRESS BOOK  
NJHS 333 So. 132  
OMAHA, NE 68144

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT

THE PICTURE ON THE

OPPOSITE PAGE?



The only names we know are Pearl Bernstein, Margie Kaplan, Dora Dolgoff, Mildred Lipsey, Berniece Yousem, and Sylvia Tannenbaum. We don't know the year or the story behind the page. Can you help us?



## HERE IS WHAT THE A. Z. A. CONVENTION HOSTESSES HAVE TO SAY

Dear Conventioneers:

Before, we said, "Why don't you come up some time"? Now that you're here, we want you to be sure to "come up". We'll see to it that you have some place to go; not only that,--we'll see that you have some one to go to, and some one that will be a real care-taker once you're there.

We want to see you have the best time in your life, so please see us as soon as possible. All our girl friends (and do we HAVE 'em) are anxiously awaiting your call. All you have to do is get a number from us, and your time will certainly be filled pleasantly until you leave the fair city of Omaha, the center of America's feminine pulchritude, and that last word takes in a lot of territory.

Greta Garbo, Jean Harlow, and Minnie Mouse have nothing on our stars when it comes to real, honest-to-goodness dates. The best in the west are at your disposal. Don't let the opportunity slip through your fingers. We'll be seein' ya-----

The Hostesses

Beulah	Ann	Sara	Margie	Mary	Louise
Pearl	Bernice	Dora	Mildred	Sylvia	



"TAKING STOCK...THE HISTORY OF  
JEWISH BUSINESSES IN NEBRASKA  
AND COUNCIL BLUFFS, 1850-1950"



Did your family have a business or store? Is it still operating? Where was it? How did it get started? Who ran it? What happened to it?

Jews have been in all parts of the business world here--peddlers, jewelers, grocers, insurance men, meat purveyors, druggists, dry goods merchants--the list is endless.

Tell us about your family's business, or write about another local enterprise. Contact us if you need help researching a firm or to get the name of one to write about.



\$100 1st prize in each category  
\$50 2nd prize in each category

Category I: 7th through 12th grade; 500-700 words

Category II: College and graduate students; 1,000-1,500 words

Category III: Adults in the general community; 1,000-1,500 words

December 1 deadline.

The Early History of the Jewish  
Home for the Aged in Omaha, Nebraska

by Allan Greene

The following essay  
was submitted to the  
first Morris C. Fell-  
man Memorial Essay  
Competition in 1983.

In 1910, an auxiliary of the syna-  
gogue Chevra B'nai Israel was or-  
ganized and became known as the  
Daughters of Israel Aid Society.

In 1912, the Society decided to  
establish a home for the aged and  
a mikvah. A lot with house on it,  
located at 25th and Charles, was  
purchased for \$5000. The alterations,  
an additional erection of one mikvah,  
cost an additional \$2200. The mikvah  
was opened in 1917 and the home it-  
self in January, 1918. Mr. Samuel  
Ravitz and Mr. Sam Newman served as  
a building committee.

The home itself was a two-story  
frame building with five rooms on the  
first floor and six rooms on the se-  
cond. The first floor had two bed-  
rooms with a capacity of five beds,  
a living room, dining room, kitchen,  
and a bathroom. Males generally oc-  
cupied these rooms.

The upstairs rooms housed the staff,  
usually an older married couple and  
the mikvah attendant. There were two  
bathrooms upstairs. One room was used  
as an isolation room for a resident  
who was ill. The other three rooms  
were used for three female residents.  
Residents at the home were known as  
"inmates."

In addition to the residents at the  
home, three basement rooms of the  
mikvah housed residents as well. These  
were not desirable rooms because of  
the cement floors and the heat from the  
nearby boiler.

The staff of the home consisted of an  
older couple who resided with the re-  
sidents and who received \$40 a month,

plus maintenance through the early  
20's. A maid who came in daily re-  
ceived \$6.00 per week and a janitor  
to attend the furnace in the winter  
received \$1.50 per week. The mikvah  
attendant received \$30 a month and  
maintenance. She was permitted to  
live at the house with her daughter  
who was retarded. They shared a bed-  
room on the second story and used one  
of the basement rooms in the mikvah  
house during the day.

Although the caption on the picture  
of the home for the aged which ap-  
peared in the December 31, 1914, An-  
nual Report Book of the Jewish Wel-  
fare Federation of Omaha was "where  
the old folks are made happy," the  
home was a rather drab place to live,  
with only the very basic services  
available.

Three meals a day were served: break-  
fast at 7:00 a.m., dinner (lunch)  
at 12:00 and supper at 5:00 p.m.  
Old newspapers frequently served as  
tablecloths. In the afternoon, fruit  
or tea was served.

There was little structure at the  
home and residents could stay up as  
late as they pleased and they could  
go and come at will. There was no  
recreational program. There was a  
"Victrola" that was used, but no  
radio. Mostly, the residents spent  
their day at the synagogue across  
the way or sat around the kitchen  
table or on stiff chairs in the  
living room.

The home experienced numerous diffi-  
culties in the early 20's, parti-  
cularly in the handling of funds, on  
their admissions policy and on the  
up-keep of the facilities. The ac-  
tual head of the home was the Presi-  
dent of the Society and the collect-  
ion of funds was left in the hands  
of a few officers of the Society.

Dues for the Society were \$3.00 per year and funds were collected as the officers had time to attend to their collection. The home was invited to become a constituent member of the Jewish Welfare Federation in 1921. A coordinating committee comprised of representatives from the Federation and the Israel Aid Society was constituted to handle the executive administration of the affairs of the home.

Still, the home experienced numerous difficulties and in 1929, the Council of Social Agencies threatened to remove the home from Community Chest funding if improvements were not forthcoming. Since these funds amounted to nearly half of the operating budget of the home, certain administrative changes were implemented dealing with the handling of the funds and in record keeping.

In its first ten years of operation, the home had served 37 people, admitting 2 to 3 a year with a maximum of 11 persons at any one time. It cost about \$1.50 per day or \$500 per year to care for each resident in 1928. Of the first 37 residents, 7 were cared for entirely free, 7 residents had paid a lump sum of \$300 to \$500, and the remainder paid an arbitrary amount ranging from \$3.00 to \$60.00 a month for their care.

The Depression years of the 1930's and the war in the early 1940's apparently pre-occupied the concerns of the Jewish community to effect any significant changes in the care of the elderly in a Jewish home. It was not until 1947 that a Federation committee undertook a study which led to the opening in February, 1948, of the Dr. Philip Sher Home on 52nd St. for 40 residents. In 1956, the Sher Wing consisting of 8 additional rooms and a porch was added. In 1961, the Cherniack/Chapman Wing, consisting of 12 rooms and a lounge was added. The Dr. Sher Home was replaced in November, 1982, by the 50-room Rose Blumkin Jewish Home adjacent to the Jewish Community Center on 132nd Street. And thus, the Jewish Community of Omaha has continued to provide and to expand and better its services and facilities to meet the needs of its Jewish elderly for more than 65 years.

## DAUGHTERS OF ISRAEL ARE FOUNDING A HOME

### S. Ravitz Buys Morse Residence, Twentieth and Davenport Streets.

Samuel Ravitz has bought for the Daughters of Israel Aid society the W. V. Morse residence at the northeast corner of Twentieth and Davenport streets for an old people's home. Possession will be given April 1 by Mrs. Morse, who makes the sale through Meyer Tatle, and the household will then be fitted up for immediate occupancy. The house, containing ten large rooms, with a lot eighty feet on Davenport and 132 on Twentieth, was bought for \$9,000. The site is on the east slope of Capitol Hill and across Twentieth street from the High school, and is a pleasant one. The property east of the Morse home in the same block occupying 184 by 132 feet is the Governor Boyd homestead.

Where the Morse garage now stands is the intention of the Daughters of Israel to build a free bath house for people living outside whom the society is looking after to use. This will be put up and equipped in time to use this summer.

Undated World-Herald clipping

### Thousand at Dedication of Jewish Old People's Home

One thousand persons witnessed the dedication of the Jewish Old People's

Home yesterday afternoon. The home is situated at Twenty-fifth and Charles streets. A feature of the new home is a beautiful bath house in the rear. The interior of the bath house is entirely decorated in white. The home contains eight finely equipped baths. The home is built to accommodate about twenty-five persons.

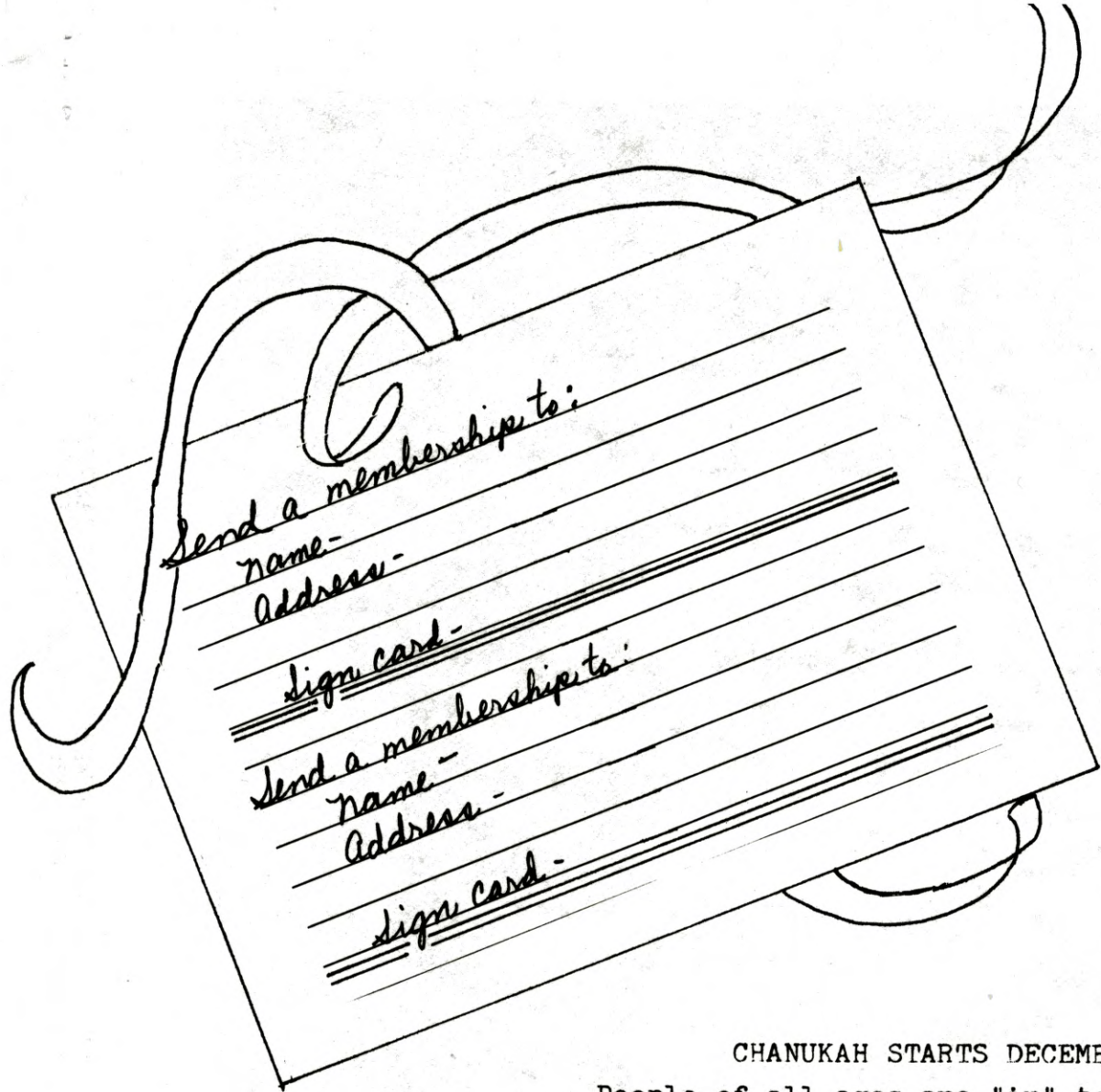
S. Ravitz, chairman of the building committee for the new home, presided at the meeting. The afternoon program included several musical numbers by members of the Y. W. H. A. and the Y. M. H. A. A recitation by Miss Helen Levinson completed the entertainment.

The dedicatory address was given by Mr. H. B. Zimman. Interesting talks were also made by Messrs. Henry Monsky, Charles Elgutter and Isadore Ziegler.

By purchasing the keys to the home Mr. Joe Steinberg obtained the privi-

August 6, 1919 World-Herald clipping. Unfortunately, the rest of the article is missing.





CHANUKAH STARTS DECEMBER 18

People of all ages are "in" to discovering their past. Take care of some of your Chanukah gifts for family and friends by sending memberships to the NJHS. We'll enclose a card with your greeting.

P.S. Don't forget to renew your membership, too!

Please enroll me as a member of the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society.  
I enclose 1985-1986 dues for the category checked:

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
 ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

- Benefactor.....\$1,000
- Life Member.....500
- Business.....250
- Patron.....100
- Organization.....25
- Family.....15
- Individual.....10
- Student.....5

Mail to: Nebraska Jewish Historical Society  
 333 South 132 Street  
 Omaha, Nebraska 68154



WHO ARE THESE ELEGANT YOUNG PEOPLE AND WHAT IS THE OCCASION?  
WE NEED YOUR HELP IN IDENTIFYING THIS PHOTO FROM OUR FILES!