

A Proud Past - A Bright Future

The Omaha Nation Visits Bellevue

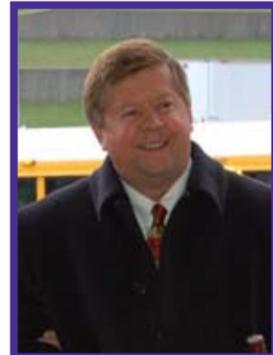
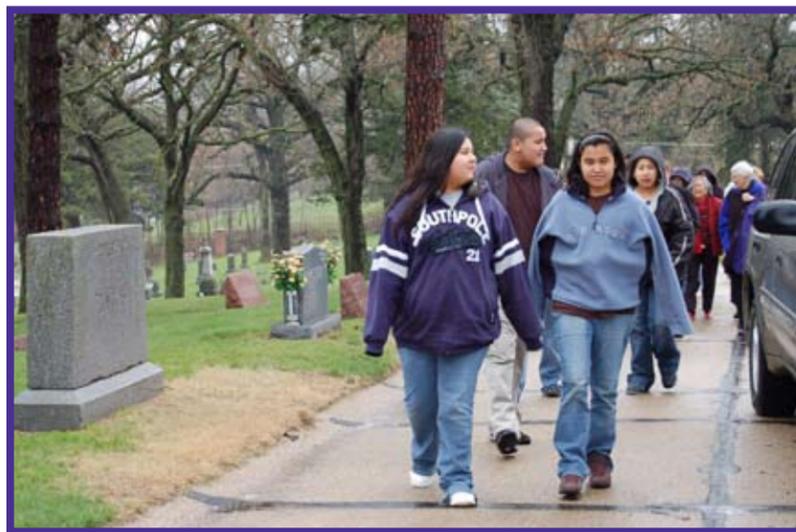
April 11, 2007

The ceremony on Wednesday, April 11, 2007, commemorated the restoration of the graves of Omaha Chief Big Elk, Susan Fontenelle Neals, Lucien and Meumbane Fontenelle, and over 1,000 military graves. It was a celebration of a chapter in history that unites us.

In the spring, 2006, Logan Fontenelle, Dr. John Deegan, and Phil Kaldahl began working together to develop a further understanding of the history of the Bellevue/Offutt Community. Mr. Fontenelle, great, great, great grandson of Chief Big Elk, visited Bellevue's secondary schools and began speaking to the Bellevue Board of Education and students about the role Chief Big Elk and the Omaha Nation played in the development of the community.

Bellevue students decided to raise funds to help restore the gravestone of Chief Big Elk, add a gravestone for Susan Fontenelle Neals, granddaughter to Chief Big Elk, add a bench with the abbreviated history, and add a stone for Chief Logan Fontenelle at Fontenelle Forest. Mission and Logan Fontenelle Middle School students and Bellevue East and Bellevue West High Schools FBLA students raised \$3,000 for the project.

There are over 1,000 military veterans buried in the Bellevue Cemetery. The Bellevue Public Schools and City of Bellevue worked together to clean up and reset the stones. The Bellevue East and Bellevue West High Schools AFJROTC worked with Todd Addison and members of the City of Bellevue in the clean up project.



The History that Unites Us

Omaha Chief Big Elk, U. S. Army Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, and frontier trader Peter Sarpy represent patterns woven into the history of the Bellevue/Offutt Community.

On May 16, 1804, Private Pierre Cruzette and Private Francois Labiche, both half Omaha and half French, enlisted in Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery to spend almost three years exploring the new Louisiana Territory from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean. Crusette and Labiche were great scouts. They were skilled Missouri River boatmen; knew English, French, and lower-Missouri and sign languages; and could scout, fish, and hunt.

On July 21, 1804, the 45-member U.S. Army Corps crossed the Platte River and camped near Offutt Base Lake in Bellevue. Their next five days were spent at White Catfish Camp by Fontenelle Forest. Here Lewis and Clark raised the first American Flag west of the Missouri and sent Cruzette and others on a "scouting mission" across Sarpy County. This U. S. Army Corps camped here again on their return trip in the summer of 1806.

While camped by Fontenelle Forest, the Corps was unaware of the Nebraska Phase Native Americans who lived here from AD 950 to 1350. Bellevue archeologists Robert Gilder and Eric Kaldahl have dug Nebraska Phase lodge sites in Bellevue.



Chief Big Elk

In the 1820s, traders, the federal government, and missionaries established early Bellevue with the Lucien Fontenelle Trading Post and an Indian Agency located in Fontenelle Forest and the Peter Sarpy Trading Post about 800 yards south. In 1846, Peter Sarpy outfitted the Mormon Battalion that joined the U. S. Army for the Mexican-American War. Both Baptists and Presbyterians opened schools to educate Omaha, Pawnee, and Otoe children.

During this time, Omaha Chief Big Elk kept peace in Eastern Nebraska and represented the Omahas before two presidents in Washington, DC. Lucien Fontenelle married Big Elk's daughter Meumbane. She and Peter Sarpy's wife Nicomi, an Iowa princess, became Nebraska's First Ladies with famous children and grandchildren.

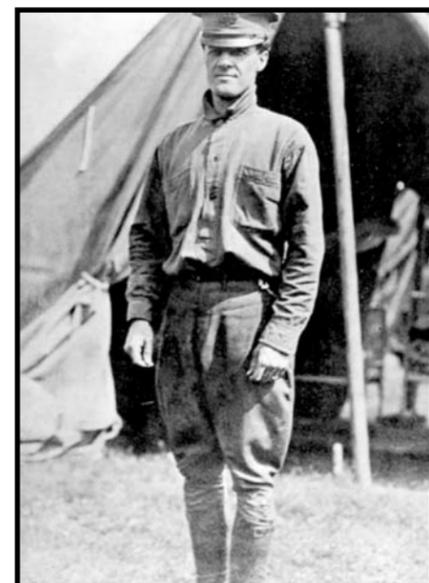
In 1854, Omaha Chief Logan Fontenelle, grandson of Big Elk, and other Omahas signed a treaty selling five million acres of Omaha land to the U. S. for a mere 17.8 cents per acre, a treaty not totally kept by the U. S. The Omahas moved from Bellevue to land they kept in Thurston County. The Omahas also gave land to start Bellevue.

Section 13 of the treaty gave one square mile of Omaha land to the Bellevue Presbyterian Mission to be divided into lots and sold for funds used to build another mission in Thurston County. This square mile is known as the Mission Reserve.

Olde Town Bellevue, Bellevue City Hall, Washington Park, South Park, and Betz, Bertha Barber, Central, and Mission schools are on the Mission Reserve. The story of this important Omaha gift has often been omitted from Bellevue histories.

Also in 1854, Congress created and opened the Nebraska Territory to permanent settlers. The Omahas moved to Thurston County, and pioneers crossed the Missouri to develop Bellevue. They wanted Bellevue to be the Nebraska Territorial Capital and the headquarters for the new western railroad. They platted Bellevue for 20,000 people, but the railroad was built in Omaha; therefore the honors and growth went to the city of Omaha. Bellevue's population dwindled to 500.

Still historical patterns flourished. In 1856, Bellevue's first financial institution was named the Fontenelle Bank after Logan Fontenelle who had been killed by the Sioux while on a hunting trip and was buried near the trading post in Fontenelle Forest where his parents Lucien and Meumbane had been buried.



Major General George Crook

In June of 1896, soldiers moved into the new U.S. Fort Crook located on the southern edge of Bellevue. Very quickly a new town developed and a school opened just west of the Fort, and they too were named Fort Crook after Civil War hero and Frontier General George Crook who had served at Fort Omaha.

The first wood-frame Fort Crook School has been replaced by a modern Fort Crook Elementary School located on the eastern edge of Offutt's Capehart Housing. Here children learn how Native Americans were declared to be human beings.

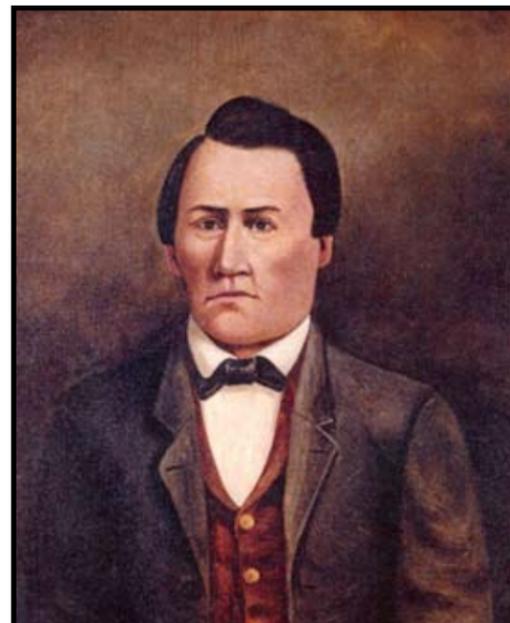
In 1879, General Crook was sympathetic to the legal cause of Ponca Chief Standing Bear and his people. The government took Ponca Nebraska lands and sent the Poncas to Oklahoma. Standing Bear's 16-year-old son was one of 280 out of 710 Poncas who died when they were driven south. When Standing Bear brought his son back for burial in Nebraska on Ponca tribal land, General Crook was ordered to arrest the Poncas. Before the Army took them to Fort Omaha, the Poncas found refuge with the Omahas.

Then Crook sought out Thomas Henry Tibbles, an Omaha Herald editor who championed Native American rights. Tibbles found attorneys and helped them develop a case based on the new 14th Amendment to the Constitution which stated that no person could be deprived of "life, liberty, or property without due process of law." A successful trial declared that Standing Bear was a human being protected by the Constitution. He then returned to his Nebraska home. In 1880, Tibbles and Big Elk's grandson Henry Fontenelle traveled to

Oklahoma Territory to champion Ponca rights there.

Tibbles is buried in the Bellevue Cemetery. He and General Crook had endured the painful initiation into the Omaha's Soldier Lodge, "a great secret fraternity."

After his first wife died, Tibbles married Susette "Bright Eyes" La Flesche. They traveled in the East and Europe, often with Standing Bear, supporting Native American rights. Susette was the daughter of Omaha Chief Iron Eye and Mary Gale. Peter Sarpy had married Mary's mother, Iowa Princess Nicomi, after her first husband Dr. John Gale died. Susette is



Chief Logan Fontenelle

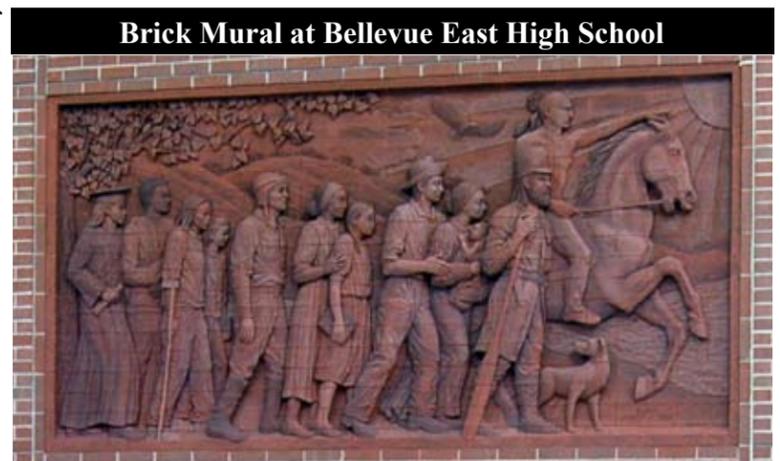
an honored member of the Nebraska Hall of Fame in the State Capitol. Her famous sister Susan became a rare 19th century female doctor and provided medical services for the Omahas in Thurston County.

In Bellevue, Fort Crook completed military missions for the Spanish American War, World War I, and World War II. Offutt Field at Fort Crook provided the name for Offutt Air Force Base after World War II when the Strategic Air Command was established in Bellevue where the Martin Bomber Plant had constructed planes that contributed to the military successes in the European and Japanese Theaters of War.

In the past 50 years, Native American, military, and civilian patterns continue to be woven into Bellevue history. On September of 1954, Omaha Chief Big Elk was buried in the Bellevue Cemetery with 1,000 spectators from Bellevue and the Omaha Nation. Fontenelle Forest was named a historical district because of the histories of the Nebraska Phase Native Americans, the Omahas, and trappers and traders. The Fontenelle Nature Association holds an annual Native American Celebration. The Fort Crook section of Offutt Air Force Base was named a historical district for its contributions to American defense. An annual Offutt Open House celebrates our military history. A state historical marker in the Bellevue City Hall recognizes Bellevue as Nebraska's first permanent settlement. Annual "Arrows to Aerospace" and "Veterans' Day" Parades honor our past.

Yes, the Bellevue/Offutt Community remembers its heritage. After Bellevue High split into Bellevue East and West High Schools, a stained glass window was commissioned for Native Americans. When Bellevue Junior High split, one school was named Logan Fontenelle Middle School and the other was named Mission Middle School to reflect our histories. Central Elementary School honors Omaha Chief Big Elk because the school is located at the bottom of Elk Hill where he had first been buried. LeMay Elementary School honors General Curtis LeMay who led Strategic Air Command's Cold War Mission of Peace Through Strength. Offutt AFB also carried out important missions for the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Persian Gulf Wars.

A beautiful brick mural honoring Omaha Chief Big Elk was commissioned and finished in 2000 for the lobby of Bellevue East High School. An exact copy of the mural will be placed at Bellevue West High School.



Brick Mural at Bellevue East High School

Bellevue continues its 50-year leadership role with Native Americans to obtain Impact Aid funds to educate children in military and Native American communities. Bellevue Superintendent of Schools Dr. John Deegan, as President of the National Association of Federally Impacted Schools, helps rewrite and improve the 50-year old law which funds school districts serving military and Native American students.

Bellevue schools will continue to remember their heritage. When Lewis and Clark Middle School opens for the first time in August 2007, a history will feature Privates Pierre Cruzette and Francois Labiche, both half Omaha and half French, who served as "scouts" for U. S. Army Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark's Corps of Discovery that camped three times in Bellevue. The Lewis and Clark Middle School mascot has been selected—THE SCOUTS.



Native Americans who came in contact with Lewis and Clark made the Expedition to the Pacific Ocean a success.

The April 11, 2007, restoration of Native American and Military graves in Bellevue is also a rededication to three patterns woven into the history of the Bellevue/Offutt Community and a sign of respect for all those who worked together to help Bellevue, Nebraska, be such a fine city.



United We Stand



