



North Bottoms Neighborhood History

North Bottoms is one of two neighborhoods originally settled by Germans from Russia, who came to the area when the land was owned by Burlington Railroad and was not yet part of the city of Lincoln. The Germans from Russia had a strong influence on the area. The neighborhood itself was shaped by these people, who built small houses on long, narrow lots in an imitation of Old World models.



One feature the emigrants brought with them from Russia was the "summer kitchen," which is a separate, smaller building situated close to the kitchen door of the main residence. In Russia, the summer kitchen was built to prevent fires, since the homes in Russia often had thatch roofs. These kitchens were built in Lincoln as well, even though they were no longer needed. **(1)** A couple of these buildings still exist; one at 1136 New Hampshire has been restored. **(2)**

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places is Hayward School, located at 9th and Charleston. Hayward school played a special role in the education of the neighborhood children, many of whom were known as "beet-field children." In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was a large market for beet sugar, and the sugar beet industry of central and western Nebraska came to depend on Germans from Russia as a major source of seasonal labor. Burlington Railroad even ran Beet Field specials that transported entire families out west for the harvest season. **(3)**

One woman named Emma Engel, who lived at 1010 N 7th Street, was interviewed in 1980 about the beet fields. She remembered riding the train out to Scottsbluff: "We went out to Scottsbluff to Uncle Henry....Uncle Henry had fields of beets and we'd thin 'em out and crawl on our hands and knees. We had

our knees padded, oh, they'd get sore." **(4)** Since beet-field children usually missed weeks of school, Lincoln Public Schools devised special programs at Hayward for them. These programs condensed the year's coursework into the available time.. **(5)**

For a time, the North Bottoms neighborhood also contained three churches where the services were conducted exclusively in German. Even as late as 1927, a church was built at 1324 New Hampshire for an Evangelical German Lutheran congregation. This church, called St. John's, was built for a group that broke off from the original St. John's, located at 10th and New Hampshire. The original was constructed in 1907. **(6)** Of course, as the younger generation of Germans from Russia left the area and assimilated into the larger society, the churches shifted their services to English. As the area began to lose its distinctively immigrant population, the churches began to diversify in step with the residents. St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church at 1324 New Hampshire was purchased in 1957 by a Latvian congregation, after the original German congregation had dwindled to ten people. **(7)**

This building was just recently purchased by the Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church in 2001. The original St. John's was demolished in the 1970s.. **(8)**



The North Bottoms is now home to a number of students from the University, as well as families from a wide variety of backgrounds. While the neighborhood is no longer an isolated ethnic enclave, its "village" character is still very apparent due to the clear physical boundaries of the neighborhood. The area is hemmed in by natural and human-made borders, including Salt Creek to the North and I-180 to the west. The State Fairgrounds and UNL campus lie to the east and south.

Sources

1. Historic and Architectural Site Survey of Malone, Near South and South Salt Creek Neighborhoods, Lincoln Nebraska. (Lincoln: College of Architecture, 1974), 92.
2. City of Lincoln, Department of Urban Development. Area Focus Plan-North Bottoms. 2001.
3. Ed Zimmer, Historic Preservation Planner for the City of Lincoln.
4. Nebraska State Historical Society, transcript of interview with Emma Engel, 1981.
5. Ed Zimmer.
6. City of Lincoln, Area Focus Plan, 2001.
7. Junior League of Lincoln. An Architectural Album. (Lincoln: Jacob North Printing Co., Inc., 1979), 74.
8. City of Lincoln, Area Focus Plan, 2001.