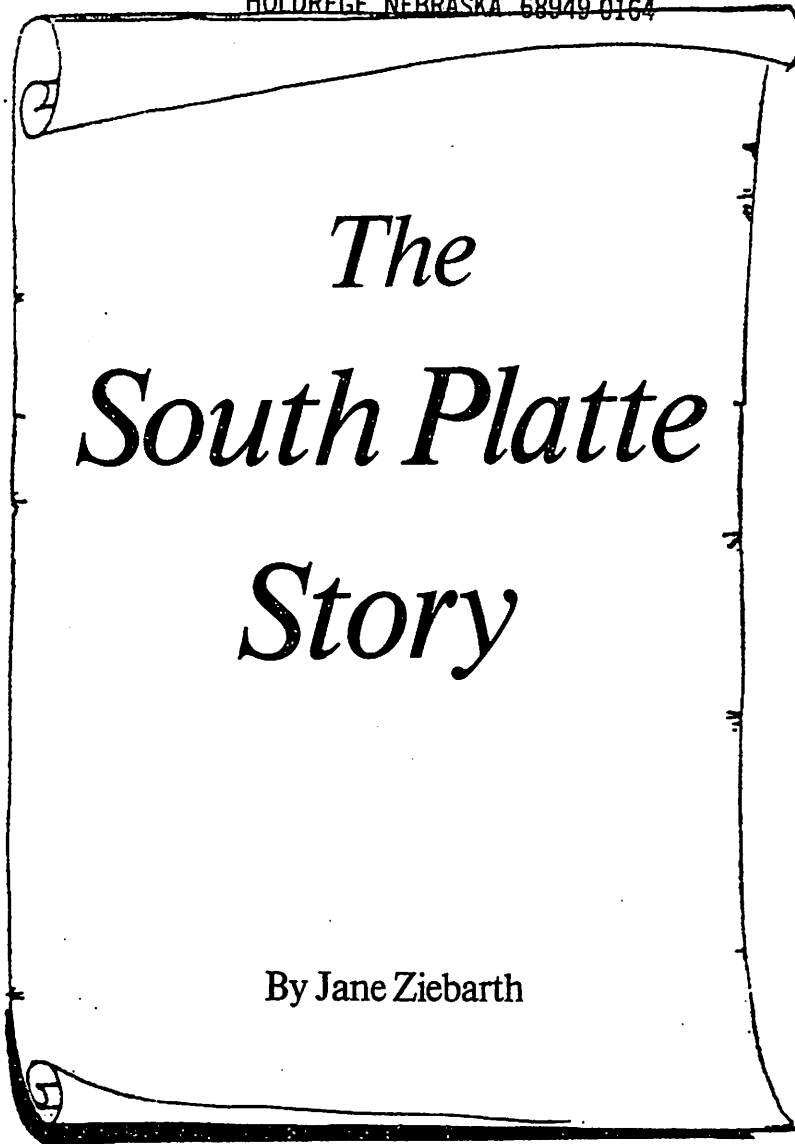


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*The*  
*South Platte*  
*Story*

By Jane Ziebarth

The South Platte United Chambers of Commerce is an organization made up of forty-one local Chambers of Commerce located in seventeen counties in South Western and South Central Nebraska. The borders of the South Platte United Chambers of Commerce includes that area south of the Platte River from Hamilton, Clay and Nuckolls Counties on the east to the Colorado state line on the west.

The South Platte United Chambers of Commerce is the brainchild of Ralph O. Canaday of Hastings. In 1934 Mr. Canaday stated, "Nebraska is the finest state in the union. This is the finest region in the state and here are the finest people on earth. But the region has not been given the consideration it should have in many matters. We need an organization that can more efficiently present the region's needs to legislative bodies and public officials."

At the invitation of Hastings, Minden and Holdrege Chambers of Commerce, one hundred and forty representatives from twenty-four towns met at the Dale Hotel in Holdrege on April 4, 1934. At this meeting the organization was formed and named the South Platte United Chambers of Commerce. The following preamble was adopted: "The purpose of this organization is to further the economic and social welfare of the State of Nebraska with particular reference to the territory from which it draws."

The first regular meeting was held in Oxford on May 3, 1934. L. B. Stiner of Hastings was elected the first president, Fred Kingsley of Minden, Vice President, Adolph Held of Holdrege, Secretary and G. E. Shallenberger of Elwood as Treasurer.

The first resolution called for the South Platte United Chambers of Commerce to support a program of improvement for Highway Number 3, with a bridge across the Missouri River at Rulo, Nebraska and federalization of the road. It is now U. S. Number 136. This resolution has been accomplished to the letter.

The first major project was the promotion of the Tri-County Power & Irrigation District. This dream became a reality. The proof of this reality can be attained in traveling from Lake McConaughy and Kingsley Dam to Lake Jefferies, Midway Lake and Johnson Lake, seeing the power plants, the Canaday Steam Plant and the thousands of acres of irrigated land along the way.

The organization worked to promote P. W. A. Projects and irrigation and power development in the area. In 1935, Val Kuska, a Burlington Railroad representative, was sent to Washington D.C. to petition for flood control work on the Republican River.

In 1938 a farmer from Nuckolls County went to Washington in behalf of the Chamber to promote the Harlan County Reservoir and Irrigation project.

1937 marked the beginning of the sponsorship of the Pasture-Forage-Livestock program, at a meeting in Holdrege, with five hundred and fifty people in attendance. This project was later taken over by the Omaha Chamber of Commerce.

The meetings of the South Platte United Chambers of Commerce were suspended from January 1943 to June 1945 during World War II, due to travel restrictions and difficulty in getting a meal served to a large group.

In 1950 the first specific plan for needed highway improvement was established. The State Highway Department was asked to improve the roads most important to the South Platte area. The east-west roads to be hard surfaced first and then the North-South roads. This has been accomplished.

In 1953 the extension of natural gas pipe lines to provide an economical fuel for pump irrigation was promoted.

Irrigation clinics were started in 1954, in cooperation with the University of Nebraska and the Burlington Railroad. Six clinics were held that year, at Campbell, Arapahoe, Elwood, Oxford, McCook and Trenton. Six clinics were also held in 1955. These irrigation clinics were held for about eight years. As the farmers and businessmen became better informed on irrigation, a change was made to livestock clinics. These programs explained the advantages of long range farming and livestock feeding operations.

In 1959 a twenty-fifth anniversary book was published, and the twenty-fifth anniversary meeting was held at Holdrege.

The South Platte United Chambers of Commerce supports a strong University of Nebraska, in particular the College of Agriculture. The South Platte United Chambers of Commerce helped raise \$5,000.00 to start a vegetable crop research program in the area. The project is now being carried on by the University of Nebraska Agriculture College. The organization is an ardent booster of the Nebraska Cornhuskers, even through the lean years. In 1938 the first "Football Special" to Lincoln was initiated. This October marks the 39th annual trip to a University game. Each year three hundred and fifty or more "South-Platters" make the trip. The South Platte United Chambers of Commerce worked with the University of Nebraska, U. S. Senators and Representatives to obtain the necessary funds for the establishment of the U.S.D.A. Livestock Research Center in the eastern part of the old Naval Ammunition Depot in Clay County. This is now in operation and eventually will employ nearly fifty scientists not to mention other types of employees that will be required. It has the possibility of being the largest Livestock Research Center in the world. The South Platte United Chambers of Commerce has also worked for an increased sugar beet acreage, and the group has met with

representatives of the Post Office Department to help overcome the delay in mail deliveries. The South Platte United Chambers of Commerce supported the establishment of the Central Nebraska Technical School at Hastings.

Present projects include: An interest in legislation relative to a Natural Gas Regulatory Body, a north-south interstate highway through the area, an agricultural weather forecasting service for the area. A legislative committee was appointed in order for the Chamber to become more active during the legislative sessions. State Senators are entertained by the South Platte United Chambers of Commerce, in order to become better acquainted and to increase influence in legislative matters. Each year, a young student in the South Platte area is selected for the "Youth Achievement Award." This award is given for an achievement which is national in scope.

The South Platte United Chambers of Commerce is the oldest organization of its kind in the United States. Its members have enjoyed over forty-three years of working together for the common good of the area and the state. It will continue to live as long as the member towns desire to enjoy the progressiveness and friendships that have been developed over the years. If the interest of the old-timers can be continued, and many have been attending for forty-three years, and the interest of the younger leaders in the communities can be gained, then the prediction that the South Platte United Chambers of Commerce is just in its infancy is accurate. This organization has succeeded beyond its founders wildest dreams.

The South Platte United Chambers of Commerce holds regular meetings the second Tuesday of each month. Each member town serves as a host, due to the large area represented a town hosts a meeting only about every three years.

The president of the S.P.U.C.C., to a degree, influences the emphasis or the direction the organization places on important projects. The last few years presidents have been especially interested in reorganization of the S.P.U.C.C. in tourism, sports and recreation in Nebraska and promotion of the area through pamphlets, brochures and displays. It is very possible that the energy crisis with particular emphasis on Solar Energy may be the project of the future.

In researching the records of the South Platte United Chambers of Commerce and visiting with some of the members I now realize the work, disappointments and success that these leaders in the history of the South Platte have experienced. I surely hope this group continues in the future to strive for projects that will benefit the area and the state.