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## Sketches From Territorial History

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## SKETCHES FROM TERRITORIAL HISTORY.

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BY A. G. WARNER.

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## I.—IN THE BEGINNING.

One not acquainted with the early history of this commonwealth may be startled, while looking through a file of newspapers handed down from the fifties, to see the headline, "Discovery of Gold in Nebraska." The explanation is that Pike's Peak itself was once included within the generous limits of this territory. By the act of congress, which brought into existence Kansas and Nebraska, the twin children of Douglas' ambition to do something spectacular in national politics, the boundaries of the latter territory were described as extending from the northern boundary of Kansas to the southern boundary of the British Possessions, and from the Missouri river and the western boundary of Minnesota on one side to the summit of the Rocky mountains on the other. This vast tract contained about 351,558 square miles of land, and at one time over 15,000 square miles on the western slope of the Rockies was added. In the early days the counties were marked out on the same magnificent scale. Though along the Missouri river they were soon reduced to a more manageable size, yet farther to the west they were for a long time planned with such dimensions as it was natural for men to give, who half doubted if away from the Missouri bottoms the land would ever be worth ten cents a township.

In preparing for the first election of councilmen and representatives, acting Governor Cuming marked off certain preliminary counties. Among others was "Jones county," the boundaries of which extended from "a point sixty miles west of the Missouri river, at the northwest corner of Richardson county," thence west along the south bank of the Platte river to the Rockies, thence southwesterly to the Kansas line, and so back to Richardson county and around to the place of beginning.\*

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\* Acts of Ter. Assem., Vol. I.

Jesse Lowe was sent to find how many inhabitants there were in this vast district, and to make arrangements for the election of a corresponding number of assemblymen. His report of December 10, 1854, is almost pathetic in its simple acknowledgment of the uselessness of his mission. After taking half a page to state what he was sent to do, and to describe the boundaries of the would-be county, the report comes to a sudden stop with the information that "said county contains no inhabitants at all, save a few in one corner that properly belong in Richardson, and who ought to vote there." Localities did not always wait for a census or for any formality when they wished to hold an election. It is said that the first election held in the town of Platsmouth, for sheriff and city officers, was peculiar in that there was no authority for it whatever. It was before land had been opened for pre-emption, no one had any legal claims to anything, and so it was just as correct to hold an illegal election as it was to live there at all. Besides it was a kind of natural necessity to hold an election of some kind, for the citizens were genuine Americans, and wheresoever two or three Americans are gathered together in a community, there will politics be also. It was a festive occasion, as such early gatherings usually were. The partisans of the different men voted industriously, and in lieu of the modern method of "tapping his bar'l," the candidate for sheriff removed the head from a five-gallon keg of whisky and put therein a long-handled tin dipper.\*

In the first assembly there were eight counties, represented by thirteen councilmen and twenty-three representatives. Small, however, as was the number either of representatives or constituents, acting Governor Cuming could not escape the charge of having gerrymandered the election districts. He had been invested with autocratic power by the government at Washington (or rather the office to which he succeeded after the death of Gov. Burt had been so invested), and in this instance, as often subsequently, the appointed governor had a personal or political axe to grind, which the people of the territory were most loth to sharpen. When the assembly met, a series of resolutions was introduced, and under various forms kept being reintroduced during the session. The object of these resolutions was to get Cuming to make

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\* I tell this tale "as 'twas told to me." In these sketches, whenever there is no better authority than the personal recollection of one man, I shall indicate the fact in a foot-note, and the reader can take it for what it may be worth. For the most part I shall not give the names of my informants, but would say in general, that only those who know of the events of which they spoke at first hand have been accepted as authorities. The unaided memory is not a very reliable guide.

known the census returns upon which he had based his apportionment of assemblymen, or even to induce him to tell what instructions he had given the census takers, or finally, to secure the appointment of a committee to investigate these matters.\* But a majority seemed to be always ready to stand by the governor; the resolutions were bundled about from the table to the committees, and from the committees back to the table, and the returns of the first census of Nebraska remain a state secret even until this day.

It is very credibly stated that nearly all the members of Nebraska's first territorial assembly came over from Iowa for the express purpose of being elected to that body. To make perfectly sure of this devoutly wished for consummation, many of them also imported their constituencies in a body from the other side of the "Grand Father of Waters." Thus, for instance, as acting Governor Cuming had marked out the limits of Burt county and had apportioned to the same two representatives and a councilman, and as there were no inhabitants at all in the district designated, it seemed only an act of neighborly kindness in the citizens of Council Bluffs to arrange a little excursion to go over there and hold an election. Accordingly, at the proper time, two wagon loads of the "uncrowned sovereigns of this great and glorious country" provided themselves with the necessary ballot boxes, election blanks, and a goodly quantity of very refreshing refreshments, and started off to hunt up Burt county. It was a long distance, however, and their patriotism and horses flagged before they got there. Not to disappoint the expectant soul of Cuming, they concluded that one neck of the woods was just as good for their purpose as another, and so, carefully failing to take note of the exact locality, they stopped in a piece of woodland in Washington county, and held a pic-nic there. The result was a set of vastly formal election returns, by which the desired number of assemblymen were returned. The councilman who thus came to represent the alleged county of Burt was Mr. Fulsom, and there is a story still extant which relates how he was given, as a sort of sub-rosa "mark of respect," the title to considerable real property of much value in the city of Omaha. He had awakened the regard of the donors by allowing himself to be "open to conviction" regarding the location of the capitol at that city. This property, or part of it, has since come into the possession of Mrs. Cleveland.†

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\* See House and Council Journals of First Assembly, per index.

† Pers. Rec.

A work which, according to the fashion of the times, was pushed vigorously by the early assemblies of the territory, was the passing of special acts of incorporation. An insurance company was the first to get itself born during March 1855. Then in this and succeeding years followed a vast swarm of railroad companies, universities, paper cities, land-claim associations, medical societies, and wild cat banks. Two universities and a college were incorporated the first year and others soon after. Some of these, like the "Nemaha University at Archer", are not more dead than the would-be towns in which they were established. Each act for the incorporation of an institution of learning declared that its object was "the promotion of the general interests of education, and to qualify students to engage in the several pursuits and employments of society, and to discharge honorably and usefully the various duties of life."\*

More truthfully speaking it might have been said that their object was to give the territory an excuse for teasing congress for land grants, and to enable immigration agents to point to our advanced position in educational matters.

The land claim associations were numerous and aggressive; but as the whole subject will be treated by another member of the Nebraska Historical Society, it may be passed over here with only the remark that these helped to swell the number of special acts with which the assembly was burdened, and of the town companies a few words can best be said here. Wherever a town site had been laid out the only way to get an approximately sound title to the land was to get the town incorporated—lack of inhabitants in no way interfering with that process. There was so much of this work to be done that the acts were cut down to essentials, and the public printer was scandalized by such an abbreviated form as this:

"An act to incorporate the town of Margaretta in the county of Lancaster.

"Sec. 1. Be it enacted by the council and house of representatives of the territory of Nebraska, that the town site claimed by the Richland (Rich land?) company upon which the town of Margaretta is located and situated, together with all additions that may hereafter be made according to law, is hereby declared to be a town, by the name and style of the town of Margaretta.

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\* See acts of first assembly, per index.

"Sec. 2. The said town is hereby made a body corporate and politic, invested with the same power and corporate rights and privileges as are granted in an act entitled 'An act to incorporate Nebraska City.'

"Sec. 3. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage." \*

Most of these cities were brought into being merely that the owners might sell the lots to some "greenhorn" for enough to a good deal more than pay expenses. One of these fiat towns, which from the mining analogy might be said to have been "loaded," was "worked off" with consummate skill. Dr. Henry, one of the early speculators, found a Pawnee village located on the Platte river, and he at once concluded it would be a good place to mark out a town. A map was accordingly made of the place, engraved in the highest style of the art; splendid lithographs represented whole fleets of merchantmen sailing majestically up the Platte; and these baits were taken east with the confidential assurance to all who were inclined to purchase that the town already had eight hundred inhabitants. Along the river front the jealous owner would only sell half lots because they were sure to be so valuable, but further back whole lots and even half blocks were reluctantly parted with.† Many other "towns" went the same pretentious road to oblivion.

But of all the "artificial persons" in the form of bodies "corporate and politic" which were created by the territorial assemblies, by far the most mischievous were the wild cat banks. Bribery was charged in the securing of their charters, rascality was obvious in the management of most of them, and a sort of epidemic cholera infantum destroyed them all before any one of them had celebrated its third birthday.

## II.—WILD CAT BANKS.‡

Just at the beginning of the present century, in the Empire state—that congenial home of all forms of political rascality—Aaron Burr had tried his prentice hand at stealing a bank charter through the

\* See acts of first assembly, per index.

† The facts regarding Henry's speculation were given me by A. D. Jones, E-q., of Omaha. Mr. Jones was the man who surveyed the town site of Omaha and was interested in many of the attempted towns in various parts of the state. It is my experience that these early speculators always prefer to tell of some other man's "deal."

‡ The work of collecting the materials used in this sketch of the early banks was begun in the winter of '84-5 during my senior year at the University of Nebraska; and as a part of that year's work in political economy under Chancellor Manatt, I began the preparation of a paper on

New York legislature under the guise of a bill to incorporate "A company to supply the city of New York with water." \* Following the lead of Massachusetts and New York, various states tried first special and then general acts of incorporation for banks having the right to issue currency, but like the traveller choosing between two roads in an Illinois swamp, whichever way they went they were sure to wish they had gone the other.

When a special act of incorporation was required for each banking company, the only result was that specially active lobbyists were required to get the bills through. Log rolling and bribery were the surest and often the only way to get a company sanctioned by the legislature, and the pass-word was virtually, "you tickle me and I'll tickle you." In the legislature of Pennsylvania, in the year 1813, those who were engineering twenty-five of these bills, incorporating as many banks with an aggregate capital of nine millions, combined and secured their passage. Gov. Snyder, however, vetoed the entire lot, but the only ultimate result was that the next year a more generous policy on the part of the rollers of logs led them to include forty-one banks in their planning, having an aggregate capital of seventeen millions, of which only one-fifth was required to be paid in, and they were then strong enough to incorporate them all over the Governor's veto.†

The birth of such a litter of wild cats as this was surely a great calamity, but the passage of a general enabling act which made possible their spontaneous generation over a whole state seems to have been worse. In 1837 Michigan passed such an act. It was thought that it had been carefully drawn, but almost immediately after its passage "banks were springing up all over the state, in unheard of places, in the depths of the forest, in saw-mills, in asheries, and in the pockets of dishonest men."‡ Their circulation soon became so enormous that there were probably \$300 of it for every man, woman and child in the state. H. M. Utley prepared for the Michigan Historical Society a short but spirited account of this disastrous system, and this paper seems to be the only one heretofore published

"State banks, and *ante bellum* banking in Nebraska." At that time it was not possible to finish the paper because the widely scattered material could not be obtained through correspondence alone. Later, during a visit to the older portions of the state, and finally, while in the employ of the *State Journal*, I was able to go on with the work in which I had become interested, and to investigate the subject with considerable thoroughness.

\* Fin. Rep. Gen. Gov. 1876, p. 131.

† Fin. Rep. 1876, p. 147.

‡ See H. M. Utley in *Michigan Pioneer Collections*, Vol V., 269-222.

which deals directly with these corporate beasts of prey. Paper cities were brought into existence merely to give plausibility to the lie which made people believe that a sound bank was located in some unvisited corner of the state, and mortgages on the lots of these alleged towns were shown as the real estate security required by law. Speaking of the city and bank of Brest, he says that the contemplative traveller who should penetrate to the desolate frog pond which the lithographic advertisements of the place had filled with the navies of the world "would never dream what great possibilities had been unrealized on that spot." Three unhappy commissioners were appointed to see that the banks complied with the law. Spies dogged their steps and notified each bank as they approached it. A considerable amount of specie was carted along before them to enable each bank in turn to make a good showing. "An examination into the affairs of the Lenawee county bank showed the requisite specie on hand. Suddenly descending upon the bank a few days later the amount of cash in the vaults was found to be \$34.20. At the same time the circulation of the bills of the bank amounted to more than \$20,000." The bills from the bank of Singapore secured a wide circulation. One gentleman tells a doleful story of how this bank "busted" while he was wandering about in the western part of the state looking for Singapore.

There had never been such a place in Michigan. In 1839 the bank commissioners made a pathetic report, in which they affirmed that at a low estimate there were \$1,000,000 of worthless notes in the hands of the people. In an agony of haste to get rid of the thing the law was repealed and declared unconstitutional at the same time.

Referring to such banks in Indiana, the governor of that state says in his message for 1853: "The speculator comes to Indianapolis with the bundle of bank notes in one hand and the stock in the other; in twenty-four hours he is on his way to some distant point of the union to circulate what he denominates a legal currency authorized by the legislature of Indiana. He has nominally located his bank in some remote part of the state, difficult of access, where he knows no banking facilities are required, and intends that his notes shall go into the hands of persons who will have no means of demanding their redemption."\*

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\* Fin. Rep. 1876, pp. 149-50.



The experience of the older states seemed never to teach the new ones anything. Each one was as anxious as its predecessors to try the intoxicant influence of inflation, and so each in turn had to go through the sickening, head-achy process of recovering from its financial spree. Even Nebraska was no exception. It has been said already that the first company ever incorporated by a Nebraska legislature was an insurance company. This was the "Western Fire and Marine Insurance and Exchange Company," and was incorporated March 16, 1855. The powers of this body to deal in all sorts of exchange which had been granted in the charter were so stretched as to enable it to do a general banking business, and thus the first wild cat got itself surreptitiously into existence as the "*Western Exchange Bank of Omaha.*" The cashier of this company was Levy R. Tuttle, who was afterwards, under Lincoln, treasurer of the United States; the paying teller of the bank was A. M. Wyman, who at a subsequent period held the same high office. Other bank bills came up in the first legislature and excited hot debate. A. D. Jones, then a representative of Douglas county, and still a resident of Omaha, claims to have been the only man who voted consistently against all of them. In a speech against them he became excited and rhetorical, concluding with the declaration that "when he should be gathered to his fathers, and an humble monument had been erected to his memory, upon the site of his beautiful home in Park Wild, it would gratify his soul to look down from the high battlements of heaven—the region of the blessed—and read upon that monument the simple and truthful inscription: 'Here lies an honest man—He voted against "wild-cat" banks in Nebraska!'" Allen H. Bradford, who was representing Otoe county in the council, was a large, fat man, with a squeaky voice. Concluding a short and sputtery speech in answer to Jones, he spoke as follows: "He (Mr. Jones) talks about the time when he shall be a-look-ing down from the high battlement of heav-en. I wish he was there now, a-singing forever more, among the blessed, instead of being down here a-makin' speeches which don't do any good away out here in Nebras-ky."\*

Whether Jones's burst of eloquence won the day, or whether the

\* Besides an interview with Mr. Jones himself, my authority for the incidents here related is Alfred Sorenson's "Early History of Omaha," pp. 69-71. He gives credit to "A Pen Picture from the Pioneer Legislature," which appeared in the Omaha Herald over the signature "M. I. Grant" (J. Sterling Morton).

schemers could not agree among themselves, is not certain, but at any rate no other bank charters were granted during that session. In the assembly of 1856 the question again came up. J. Sterling Morton was then twenty-three years old and a member of the lower house. Fresh from college and full to the brim with the principles of Wayland's Political Economy, he was convinced that a legitimate bank could only be made up out of surplus capital, and he urged that obviously there was no such capital in the infant territory.\* From that time to this Morton has been active in the politics of the state, always making a brilliant fight, and nearly always an unsuccessful one. In this early legislature he was made chairman of a special committee to which was referred a bill incorporating the proposed bank of Richardson county. From this committee he submitted a minority report adverse to the chartering of this or any other bank, but this report was denied a place in the house journal,† though it subsequently appeared in the newspapers of the time. In that report it was urged that the legend on each bill issued by any of these so-called banks "to pass as money, to act as a tool of exchange in measuring values, or merely as a medium of exchange should be: 'Bill holders individually liable.'" Morton's two colleagues on the committee—Messrs. Wm. B. Hail and John C. Campbell—reported favorably to the incorporation of the bank, only making certain changes in the personnel of the company, which one suspects might have much significance if only some one yet able to interpret it could be found.

The Richardson county bank was not finally chartered, but on the 18th of January, 1856, five banks were chartered, as follows: The Platte Valley Bank (at Nebraska City), the Fontenelle Bank of Bellevue, the Bank of Florence, the Bank of Nebraska (at Omaha), and the Nemaha Valley Bank (at Brownville). The fact that all the bank bills were approved on the same day is indicative of the methods by which their passage was secured. Their charters had been all drawn in the same form. Each company was made up of less than a dozen persons. The stock was either \$50,000 or \$100,000, to be increased at will to \$500,000, and was divided into shares of \$100 each. When \$25,000 of the stock had been *subscribed* the company could organize and go to work. The stock was assignable and trans-

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\* See a letter from J. Sterling Morton to the author.

† See House Journal 2nd ses., p. 139; Jan. 22nd 1856.

ferable according to such regulations as the directors might think proper. The bank had power to issue notes, bills, and other certificates of indebtedness, to deal in exchange and do a general banking business. The stockholders were individually liable for the redemption of the currency issued, but there was no provision for a fixed specie reserve, nor other guard against individual rascality or incompetency.\* There was indeed a provision for an annual report of the condition of the bank, to be made under oath to the territorial auditor, and to be published in three newspapers in the territory, but no such report was ever made.

While the act incorporating the Platte Valley Bank was under consideration, some attempts were made to throw additional safeguards about it. Miller moved to reduce the amount of possible stock from \$500,000 to \$300,000—tabled.† Kirk offered the following amendment:

*“Provided, That no person shall become a stockholder in said bank by transfer or otherwise, until such person shall file a certificate with the commissioner, showing on his oath that he has real or personal property worth twice the amount of stock that he wishes to subscribe, and that over and above the amount of his indebtedness, and that there is no mortgage or incumbrance on said property.*

*“Provided further, That said stockholders shall be held individually liable for the issue of said bank while they are stockholders, even though they may transfer their stock before said issue shall be presented for redemption.”* On motion of Mr. Decker, amendment tabled. Mr. Kirk also offered the following amendment:

*“Provided, Said bank shall not issue more than two dollars for one deposited, and shall not pay or loan out of its specie for any other purposes than for the redemption of its own notes.”* Tabled, and bill passed with all the original loopholes in a fine state of preservation.

In the third session of the territorial assembly in 1857, there was a perfect swarm of bank companies struggling for future existence; but by this time there was a growing suspicion that there might be “something rotten in Denmark,” and Mills S. Reeves and James S. Allen, a majority of the select committee of the council to which were

\* For the charters of these banks in the order in which they are named in the text, see Acts of Second Legislative Session, pp. 224, 230, 177, 202, 203.

† For this and succeeding amendments, see House Journal 2d session Nebraska Legislature, pp. 89-90.

referred "sundry bank bills," made a report discouraging the incorporation of more banks. This report was not so much the outcome of the teachings of economic science as it was an ebullition of good sense and common honesty. The two men boldly say at the beginning that they are "not at all in favor of banking in general, but neither do they feel positive that the new state can get along entirely without banks, for they think that in that case eastern banks would send their money here and monopolize the gold and silver themselves.\* Your committee would further state that if it was true that a little of a thing was good therefore more was better, this legislature might go on and charter a bank for every county in the territory. \* \* \* \* But where are to be found the honest men who would invest capital in a banking operation when every twenty-four square miles has a machine for grinding out a mean representation of money. Your committee can easily conceive that they are recreant to the interests of the persons who would readily engage in the business of securing charters and putting bills in circulation to the extent of their ingenuity, and when no more could be issued a failure would ensue and the bill-holder would have the privilege of holding them." Then in a style as ungrammatical and as innocent of punctuation as the above, they consider the evils of inflation, and again shifting the view, they say: "Look now, sir, at this machine as a bank of exchange and tell us what banker in any of our eastern cities would honor our paper, none would dare because they would have no certainty that the soulless thing would have any existence when the draft should return by express." Further on they say: "But suffer us again to return to the issue. We have now six banks add six more and we have twelve, a bank for every thousand inhabitants there with a capital stock of \$250,000; each would be equal to \$300,000 (\$3,000,000 evidently intended); three times that annually which is the remaining sum which they have a positive right to issue would be \$900,000 (\$9,000,000), this upon equal division would give to every man, woman and child \$750 currency, allowing every fifth of our twelve thousand inhabitants to be business men, then we would have for each man \$3,750. Now, sir, your committee would ask if there is a man upon this floor that does not see how perfectly absurd and ridiculous this whole affair is, even in the supposition that the capital stock was

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\*These extracts are copied from the Council Journal *verbatim et literatim*. The full report may be found, Council Jr., 3d ses., pp 115-17.

reduced to fifty thousand dollars for each institutions, this would still leave for every man \$750. We would ask again; of what use would this money be to the bankers except to loan, but if they should loan, where would be their security for \$187,580 dollars?

"There is another view of this matter it would be well to look at. Who are the men that ask for these charters? Are they sovereign squatters of Nebraska? Not at all; most if not all of the leading men are from other states, who would be much obliged to us now to legislate to them the opportunity of filling our pockets with their bills, but who would laugh us to scorn when they had our gold and our property in their possession." In speaking of these banks as places of deposit, the committee say: "Who in his senses would think of intrusting money in the vaults of such institutions, if past experience would teach us anything. We would dread them as a highway robber, for hundreds who have had confidence in them have woke up in the morning and have found that the body of the soulless thing had evaporated and that there was nothing to represent their pocketful of bills but an old store, the counter, and a broom." The committee next take high moral grounds, for after saying that "it will avail us little to wail our folly and wickedness when the territory is bankrupt," they point to the fact that "privileges, exemption, and facilities for speculation" encourage and multiply rascals. "The honest portion of the community with vice constantly before their eyes become assimilated with it, its odious features and soon become familiarized, they wink at the monster and it is well for them if they are not fascinated and become parties in a grand swindle of the confiding and unthinking portion of the community."

Thus far, the report of Messrs. Reeves and Allen is climacteric, and one only wishes that the public printer had helped them out more on the grammar and punctuation, but the conclusion is weak. They "are not willing to assume the responsibility of saying that there shall be no more banks chartered at this session of the legislature," and only recommend certain amendments in case the council should see fit to pass any of the bills referred to them. The amendments recommended limited the amount of stock to \$300,000, reduced the maximum interest chargeable to eighteen per cent per annum, provided for the deposit of adequate securities with the state treasurer, and made the stock non-transferable except after three months' notice of the contem-

plated transfer. A minority report from the same select committee favored the chartering of the six banks in question, but later the standing committee on corporations, S. M. Kirkpatrick, chairman, reported adversely, as more than a dozen banks had applied, and it would be madness to charter them all.\* The result of the struggle was, that during the third session only two more banks were turned loose to prey upon the wealth of the young territory—the bank of DeSoto† and the bank of Tekama,‡ both acts being finally passed Feb. 13, 1857. Both were vetoed by the territorial governor, Mark W. Izard, and both were passed glibly over his veto. In the message relative to the bank of Tekama, he said complacently that he had many good reasons for refusing his assent to the bill, but thought it only needful to affirm his honesty in pursuing the course he did, and concluded as follows: “Acting upon the principle that it is better that one man should die for the state than that all should perish, I most cheerfully take the responsibility of withholding my signature from the bill above recited, and herewith return it to the house in which it originated for its reconsideration.” § As hinted above, the legislative gulf swallowed down this would-be Curtius without the slightest difficulty and still yawned horribly for more.

This ended the incorporating of banks by the territorial assembly of Nebraska, for in the summer of 1857 came a financial panic, and those in existence failed unanimously. But yet another attempt was made in 1858, and that of a more ambitious kind than any that had preceded it. In the autumn of '58, during the 5th session of the territorial assembly, a sleek gentleman by the name of Richardson appeared in Omaha, and began to “wire” through a bill to incorporate the “State Bank of Nebraska.” This was to be an extensive affair, having direct dealings with the state. It was to be located at Omaha, but to have branches in other parts of the commonwealth. The council passed the act of incorporation, but rumors of bribery and other illegitimate methods of influencing votes began to circulate, and finally, according to a newspaper account of the time, Dr. Miller found upon his desk a note, promising that if he would support the measure he should receive \$250 in cash and the privilege of making a loan of \$5,000 without interest as soon as the bank should get to doing busi-

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\* Council Jr., 3d ses., p. 161.

† Acts, 3d Leg. ses., p. 145.

‡ Acts, 3d Leg. ses., pp. 143-4.

§ House Jr., 3d ses., pp. 174-5.

ness. He made a public exposure of the attempt to bribe him, and the result was that the legislature joined in the general cry to hunt down the wild "cat" that had thus been let out of the bag.\* Mason, in the house, moved an investigation of the charges of bribery† but nothing came of it, though no man dared to vote against the appointment of the committee.

I have dwelt thus at length upon the origin of Nebraska's territorial banks because the political part of political economy is so often the most important portion, and because this is especially apt to be true where strictly economic forces have their origin in what is known as "practical politics."

The only statistical statement relative to the condition of these early banks which I have been able to find is the one given below, taken from the report of the comptroller of the currency for 1876. Correspondence with that officer assures me that the statements from which the table was compiled are no longer in existence.

STATISTICS OF NEBRASKA STATE BANKS, 1857-61.‡

		PRINCIPAL RESOURCES								PRINCIPAL LIABILITIES															
Years		No. Banks	Loans and Discounts	Stocks	Due from Banks	Real Estate	Notes of other Banks	Specie Funds	Specie	Other Resources	Capital Stock	Circulation	Deposits	Due other Banks	Other Liabilities										
1857	4	\$	418,097	...	\$	129,804	\$	3,975	\$	15,069	210	\$	136,325	\$	2,154	\$	205,000	\$	353,796	\$	125,291	\$	1,749	.....	.....
1858	6		15,679	...		35,601		3,850		1,000	.....		5,683		.....		15,000		41,641		3,673		.....	2,576	.....
1859	2		97,087	...		3,127		1,155		1,399	26		6,629		1,341		56,000		23,346		23,748		4,418	.....	.....
1861	1		72,406	...		4,443		7,885		1,209	.....		5,627		404		60,400		16,007		10,717		.....	5,530	.....

In the study of this table it is to be noticed, (1) That not all the banks reported, and that only those which were in the best condition would do so; (2) That the returns seem to have been made for June of the year to which they are assigned, and so the panic which reached Nebraska in the fall of '57 is not indicated by the table till 1858; and (3) That for this year the names of some banks that had already failed must have been counted, as there were certainly not six solvent banks in the territory at any time in 1858; and furthermore it is not credible that there could have been six banks doing business with an aggregate capital of only \$15,000.

\* See an article of a column and a half in the *Florence Courier* for Nov. 4, 1858, copy in possession of Mr. Reed, of Omaha.

† House Jr., 5th ses., p. 168.

‡ Fin. Rep. 1876, 230-31.

Before taking up the story of the panic of 1857, it may also be of interest to see how far the assertion that the banks were not owned by "sovereign squatters" of the territory, made by our valorous committeemen, Reeves and Miller, was borne out by the facts. After ruin had struck the banks in Nebraska, a correspondent of the *St. Louis Republican* thus places the ownership of the capital that had been invested in them :

Nemaha Valley Bank, Galesburg, Ill.

Platte Valley Bank, Nebraska City, Neb.

Fontanelle Bank of Bellevue, Elgin, Ill.

Western Exchange, Fire and Marine Ins. Bark, Galva, Ill.

Bank of Nebraska, Council Bluffs, Ia.

Bank of Florence, Davenport, Ia.

Bank of De Soto, Wisconsin.

Bank of Tekama, Bloomington and Gossport, Ind.\*

Thus we see that with one exception the banks were owned by men who had nothing more than a merely speculative interest in the territory.

In September, 1857, what Morton called "John Lawism" in Nebraska came to its usual calamitous conclusion. The panic of this year began in Cincinnati by the failure of the Ohio Life & Trust Company, and the collapse in New York of the then famous broker, John Thompson. Financial storm signals are often but tardily heeded ; newspapers especially are inclined to insist that everything is secure, when in fact everything is imperiled. Thus the *Omaha Nebraskan*† on September 12, 1857, published a clipping from the *Chicago Times*, which speaks of the failures of eastern bankers, and congratulates the west on the sound financial condition of this region in general and of the western banks in particular, and then adds complacently, "Even should there be a much greater tumbling among these institutions (the eastern banks) than we now have any reason to expect, our western banks will scarcely feel the shock. Wall street may be the money center, the great stock and currency regulator, but the money strength of the country is in the west." This rather obscure and illogical declaration of financial independence failed to nullify the laws of trade. The five older banks, those chartered in 1856-7, were "circulating" their paper currency as fast and

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\* Reprinted in the *Brownville Advertiser* of July 8, 1858.

† See file in State Library.



far as possible. As the wave of bankruptcy swept towards the state, it became the journalistic duty of Robert W. Furnas, who had started and at that time still edited the *Brownville Advertiser*, to express his confidence in the solidity of Nebraska banks. September 24 he gives it as his opinion that the failure of the Ohio Insurance, Loan and Trust Company is only used by certain rotten concerns as an excuse for failing and that no one need fear for really well established institutions.\*

On the day previous to this issue of the paper, the 23d day of September, 1857, the Western Exchange and Fire and Marine Insurance Bank of Omaha closed its doors, and the president, Thomas H. Benton, jr., issued an address to the public saying that the business would be wound up as quickly and economically as possible. Lowe, Parker, and Wyman were appointed trustees. The company had been the first one of any kind incorporated by the territorial legislature, and its life, dating from the 16th of March, 1855, was quite extended for an institution of the kind and time. It had issued currency without check, apparently, as its charter conferred no power to do so, and therefore no regulations regarding the issue.

The assets, as given in the schedule published by the trustees, would not be very satisfying to anxious creditors. There were \$288,-083 of "bills receivable and notes discounted." There also purported to be "stock certificates" to the amount of \$80,000, and besides these more than doubtful resources there were only \$191.30 in specie and \$121 in bills of the insolvent banks.†

The Nemaha Valley Bank had begun operations November 10, 1856, under the presidency of S. H. Riddle. He had been succeeded by Barkalow and the latter by McKoy, and at each change of administration the *Brownville Advertiser* expressed renewed confidence in its soundness.

As John L. Carson was sitting in his private bank at Brownville, one fine midday in the fall of 1857, Alexander Hallam, cashier of the Nemaha Valley bank, came in at the rear door with an anxious look upon his face. Carson understood the condition of things well enough so that he guessed the cause, and said:

"What's the matter, Hallam, bank closed?"

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\* See Furnas' file of *Advertiser*.

† History of Nebr., p. 693.

"Well, not closed exactly," was the answer, "No use of closing, nothing to close up on." \*

But the cashier was not quite so confidential with everybody. At his request Editor Furnas of the *Advertiser* inspected the accounts of the concern and finds that the bill holders are secure against all possible loss. The resources of the bank are: Stock notes, \$73,000; discounted paper at thirty and sixty days, over \$5,000; cash, over \$1,000. The books also show that there are \$33,000 of the bills of the bank in circulation.†

The above is a very fair example of the kind of "statements" that newspaper men are apt to get stuffed with whenever it is thought necessary or best to "keep up public confidence." Were a bill holder at all inclined to be suspicious he would hardly get much reassurance from such a presentment of the case. Suppose, for instance, that it should transpire that the \$73,000 of "stock notes" were virtually worthless. Such a thing is not by any means improbable, as the stockholders often "paid up" the capital they had subscribed by putting in their personal notes, and then, if so inclined, they could easily take measures to render these as worthless as so much waste paper. Then suppose, further, that the discounted paper had been received from those who were not reliable, at least during a financial crisis. Suppose also that the \$1,000 in alleged "cash" was merely a collection of the bills of other banks as worthless as the one under investigation; and suppose, finally, that the books had been "doctored" and that there was much more than \$33,000 of the bills of the bank outstanding. Such would be about the condition of the typical wild cat bank, and such was nearly the condition of the Nemaha bank in the fall of 1857.

The Brownville *Advertiser* noted it as a misfortune that McKoy, the president of the bank, was absent in the east at the time of the crisis. This may have been a misfortune, but certainly it was not so for the gentleman himself. Nor did he hasten to get back with all the speed that had been expected of him. In fact he never came back at all. The paper that had regretted his absence on his own account came eventually to regret it on account of others. "Legal notices" were published to inform him that he was wanted, and the calls were loud and frequent which summoned "Thomas L. McKoy to come into

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\* Pers. Rec.

† *Advertiser*, Oct. 1, 1857.

court." It might have been thought that when the steamboat tied up at the Brownville landing that fine September noon and the hands and others started up town to get their supply of Nemaha Valley currency turned into specie, that the end of the thing had come. It seemed quite final to the men that held the bills when they found that Hallam had closed the front door and slipped out of the back one, and they had to return to untie their steamboat, and float off, somewhat wiser and a good deal poorer than they had landed. But some of the most interesting incidents concerning such money mills are apt to come out after their emaciated ghosts get to haunting the law courts.

In the cramped pigeon holes "where sleeps in dust" all that is legally mortal or memorable of bygone misfortunes and departed villainies, one may at times even happen on to a sort of intimation of something that might in its time have been almost humorous. In the records of the district court which then sat at Brownville, we find four cases against the Nemaha Valley bank.\* Hallam, McKoy, and all that had been connected with the bank suddenly vanished. Advertisements failed to bring them to light, but each time as a given case was about to go against them by default, an attorney would put in an appearance, and spend his time making technical pleas designed to delay proceedings. Property was levied on that turned out to belong to other folks; a lot or two was sold. Finally, in June, 1850, Sheriff Plasters levied upon a safe, a table, a stove, and a letter-press, which altogether brought \$63, and subsequently, in the case of S. F. Nuckolls vs. the Nemaha Valley bank, an execution is returned unsatisfied, the sheriff reporting that he can find nothing to levy on. Stored away with the other evidences in these cases, is nearly a thousand dollars' worth of the old currency. The engraving is excellent. The writer thoughtfully held one of the old, worthless promises to pay up to the light, half expecting to find a water-mark representing a wild cat rampant, but none was visible. The printer had done his utmost to make the bills valuable, and so well had he accomplished his purpose that long after the bank had failed, an enterprising citizen of Brownville took a pocketfull of the currency down below St. Louis and passed it as good money.† The last plea which McKoy ever ventured to make (even by attorney), in a Brownville court, was that

\* Records of Nemaha Co., Dist. C. Cases 1., 78, 81, 175.

† Pers. Rec.

the "Nemaha Valley bank," so called, could not legally be sued since as a matter of fact it had never been incorporated at all !

Most of the other concerns died ignobly, without the formality of "trustees," or "addresses," or "statements," or anything else pertaining to a decent or orderly taking off. For instance, we find the bank of Tekama leaving more than \$2,000 of its currency to gather dust in the vaults that hold the records of the district court of Omaha. The bills are quite captivating. Miss Columbia, at the top of the ones, is leaning over to tickle with the rod of Mercury the ribs of a very Greek-like Indian, and from opposite ends of the fives, James Buchanan seems to be carrying on a flirtation with a lackadaisical girl, who has curly hair and bare feet. This bank was also advertised for in the *Nebraskaian*, and reported by the sheriff of the county as "not found." The last suit this bank was engaged in, Messrs. Frank and Matsenbaugh put \$428 of the currency in evidence, and J. M. Woolworth, as attorney of the bank, moved to quash the attachment, because in the petition the plaintiffs had brought suit against "The Bank of Tekama, in Burt county," whereas the institution had been incorporated as "The Bank of Tekama, in Burt county, *Nebraska territory*."\*

The only record we find of the assets of the Bank of Nebraska, at Omaha, is in the return of a writ of execution by the sheriff of the county, when he reports having levied upon and sold the following property: "Thirteen sacks of flour, one large iron safe, one counter, one desk, one stove drum and pipe, three arm chairs, and one map of Douglas county."

Though there was much trouble about finding some of these banks, yet others have continued to keep their existence, or rather their having existed, before the public for a very long time. The name of the Bank of Florence remains in gilt letters upon the old building even unto this day, though the old Mormon town of Florence has long ceased to be Mormon and has also ceased to be a town. DeSoto was also at one time an ambitious place, but has since evaporated to such an extent that there is nothing left of it but an old mill building. Kountze, at that time a real estate man of DeSoto, and still prominent in Omaha business circles, redeemed the issue of the bank of DeSoto in a sort of desultory manner, buying it up for what it was selling at in

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\* App. Docket "B," case 76, Dis. Co., Douglas Co.

the market, and so getting most of it out of the way. This bank did not try to start up till after the panic of '57, and some of its bills bear a date as late as 1863.

When one of these banks was in any sense secure it was because the men who established it were honest enough to be willing to suffer themselves rather than to let others do so in consequence of their mistakes. This was the case with the Platte Valley Bank. So great was the confidence of the people in that institution that even after the banks at Omaha had failed and the rush upon this one at Nebraska City had begun, many of those who happened to have gold or silver on hand went to the bank and deposited it.\* This mark of perfect confidence and tender of practical assistance could not, however, prevent the suspension of specie payments. But in this instance public confidence had been well placed. All the bills of this bank were redeemed at par, and it was the only territorial bank of issue of which this could be said. It was true of the Platte Valley bank, not because the institution was intrinsically sound and prosperous, but because S. F. Nuckolls would never allow it to be said that paper bearing his name had been worth less than its face value.†

One effect of the circulation of so much bad money in the territory was, that people came to feel as though anybody had a right to start a bank if only he could get the bills properly engraved. All the banks that had taken the trouble to secure charters soon violated even the loose provisions of those slipshod documents, and therefore it did not seem very extraordinary that banks should start business without any charters at all.‡

Such, for instance, was the "Waubee Bank of DeSoto." In July, 1857, the *DeSoto Pilot* felt it its duty to warn people against this institution, saying that the bills were being circulated at a distance and that when the crash came the reputation of the town would suffer. The *Omaha Nebraskan* alluded to the item in the *Pilot* and urged that such a bank was just as safe as those that had charters, since it must at best all depend upon the individual stockholders, and then took advantage of the occasion to call attention to the advertisement of the

\* *Brownville Adv.*, Oct. 1, 1857.

† The same is claimed by Sorenson (early hist. Om.), for Kountze and the bank of DeSoto. The statement made in the text regarding the latter bank is based on the statements of three different men who were acquainted with the circumstances, but it may not do the concern justice.

‡ A requisition of Governor Richardson to the district attorney of the first district, ordering him to proceed against these institutions, seems to have led to very little, if to any good.

Waubeeek bank in another column.\* Other banks that operated without charters or under a strained construction of some general statute were numerous. Such were the Omaha and Chicago bank, the Bank of Dakota, the Corn Exchange bank at DeSoto, and the Omaha City Bank and Land Company.† The paper of these banks looks as well as that of the others, and no one seemed to have cared whether the date and fact of charter were in one corner or not. The state was in much the condition in which Wisconsin found herself when, as is stated by a some time member of her senate, the members of her legislature used to have to sort their money each morning after reading the paper, and throw away what was worthless.

An article that might have served for such a purpose appeared in the *Omaha Times* for April 5, 1858.‡ This article was clipped from the Council Bluffs *Bugle*, and from its general tone may, I think, be taken to be unreliable. According to this statement the issues of the Bank of Nebraska, and of De Soto, and of the Platte Valley and Waubeeek banks were then at par; Nemaha Valley at fifty per cent, Western Exchange at seventy-five per cent, Fontanelle Bank of Bellevue, at sixty per cent, and Bank of Florence at eighty per cent discount; Tekama nowhere.

So great was the tendency to manufacture money that even the "Brownville Hotel Co." issued scrip to enable them to put up a hotel, and the *Advertiser* endorsed their action.§ Omaha early took advantage of the same method of borrowing money without interest. The need in this case was certainly pressing. The general government had made a limited appropriation for the erection of a capitol building on the spot where the Omaha High school now stands. The territorial authorities, setting an example which has been assiduously followed by their successors of the state, adopted plans for the building which called for more than double the amount of money at their command. The general government, strange to say, refused to believe that more money was needed, and the walls of the abortive structure stood piteously incomplete, ruined and stormed on, and rapidly falling into decay. Other towns that wanted the capitol themselves were greatly tickled at the prospect.

So, during the recordership of H. C. Anderson, and while Jesse Lowe

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\* *Nebraskan*, July 8, 1857, file at State Library.

† See Reed's collection of the early bank issues.

‡ See Reed's file.

§ Nov. 5, 1857.

was mayor, the city issued \$50,000 of scrip; this sum being speedily exhausted, and the capitol still being unfinished, another issue of the same amount was made. There are still dark rumors wandering through the back alleys of Omaha, that some of this was not applied in a manner to promote most rapidly the building of the needful edifice, but they are intangible and it is idle to pursue them. The scrip issued at first passed at par, but soon depreciated, was good only to pay city taxes with, and most of it was a dead loss in the hands of the holders. The people of Omaha were quite complacent regarding the issue even after it had become worthless. They looked upon it as "a war measure," necessary to keep the capitol, and as citizens of the town were for the most part the losers by the depreciation of the stuff, so they also were the chief gainers by the completion of the capitol.

In the possession of Byron Reed of Omaha is an almost complete collection of the issues of all the above named banks. Only the Platte Valley and the Bank of Nebraska are not represented, and the collector would gladly give face value for specimen notes of these banks. Looking at the two large frames filled with these, for the most part, dishonored promises to pay, one may have a very instructive object lesson in finance. Only two of the banks issued bills of a denomination as high as ten dollars, and none higher, and the intention was obvious that they should wander away and never come back for redemption till the concern that issued them should be "beyond redemption." We have tried the experiment of cheap state-begotten banks, and the experiment has taught us that the power to issue money should not be left to the regulation of various state legislatures, because many of these are sure to prove unwise, and some of them dishonest. The currency must, on the other hand, be controlled by a power wise, and honest, and strong enough to properly understand and minister to the needs of the whole people. If this lesson has been thoroughly learned it is worth what it has cost.

### III.—SECTIONAL POLITICS.

Some indication of early political methods has been given in the first of these sketches; and all the virulence of the early fights turned mainly on sectional issues.

Party lines hardly existed in early times. The patronage of the territory was in the hands of the democratic appointees of the demo-

cratic administration at Washington, and so large a portion of all who meddled with politics were democrats, who had come here for the express purpose of sharing in that patronage, that none ventured to dispute the claim of the dominant party. This left the field clear for family quarrels of tremendous vigor within the party itself, made personalities the stock in trade of the political newspapers and the stump speakers, and left sectional issues to play havoc with all good feeling between the different districts of this state. No political conventions were ordinarily held in the counties. Each man announced himself, through a newspaper or on the stump, as a candidate for a certain office, and then took off his coat and went into the general hair-pull with all the vindictiveness and all the skill that nature had vouchsafed him. As high as fourteen candidates at one time blossomed out in Nemaha county when only four could possibly succeed.\* In state politics each man fought for his section, in county politics each man fought for himself. The location of the capital was of course the main bone of contention, and the whole of this long fight, together with the initial struggle between Bellevue and Omaha, is told at length in another part of the present volume. The first capital fight was carried on by a knot of schemers gathered about F. B. Cuming. Had they been able to raise \$15,000 more than they could, in fact, command, or had Father Hamilton consented to bribe Cuming, the capital would have gone to Bellevue instead of to Omaha. It was felt at the time and has since been acknowledged by all that Bellevue was the place where it should have been located. It was nearer the center of the settlements then existing, was situated in a much better location for the development of a large city, and would have had a much easier exit for a west-bound railroad. The recognition of all these facts helped to intensify the jealousy with which the successful city was regarded by the rest of the river towns, and the attitude of territorial politicians was most easily stated by the formula, "Omaha against the field." Besides this enmity felt towards a growing and aggressive town there was the ever present and ever useless contest between the sections of the north and south Platte.

The struggles engendered by these jealousies culminated during the session of the territorial legislature in the early part of January, 1858, and the manner of waging the contest was so characteristic

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\* Pers. Rec. See also any of the early files of the Omaha papers for examples of these advertisements. Omaha Times, of July 30, '57, contains eighteen such advertisements.



that it will be worth while to describe it at length. At Florence, on the 9th day of Januar y, 1858, the following manifesto was issued :\*

“To the People of Nebraska, Fellow Citizens : The general assembly of Nebraska territory is no longer able to discharge its legitimate functions at the Omaha seat of government. Owing to the organized combination of a minority of its members, aided by an Omaha mob, and encouraged by the Omaha *Executive*, they have been compelled to adjourn their present session to the nearest place of safety. They accordingly assemble to-day at Florence, pursuant to adjournment.

“The sovereign power of legislation for this territory is now exercised alone at this place. The house of representatives, J. H. Decker speaker, retains twenty-four of its thirty-five members. The council, L. L. Bowen, president, retains nine of the thirteen members, being two-thirds of their respective bodies.

“It has been long supposed that whenever the interests of Omaha became concerned, it became hazardous to attempt legislation at Omaha. The course of the minority during the whole session has been characterized by tricks and chicanery, unworthy a manly system of legislation. It culminated in violence on the seventh instant. On that day the factionists, allied with Omaha ruffians, dragged the speaker of the house by force from his stand while attempting to discharge his duties, and the Omaha mob, armed and ready for any emergency, applauded the foul act—affixing to Nebraska legislation an indelible stain, and covering the fair name of Omaha with ineffaceable INFAMY.

“Omaha can boast of having degraded the sovereignty of the people by thus exposing the person of her elected Representative to the unresisted violence of an irresponsible rabble !

“Omaha can boast of having arrested the wheels of legislation at the capital !!

“Omaha can boast of having driven the legislature from the seat of Government.

“Yet Omaha still retains the Capitol, bought with such an infamous past of corruption, violence and crime, but the sceptre of

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\* This manifesto was copied carefully from the printed circular issued at the time, a copy of which I found loose between the leaves of the first volume of the *Brownville Advertiser*, the file kept by R. W. Furnas. This is the most complete file of early papers I have yet found in the state, and my thanks are due to Gov. Furnas for courtesy shown in permitting me to use the same.

legislation has departed from the ill fated city, and the law givers from its *riotous* halls forever.

"The issue now made by Omaha with the squatter sovereigns of the whole territory can have but ONE solution !

"The interests and the rights of the whole of the masses will no longer be made subservient to the intrigues or machinations of one locality. It is no longer a question as to the location of the city of their government merely. It has now become a question as to the right of the people to rule ! It can have but ONE answer—*the majority must prevail*.

"The legislature is now free from faction and from violence. Its acts will be free and untrammelled. It will finish out its organization at this place, zealously devoted to the legitimate legislation required by the wants of the public and the interests of the Territory, and if such honest efforts shall fail of consummation, they will leave the whole responsibility with the accidental Executive, who, albeit not elected by or responsible to the people, while clothed in a little brief authority, in the absense of the governor *may* dare to thwart their sovereign will !

"For the full justification of our course we confidently appeal to our own *constituencies*, to whom alone we acknowledge responsibility."

This document was signed by the following members of the assembly :

#### MEMBERS OF HOUSE :

James H. Decker, <i>Speaker</i>	C. T. Holloway
J. G. Abbe	Wingate King
W. B. Beck	T. M. Marquett
W. G. Crawford	D. B. Robb
J. C. Campbell	P. M. Rogers
S. A. Chambers	J. S. Stewart
P. G. Cooper	L. Sheldon
E. A. Donelan	S. A. Strickland
James Davidson	J. M. Taggart
Joseph VanHorn	A. J. Benedict
Amos Gates	Alonzo Perkins.
W. B. Hail	

## SENATORS :

Leavitt L. Bowen, <i>President</i>	S. M. Kirkpatrick
Mills S. Reeves	Wm. Clancy
James S. Allen	R. W. Furnas
Jacob Safford	A. W. Puett.
• A. A. Bradford	

Turning, however, to look at the matter from the Omaha standpoint, we can get a good view of their side of the case by glancing over an "extra" issued by the Omaha *Nebraskian* on January 8, 1858.\* As is usual on such occasions it was a document rich in head lines and exclamation points :

"BORDER RUFFIANISM IN NEBRASKA! KANSAS OUTDONE!! BOLD ATTEMPT AT REVOLUTION!!! SPEAKER DECKER HEAD-ING THE REVOLUTION!!!! *Revolutionists to Organize Another Government at Florence under the Protection of Brigham Young!!!!*" Then the "extra," settling down to ordinary type and contenting itself with only an occasional eruption of exclamation points, like the recurring sobs of an aggrieved child, goes on to talk of the "infamy" of the majority of the legislature and proceeds to give the "facts" in the case. According to this account the house had gone into committee of the whole on the election of a public printer. A bill had been previously introduced for removing the capital from Omaha. While in the committee of the whole, certain Omaha members, having obtained the floor, began to talk against time, so that the committee of the whole could never rise till the friends of the capital bill would promise not to push it. While Poppleton and Clayes were speaking *ad libitum*, Decker and his conspirators withdrew to the Douglas house, there to caucus, leaving the "committee of the whole" to grind out eloquence without a quorum. In the caucus it was resolved, according to this account, to get possession of the chair at all hazards—"get it or die," Decker is reported to have said. Rumors assert that they armed themselves with revolvers and knives, but the *Nebraskian* does not state this as established. Returning to the capitol building they persuaded the clerk of the council to go into the house with a message from the upper chamber. To receive this in the usual parliamentary manner it would be necessary for the speaker of the house to resume the chair. This of course was what Decker

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\* A copy of this extra is also preserved with vol. 1, Br. *Adv.*

was ready and anxious to do. The chairman of the committee of the whole, however, saw fit to ask if the council was in session. As it was not he ruled that the message could not be received. Decker and his followers then assaulted the chairman, seized or attempted to seize the gavel, and a general melee ensued. Decker being at the head of the assaulting party, his life was at one time in immediate danger, but Hanscom of Omaha valorously interposed and saved him by "quickly rolling him under the tables without waiting to suspend the rules." The lobby during all these performances was very "quiet and orderly" and was soon afterwards cleared at the request of a member from Omaha. The next morning the house adjourned to meet at Florence, which being wholly inadvisable, and the clerk of the house refusing to remove the records or to record such a motion, the minority continued to meet in Omaha and adjourn from day to day, not having a quorum. At the time the motion to adjourn to Florence was made in council, Dr. Miller was in the chair, and ruled the motion out of order, as it took a joint resolution, passed with the concurrence of the governor, to adjourn to any other place. Appeal was taken to this decision and sustained by a majority, but as he still refused to put the motion, the member who made it put it, and those who had voted for it moved off to Florence. The "extra" concludes by saying that they have talked with disinterested men from all parts of the territory, and that it is everywhere conceded that the position of the minority is "legal, parliamentary, and correct."

Taking another position to see if haply we can get yet another view of this affair, we will look at it through the eyes of the editor of the *Nebraska Pioneer*, a paper published at Cuming city, the editor of which was at Omaha during the excitement, and who hastened to get out an "extra" as soon as possible, which was on the tenth of January.\* He did not use so many headlines as the *Nebraskian*, but the body type was much larger, which perhaps answered as well. He goes back to relate how on the 6th inst. Mr. Abbe, of Otoe, had introduced in the house of representatives a bill for the removal of the Capital from Omaha. As soon as it was introduced a motion was made by an Omaha member to adjourn. Much confusion prevailed, but the motion being put, was lost by a vote of 25 to 10. "Then commenced a scene which places border ruffianism

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\* With Br. *Adv.* vol. 1.

far in the shade. One of the members from our county (Mr. Perkins) was rudely assaulted by two prominent citizens of Omaha, and it is with deep regret that we state that one of these *gentlemen* was a member of the council. The war was now fairly open—Omaha against the territory. All manner of means was used to stave off the bill, but the minority not being able to stave it off any longer at that time, ‘condescended’ to allow it to be read the first time, which being done, the house adjourned.

“Thursday morning the house convened as usual and went into committee of the whole on the election of a public printer. Mr. Strickland in the chair. Mr. Strickland, wishing to make some remarks on the question, called Morton to the chair; the minority then boasted that they had the chair and would keep in committee of the whole the balance of the session unless the majority would agree to withdraw the capital bill. Mr. Poppleton, getting the floor, commenced his famous speech against time; he spoke of all conceivable subjects except public printing, beginning as far back as Gulliver’s famous history of the Lilliputian war. The lobbies were crowded, and Mr. Poppleton was loudly applauded by the Omaha lobby members.” Leaving to get something to eat, the editor of the *Pioneer* on his return found Dr. Thrall, of Omaha, in the chair and Mr. Clayes on the floor. Mr. Clayes asserted that it did not much matter what he said, as he had to talk nine days.

“About this time a message was announced and the speaker went to the stand to receive it. Hanscom rushed to the speaker and dragged him from the chair and after some scuffling threw him violently under a table.” Beyond this point the account given by the *Pioneer* is lurid and wrathful, concluding with an apparent afterthought to the following effect: “We have just received an extra issued by the Omaha *Nebraskan* which we unhesitatingly pronounce a tissue of misrepresentations.”

*Still more journalistic light is shed upon the occurrences of that exciting Thursday by an account written by Robert W. Furnas for his paper, the Nebraska Advertiser.†* He was one of the seceding members of the council, and took his time to prepare his two-column statement of the case, which did not appear in the *Advertiser* till the 28th of the month. According to this account it seems that Omaha had published a list of property in the city which was said to be

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† Br. *Adv.*, Jan. 28, 1858.

pledged for the redemption of the scrip issued to complete the capitol building. Among the rest was placed the "Capitol square and the building thereon." This was an eye-opener to the members of the assembly from outside Omaha, who had supposed that the territory owned the square and building too. The capitol bill was then drafted as a means of bluffing the Omaha authorities into deeding the capitol and grounds to the territory. Furnas promises to bring affidavits to prove that had this been promptly done the capitol bill would never have been introduced. The other party was, however, ready to go them one better on the bluffing game, and things had to come to a crisis. With thorough appreciation of western character Furnas says that when the parties got to "you must," and "we will not," it was nothing strange nor unexpected that a "general pitch in, knock down and drag out" should occur among the members.

The *Nebraska City News* \* commented on the affair as a most fortunate occurrence, because it led to the division of the territory on the line of the Platte, and this the editor considered most desirable: "The gentlemen may cry 'peace, peace,' but there is no peace."

The fact seems to be that the territorial assembly could not in any case have removed the capitol from Omaha without the consent of the executive, so that this affair was in its last analysis a mere ebullition of gratuitous lawlessness. At any rate the session of the majority of the assembly at Florence brought about no permanent results.

For further information regarding the early sectional squabbles the reader is referred to the paper by C. H. Gere in this volume on "The Capital Question."

#### IV.—POLITICS PROPER.

It may very properly be said that Samuel G. Daily was the Moses of the Republican party in Nebraska. There was no such organization till he was nominated as the party candidate for the place of territorial delegate to congress; to that position he was elected, and in it he was installed after a most bitter contest with Estabrook. Before this time nothing was considered a worse charge than to accuse a person of aiding or abetting the "Black Republicans." This fearful slander was bandied back and forth by the newspapers and politicians. An old copy of the *Omaha City Times* is even unto this day black in

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\* Jan. 16, 1858.

the face (with head lines) so vehemently did it resent this imputation on the part of the *Nebraskian*. Between these two papers there was constant war. It has already been told how early political struggles centered about personal and sectional issues. These two papers were both in Omaha, and so were agreed on sectional questions, and the feud was necessarily a personal one. The Omaha postmastership was one of the bones of contention. The editor of the *Times* wanted the position, and held it periodically, according as his influence or that of Bird B. Chapman could be most efficacious in "working" the administration at Washington.

This Bird B. Chapman was an Oberlin graduate, who had taken the trouble to come all the way from Ohio to be made congressional delegate from the new territory. His first care was to establish a newspaper, the *Nebraskian*, which he left in good hands while absent in Washington, contesting for or occupying a seat as territorial delegate. The early papers talk about him and his carpet-bag, and he seems in reality to have been the prototype of the vast swarm of carpet-baggers that the south afterwards claimed to be overrun with.

Like others of that ilk, his success was more flattering at first than later. In 1856, we find Hiram Bennett contesting his seat. The majority of the house committee on elections reported in favor of the contestant. But no one need conclude from this that there was any show for Brother Bennett. On the contrary, they had concluded that Chapman was to have the place, but had made a report of the kind stated merely to mollify Bennett, and to make it appear right and fair that congress should vote to pay his mileage and per diem while contesting.\* This way of doing was quite common, as it may be yet, and gave enterprising statesmen a chance to visit Washington and spend some months there agreeably and even profitably. Chapman got his seat and Bennett got the mileage and per diem as had been predicted by the metropolitan papers at the time of the committee report. The seat was hardly won, however, before the term expired and Chapman came home to wage fierce struggle for re-election.

One of the first attempts at a party convention was made during the summer of 1857. It was ostensibly a family gathering of democrats, but in reality was only a caucus of one wing of that party.

The Omaha papers declare that only two counties were actually

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\* June 7, 1856.

represented, while individual men who happened to be present and "in sympathy with meeting," were allowed to cast the entire vote of two or three other counties. The *Nebraskian*,\* in a long and laborious attempt to make fun of the whole affair, has the customary irruption of headlines, and breaks out all over its bespeckled surface with italics and exclamation points. With long drawn out type, apparently intended to represent a typographic grin, it declares that the mountain (the Bellevue convention) has labored and brought forth a mouse (Judge Fenner Ferguson). The convention had certainly not been the most decorous and regular in the world, for the Brownville *Advertiser* speaks of the hubbub and brawling, in which "pistols, bowie-knives, and such like representatives of the people," played no inconsiderable part. As a matter of fact the convention was made up of those hostile to the interest of Omaha, and the *Nebraskian* calls Ferguson "Strickland's and Mitchell's great anti-Omaha, anti-democratic candidate for congress."

To say that he was an anti-democratic candidate was a damning charge. It was in this campaign that Thayer took occasion in a speech in Omaha to clear himself of an alleged taint of republicanism, and to declare himself a supporter of the administration of James Buchanan.† It was just before the beginning of this campaign that Robert W. Furnas declared that his paper, the *Advertiser*, was no longer to be independent in politics, but would be henceforth strictly democratic, and a "firm supporter of the great principles of the party of Jefferson, Jackson," et al.‡ It was long after this campaign that Judge O. P. Mason thought it right and very expedient to take the stump for a democratic candidate.§ But in 1857, though Ferguson had been nominated by a would-be territorial democratic convention, yet his two opponents claimed to be more intensely democratic than himself. One of these was the above mentioned Bird B. Chapman, and the other was Gen. Estabrook. The name of the latter gentleman had been set at the head of the Omaha City *Times* as a candidate for delegate. The post-office fight was now at its hottest. The editor of the *Times* had recently been removed from office, a mass had been called to get indignant over the outrage, and the editor of the *Times* had used the following language relative to his brother editor of the *Ne-*

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\* July 15, 1857.

† *Nebraskian*, Sept. 2, 1857.

‡ June, 1857, at beginning of second year of *Advertiser's* existence.

§ For Kinney against Daily, 1862.



*braskian*: "This editor, the slave of a man who is so contemptible his name defiles the mouth that speaks it, has taken this opportunity to insult and spite the people of this place. The whole faction of imported bobtails and sneaks feel the utter loathing which our towns have for them, and they cannot help casting their poisoned missiles on every occasion."\*

To add zest to this triangular contest for the delegate's seat in congress, as many as eighteen different persons advertised themselves in one of the July numbers of the *Times* as candidates for various local or territorial offices. These midsummer campaigns, intensified by such heated rhetoric as seems to have made up the stump speeches of the day, must have "made things hot" for political aspirants in more senses than one. But at that time there was nothing else for it. Each man had to go campaigning with his own conveyance, and travel about from one of the scattered settlements to another; allowing for bad weather and other detentions made it necessary to consecrate much time to the holy work of enlightening the people as to their duties as citizens. The candidate for congress had to know nearly every "squatter sovereign" in the territory, and win, in so far as possible, his personal approval. All this took time, and so the campaign of '57 dragged on. On July 23, Estabrook published his personal "platform," which appears in the *Times*, and reads much as though it had been written by the editor. He makes a personal appeal for support, but in the next week's paper withdraws from the race. We gather from the invective used by his pet editor—or rather the editor that made a pet of him—that he took this step, believing that he had no chance of success, and that his candidacy might endanger the interests of Omaha. The *Florence Courier* had used headlines to ask the question, "Shall an Omaha man be our delegate?" and the city began to fear that question would be answered in the negative. The *Times* on the day before the election had to content itself with a long exordium to the voters of the territory to appreciate the awful responsibility that rested upon them, and to choose wisely the man who was to receive the high honor of their support, without naming any such person.

Long after the early election had taken place it was uncertain who had won. It was the common practice of each side to reserve one or

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\* *Times* of either June 11th or 18th, 1857.

two of the backwoods counties that they might doctor the returns therefrom to suit the exigencies of the case. The Nebraska correspondent of the *St. Louis Republican* writes that "the official vote is in from the entire territory with the exception of Pawnee county, to which Gov. Izard has dispatched two messengers, whether for the purpose of getting the returns, or with a commission to smell out illegalities and frauds, as his organ, the *Nebraska City News*, proclaims, or to manufacture votes, as a great many believe, is a matter of doubt." \*

The official count gave the election to Ferguson. But as a matter of course Chapman made preparations to contest, and it is with some returning pride in our American institutions that one is able to state that he not only failed to unseat Ferguson, but that he did not even get paid, as previous contestants had done, for waging a useless contest, and wasting the time of congress. Before he got through with the affair he also was accused of having sold himself to the powers of darkness in the shape of "Giddings, Greeley, Douglas (Frederic), Forney, etc." †

As appropriately following the fall elections of 1857, the *Omaha City Times* proceeded to publish an obituary notice of the republican party. After saying that it is customary to speak well of the dead, whether they deserve it or not, the editor implies the inference that, like the immortal G. W., he cannot lie, and is therefore constrained to break away from precedent. "Let that remain for some more deluded genius who claims to have been its friend and supporter. Let Giddings or his political compeer, Fred Douglas, bid their own adieus and sing their own requiems over the political abortion of their own paternity. In other words, 'let the dead bury the dead.' On all the issues they have raised they have been defeated, the outcry concerning the repeal of the Missouri compromise has howled itself into silence, the ravings about the *Dred Scott* decision have long since died away and are now only known as a matter of history, with much more to the same purpose.‡ Verily "pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

In the next campaign the republican party was an organized body backing Daily for the position of delegate. His opponent was Gen. Estabrook. The personal element was still present in the political

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\* Reprinted in *Omaha Times*, Oct. 1, 1857.

† *Times*, Oct. 14, '58.

‡ *Times*, Nov. 25, '57.

work, as it always must be, and the sectional feeling was also present, as in this state it always has been. Daily was a man with warm friends, and many of them, though democrats, braved the stigma of being called republicans in order to support him. Besides this he was a South Platte man, and this prejudiced that section in his favor, while shrewd diplomacy kept the northern counties from breaking with him.

There is one story of these early stumping expeditions which says that Daily used to take with him a gigantic friend by the name of Green, whose duty was to cow the roughs that might be inclined to interrupt the meetings, while Daily was then at liberty to take his hands from his pistol handles and be free to use them in the persuasive gesticulations fitting the occasion. The first campaign concluded with the official returns in favor of the democratic candidate, Gen. Estabrook. Congress was democratic, and in the opinion of Daily's friends it was useless to contest the seat. But as a matter of course there were the usual western counties with no inhabitants and big returns, all in favor of one man, in this case the democratic candidate. Daily was a fighter by nature and had become more so by practice, and prepared to wage a contest on his own account, whether his friends thought it wise or not. The evidence submitted to the committee on privileges and elections made a good sized octavo volume, and so complete was his exposition that the committee were practically unanimous in recommending that he be given the seat. Time had dragged on till the republican convention had met at Chicago, and the debate on the adoption of the report of the committee was long and turned in a measure upon national issues. When the vote was finally taken that ousted Estabrook, that gentleman arose and made his final speech in the congress of the United States as follows:

"Mr. Speaker, I thank the house for making me a sacrifice to the gods of the Chicago convention."\*

One fight followed speedily upon the heels of another. Hardly was the contest settled before Daily was compelled to begin a new canvass in the territory. The *Nebraska City News*, a rabidly democratic sheet, casting about for something to hurt Daily with, could find nothing more effective than such a paragraph as this:

"There is a well authenticated rumor abroad that Daily has secured

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\* Cong. Rec.

the support of many of the electors of Omaha city upon a written pledge to devote himself in congress to their interests, to the sacrifice and exclusion of other portions of the territory. He is known to have made the remark that 'South Platte has sold me out and can have no favors to ask, and damn me if I have any to give them.'" His opponent this second time was the wily and versatile Morton. The result was, as usual, disputed. Gov. Black issued the certificate of election to Morton. But about this time the war was beginning, and Black, though a democrat, was a patriot, and prepared to go to his home in Pennsylvania and enlist. Daily visited him at Nebraska City a short time before his departure. The differences between a republican and a war democrat were so few that it was hardly strange that they became very friendly. Daily was always an admirer of good horses and conveyances and bought Black's horse and carriage. It is not known how much he paid, but it is understood that it was enough to satisfy the retiring governor. So Daily drove back to his home near Peru inside the new carriage, and inside his pocket was another certificate of election, signed by Gov. Black and revoking the one that had been given to Morton. The latter knew nothing of the transaction, and Daily had all the papers from his side made out and sent in as though he were an ordinary contestant, relying wholly on the justice of his cause to set aside interfering technicalities. But he took the precaution of hieing to Washington a few days ahead of Morton, presented his certificate of election, secured his seat, and left Morton to appear in the unexpected rôle of a contestant. The much mentioned "versatility" of the latter was put to a severe test. He got his papers ready, however, as soon as possible and began the battle. In the meantime ex-Gov. Black had been killed at the head of his regiment. Congress was no longer overwhelmingly democratic. When it came to look at these two certificates of election, it naturally inquired, "What kind of a man was this Black, anyhow, who seems to have done such very contradictory things?" Dunn, of Indiana, made answer that he was a man who had resigned a lucrative place under the corrupt administration of James Buchanan to go and give his life for an imperiled country, and this fact, eloquently sprung upon the house, made them conclude to accept Black's decision of the question, which was accordingly done.\*

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\* Pers. Recol. and Cong. Rec.

The first election, so conducted that no one thought it worth while to contest, was between Daily and Judge Kinney. Daily's hardest work at this time had been to secure the republican nomination, as he was only selected as the party candidate on the forty-seventh ballot. In this campaign there was a good deal of joint discussion. Perhaps the bitter contest in the convention had weakened Daily. At least O. P. Mason was among those who worked and spoke against him, but keen observers noticed that Mason's speeches did not hurt Daily much, and it was shrewdly suspected that he did not intend they should. The majority for Daily when the returns were all in was only one hundred and thirty-six,\* but things had been so closely watched that Kinney saw no use of contesting. Through the whole campaign it had been urged against him that he was holding a place under the government in the territory of Utah, and the republican papers and speakers always referred to him as "Chief Justice Kinney of Utah," and insisted that government was paying him six dollars per day for supposed services in Utah, while he was campaigning in Nebraska. After the election his conduct went far to prove that he was a typical carpet-bagger, for he flitted off to one of the other territories and soon got returned to Washington as delegate from there. While on his way west to begin this second campaign, he stopped one night with Daily and had a long and friendly talk about the struggle just closed. "Well, Sam," he said at last, "that campaign cost me four thousand dollars, and I believe if I had spent another thousand I should have downed you." Then he added, after a thoughtful silence, clinching his fist as he spoke, "and I'd have spent it too, but" (regretfully) "I thought I had spent enough."†

It is not the intention to draw much material for these sketches from this side the fifties, but having passed that limit it may do no harm to give just one glimpse of politics during the war. This purpose will be sufficiently well answered by reproducing a few extracts from a speech of J. Sterling Morton, delivered May 9, 1863, before the Council Bluffs Democratic Club, and afterwards published in the *Nebraska City News*.‡ The extracts are of interest mainly as examples of how mountains of rhetoric and ostensible logic may get melted down by the tumbling seas of political commotion like so many

\* Files of *Omaha Republican* have been used for this campaign.

† Pers. Recol.

‡ I copy from a chance preserved copy of the *News*, kindly given me by Mrs. Samuel G. Daily.

Ararats of loaf sugar. The speaker began by telling how bewildered a common rustic is when he first enters Barnum's museum, and then added: "So an unpractised speaker who attempts to-day the investigation of the politics of the present administration, and endeavors to collect and put upon exhibition some of the political monstrosities of abolition, is at once lost and dumbfounded amidst the magnificence of the imbecility and the grandeur of the knavery which has filled that great curiosity shop of corruption at Washington City, over which Mr. A. Lincoln—inimitable anecdoter of Illinois—presides with a mirth and merriment as potent for side splitting as his arm and axe were once for rail splitting, or his present conduct of public affairs is for union splitting." He goes on to show how the black republicans had contrived to force the south into rebellion and to "draw from them the first fire," how the abolitionists had brought it all about to obtain their own nefarious ends, and how the president, yielding at last to pressure, had "advised emancipation as the wonderful patent abolition panacea for a sick nation." After detailing the results of this policy, he asks:

"Do we desire to investigate still further in the African business? Has it not declared a dividend? Go over the battle field, look down through the green sod into the hastily filled graves of good and brave men. These grinning skulls, these meatless limbs, these slimy worms that revel in forms once animate and strong as yours or mine—forms whose images are photographed upon the heart tablets of weeping widows, mourning mothers, and dimly shadowed in the souls of the fatherless. Is not this its dividend? Its full fruition? Abolition has paid fat contractors; has paid the brother-in-law of the secretary of the navy (for buying old hulks to sink in Charleston harbor) \$65,000 in five months—more than has been appropriated to all the territories in the last year. Abolition has paid Beecher, paid Greeley, paid Phillips, paid Garrison, paid those transcendental and loose jointed intellects that shed a sickly light through solemn rolling eyes upon the cadaverous branbread faces and crazed heads that sometimes surmount a white cravat and other garb of solemn mien, and impiously call themselves preachers of Christ and Him crucified. Such men, such things it has paid."

And after some eight columns of similar eloquence he nears his conclusion thus: "As the voice of God called unto Abraham of old, say-

ing unto him: 'Abraham, take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering,' so during the fall elections in the great states of Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, and New York, a voice—*vox populi vox Dei*—like the sound of many waters, has cried unto our Abraham, saying: 'Take now thy well beloved friend and brother Abolition, and get thee into the boundaries of the constitution of thy fathers, and offer him there for a peace offering.' But in vain! Abraham of this generation is stiff-necked and heedeth not the reprimanding voice of a displeased people. He and his party proceed, emancipating and to emancipate, and if to-night God in His infinite mercy and goodness should call the weary spirit of every black slave in all this broad land to come up higher, to pass from earth and to float triumphant up through the stars and the shining worlds to heaven, Lincoln and his nigger-crazed counsellors would awake to-morrow and weep bitter tears because there would be no more niggers to free, to feed, to clothe, and to tax us for."

From the intensity of such sentiments we may judge of the white heat of enthusiasm in which those persons labored who opposed and triumphed over them. Long afterwards, when the war was over and nothing was left but the reconstruction quarrel between Andy Johnson and congress, enough of the ante-rebellion hatred was left to lead an aged minister to make a most unusual prayer. It was in the old sandstone "seminary," in the town of Lancaster—the geographical predecessor of Lincoln—at a meeting of the Protestant Methodist conference. Perhaps he was one of those that Morton would have described as having "solemn rolling eyes and a crazed head," but though old, his appearance was certainly not cadaverous. The struggle between Johnson and congress was at its bitterest. As the minister in the course of his long prayer besought divine guidance for the various classes of public officials, he warmed to his work. He prayed for all the various ranks of functionaries that they might be wise, and courageous and faithful. When he came to congress, he ventured to ask that they might have "faces like anvils, to bear any amount of hammering." At last he said after a pause—"And our president (long pause)—Oh Lord (minor pause) we don't wish him any harm. But be pleased to grant him a very short life and a happy death; and as long as grass grows and water runs, deliver us from such another."\*

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\* Pers. Recol.

## V.—PIONEER JOURNALISM.

The first editorial ever written for an Omaha paper was as follows:\*

“Well, strangers, friends, patrons, and the good people generally, wherever in the wide world your lot may be cast, and in whatever clime this *Arrow* may reach you, here we are upon Nebraska soil, seated upon the stump of an ancient oak, which serves for an editorial chair, and the top of our badly abused beaver for a table, we purpose editing a leader for the Omaha *Arrow*.

“An elevated tableland surrounds us; the majestic Missouri, just off on our left, goes sweeping its muddy course adown towards the Mexican gulf, whilst the background of the pleasing picture is filled up with Iowa’s loveliest, richest scenery. Away upon our left, spreading far away in the distance, lies one of the loveliest sections of Nebraska. Yon rich, rolling, widespread and beautiful prairie, dotted with timber, looks lovely enough just now, as heaven’s free sunlight touches off in beauty the lights and shades, to be literally entitled the Eden land of the world, and inspire us with flights of fancy upon this antiquated beaver, but it won’t pay. There sticks our axe in the trunk of an old oak, whose branches have for years been fanned by the breezes that constantly sweep from over the oft-times flower dotted prairie lea, and from which we purpose making a log for our cabin claim.

“Yonder come two stalwart sons of the forest, bedecked in their native finery. They approach, and stand before us in our sanctum. The dancing feathers which adorn their heads once decked the gaudy plumage of the mountain eagle. The shades of the rainbow appear on their faces. They extend the hand of friendship with an emphatic “cuggy how” (how are you, friend), and knowing our business, request us by signs and gesticulations to write in the *Arrow* to the Great Father that the Omahas want what he has promised them, and they ask us also to write no bad about them. We promise compliance whilst they watch the progress of our pencil back and forth over the paper. But let us proceed. What shall we say? But little.

“The *Arrow’s* target will be the general interest and welfare of this highly favored, new and beautiful territory upon which we have now

\* Omaha *Arrow*. Vol. 1, No. 1, which appeared July 28, 1846. Part of it was reprinted by Sorenson, Early Hist. Omaha, pp. 45-6.



for the first established a regular weekly paper. Our caste is decidedly 'Young American' in spirit and politics. We are in favor of anything that runs by steam or electricity, and the unflinching advocates of the 'sovereigns of the soil.'

"The pioneering squatter and the uncivilized red man are our constituents and neighbors. The wolves and deers are our travelling companions, and the wild birds and prairie winds our musicians,—more highly appreciated than all the carefully prepared concerts of earth. Surrounded by associations, circumstances and scenes like these, what do you expect from us, anxious reader? Do not be disappointed if you do not always get that which is intelligible and polished from our pens (we mean those of the east and south, the pioneers understand our dialect). Take, therefore, what you get with a kindly heart and no grumbling. In the support of the national democratic party, the advocacy of the Pacific railroad upon the only feasible route—the Platte valley—the progress of Nebraska and the interest of the people among whom we live, always count the *Arrow* flying, hitting, and cutting. We shoulder our axe and bid you adieu until next week."

J. W. Pattison, the author of this almost amateurish salutatory, was the editor of the *Arrow* during its short existence of twelve weeks, when it was conducted in a manner which attracted considerable attention from eastern papers and subscribers. This was in reality the main object of the enterprise. If any one should happen to wonder how a newspaper man who had no better editorial tripod than a stump could have much of a printing establishment, it must be confessed that this paper, ostensibly a Nebraska enterprise, was really printed in Council Bluffs. However, it was run in the interest of Nebraska settlers, either present or prospective, and was already cultivating a contempt for its place of origin, the Bluffs—this alone would mark it as being indubitably Omahogish in nature. J. E. Johnson, who was joined with Pattison in the undertaking and was the business manager of the affair, was a Mormon and had three or four wives. Being so well supplied in this regard, it was but natural that he should also have a large number of callings by which to earn a living for himself and them. Besides managing the business part of the *Arrow* he also practiced law, ran a blacksmith shop, was an insurance agent, and carried on a general merchandising business. Perhaps he would now be a shining light in this state in some of these lines,

but his habit of frequent marrying made advisable his departure for Utah in 1856.\*

Pattison was an eminently quotable writer, and as he seems to have worked with his eastern readers in his thoughts, his editorials and locals throw much more light upon the early times than those of the later newspaper men. For instance, one of the editorials in the first number was headed "A Night in Our Sanctum," and was as follows :

"Last night we slept in our sanctum—the starry-decked heaven for a ceiling and mother earth for a flooring. It was a glorious night and we were tired from the day's exertions. Far away on different portions of the prairie glimmered the camp fires of our neighbors, the Pawnees, Omahas, or that noble and too often unappreciated class of our own people known as pioneers or squatters. We gathered around our little camp fire, talked of times of the past, of the pleasing present, and of the glorious future which the march of civilization would open in the land whereon we sat. The new moon was just sinking behind the distant prairie roll, but slightly dispelling the darkness which crept over our loved and cherished Nebraska land. We thought of the distant friends and loved ones, who, stretched upon beds of downy ease, little appreciated the unalloyed pleasure, the heaven-blessed comfort that dwelt with us in this far-off land. No busy hum of the bustling world served to distract our thoughts. Behind us was spread our buffalo robe in an old Indian trail, which was to serve as our bed and bedding. The cool night wind swept in cooling breezes around us, deep laden with the perfume of thousand-hued and varied flowers. Far away upon our lea came the occasional howl of the prairie wolves. Talk of comfort—there was more of it in one hour of our sanctum camp life, and of camp life generally upon Nebraska soil, than in a whole life of fashionable, pampered world in the settlements, and individually we would not have exchanged our sanctum for any of those of our brethren of the press who boast of its neatness and beauty of artificial adornment.

"The night stole on, and we in the most comfortable manner in the world—and editors have a faculty of making themselves comfortable together—crept between art and nature, our blanket and buffalo, to sleep, and perchance to dream, of battles, sieges, fortunes, and perils,

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\* See Early Hist. Omaha, chap. vii.

the imminent breach. To dreamland we went. The busy hum of business from factories and the varied branches of mechanism from Omaha city reached our ears. The incessant rattle of innumerable drays over the paved streets, the steady tramp of ten thousand of an animated, enterprising population, the hoarse orders fast issuing from the crowd of steamers upon the levee, loaded with the rich products of the state of Nebraska, and unloading the fruits, spices and products of other climes and soils greeted our ears. Far away from toward the setting sun came telegraphic dispatches of improvements, progress, and moral advancement upon the Pacific coast. Cars full freighted with teas, silks, etc., were arriving from thence and passing across the stationary channel of the Missouri river with lightning speed, hurry-on to the Atlantic seaboard. The third express train on the Council Bluffs and Galveston railroad came thundering close by us with a shrill whistle that brought us to our feet knife in hand. We rubbed our eyes, looked into the darkness beyond to see the flying train. They had vanished, and the shrill second neigh of our lariat-ed horses gave indication of the danger near. The hum of business in and around the city had also vanished, and the same rude camp fires were before us. We slept again, and daylight stole upon us refreshed and ready for another day's labor."

At the risk of turning this sketch of early journalism into a series of extracts from the *Arrow*, we venture to quote still further from the file of that paper now treasured by Mr. Byron Reed, of Omaha. The file is complete with the exception of the sixth number, is probably the only one in existence, and was secured by him at a cost of thirty dollars, or something more than two dollars and a half per number. On the first issue we find this surprising item: "As many of our foreign friends will be unable to pronounce the word Omaha, we will from our Indian dictionary assist them. The proper pronunciation is 'O-maw-haw,' accenting the middle syllable." There is also a notice that Omaha has just been surveyed by A. D. Jones, and that the colored maps and plates, without which no "city" could in those days achieve greatness, were in course of preparation. Later on the editor of the *Arrow* felicitates himself on the receipt, "clear out here in the wilds of Nebraska," of a copy of *Godey's Lady's Book*, which one would suppose that his partner, Johnson, might have had more use for. An extended trip up the Platte with a company of land

hunters supplied him with material for an interesting series of sketches entitled "Journeyings and Jottings in Nebraska." In the second number we find an account of a visit from Mr. Reed, of the Bellevue semi-monthly *Palladium*. The accounts which the two editors prepared of their trip together over the site of the alleged city of Omaha differ widely, one being written by a man whose business it was to boom that town, and the other by one whose business it was to boom a rival place. On the 3d of November the *Arrow* published five columns of very flattering notices of itself clipped from other papers, and only survived this ebullition of egotism one week.

Its place at Omaha was taken by the *Nebraskian*, which was started late in the year 1854, for the purpose of getting Bird B. Chapman to congress, and succeeded to perfection. This paper, from which frequent quotations have been made in the previous articles of this series, continued to lead a vigorous and belligerent existence, fighting with valor and bitterness the battles of its owners, of Omaha, and of the North Platte wing of the unterrified democracy, till in 1865 it subsided to make room for the *Omaha Herald*. Like most of the early papers its rhetoric was often more forcible than correct, and sometimes more startling than either, as when, in speaking of the character of Izard, who had just retired from the governorship, it said that "as perfection is seldom attained, it would be well to let the mouth of charity descend over his faults."

On June 11, 1857, appeared the first number of the *Omaha City Weekly Times*. The motto of this paper (most of the papers of the day considered it necessary to have a motto—some of them two) was the old couplet,

"Pledged but to truth, to liberty and law,  
No favor sways us, and no fear shall awe."

It observed, rather obscurely, in its salutatory, that "Public opinion is the mark of this modern civilization. The public opinion of Rome was once the thought of Cicero. The public opinion of Europe was once the will of Charlemagne. As the great engine of power is the mark of our modern civilization it has made for itself its own instructor—an instructor also and equally a peculiarity of our age—this is the *Press*."

In 1857 was published a prospectus of the *Omaha Daily Times*, which was to begin as soon as there was sufficient advertising patronage secured to warrant the outlay of publishing an evening paper, but

nothing came of it, and in 1859 the *Times* was merged into the *Nebraskian*.

"Westward the star of empire takes its way," was the appropriate motto of the first daily ever published in the state. Henry Z. Curtis was the manager of the Omaha *Daily Telegraph*, which began to be issued on the 11th of December, 1860. The editor had a talent for quoting and misquoting Shakespeare. The paper circulated both in Omaha and Council Bluffs, but the patronage was not sufficiently large to keep it up. At the end of six months it was reduced in size so that it could be printed on a hand-press, and soon after ceased altogether.

To aid the republican party, which had just begun to struggle into existence in this territory, the Omaha *Republican* was established in 1858, a paper that has since had a continuous and most prosperous career. As the war drew on it adopted for its motto, "Liberty and union, now and forever, one and inseparable," and fought it through on that line.

Turning from Omaha we find various papers in the different river towns. The earliest was probably the Bellevue *Palladium*, already mentioned. At Brownville, on the 7th of June, 1856, appeared the first number of the Nebraska *Advertiser*, "an independent newspaper, devoted to matters of general interest to the community at large." Robert W. Furnas was the editor, and thus strikes into the high heroics in his salutatory: "At the call of duty we bestir ourself, and at the expense of our own peace and happiness tread the path she lays out for us—tread it though paved with thorns and sown thick with perils." In enumerating the classes he wishes to serve, the editor says the paper is to be "for the ladies a mirror, from which may be reflected their numberless virtues and winning graces." The cause of the insertion of this gallant passage may perhaps be that a company of young people had gathered at the printing office just before the stock and press arrived, and had dedicated it with a most enjoyable dance. After awhile the *Advertiser* seemed to become dissatisfied with the objects it had been aiming at, and became a paper "devoted to art, science, agriculture, commerce, news, politics, general intelligence, and the interests of Nebraska." This was surely a comprehensive programme for a weekly paper of those early days, even though it did claim, but without entire justice, to be the largest paper above St. Joe. In politics it was strictly non-partisan the first year, but while Furnas was absent

as a member of the territorial assembly the "sub" who managed things in his absence felt the restraint sorely. "We are trammled by neutrality. We deprecate, we despise neutrality, but contrary to our feelings the path already marked out must be followed. We can say this much—which, by the way, is consoling—if the editor lingers at Omaha one hour beyond his time, up goes our banner at the masthead with some kind of principles inscribed thereon." To prevent such a catastrophe in the future, Furnas, at the beginning of the second year, announced the *Advertiser* as a democratic sheet, and it proceeded to read the slavery question out of politics, to hurrah for Douglas, to complain of Daily's fanaticism in trying to organize the republican party, and to conduct itself in other regards after its kind. One thing to be noticed about this paper from the start was the attention paid to agriculture. Though a department was given up to poetry, and another to "select tales," and such like matters, that now fill the "patent" portions of the country press, yet the farm department was well taken care of. It was announced at the head of the editorial columns that the editor had "a fine lot of upland cranberry plants for sale." The paper published the entire premium list of the first Nebraska territorial fair, to be held at Nebraska City, September 21-3, '59, and in many ways the future successful secretary of the state board of agriculture prophesied of himself by his method of conducting the paper; while on the first of October, 1859, he began the publication of a monthly called the *Nebraska Farmer*.

The *Florence Courier*, John M. Mentzer editor, had much to say on sectional topics, and with an eye to the future terminus of the trans-continental railroad chose for its motto: "We would rather be in the right place on rock bottom, than have the capital of the territory." The people of Florence found before they were through with it that another kind of "rocks" than those at the bottom of a river might have influence in directing the course of a railroad line.

It had been the intention to speak of some of the other territorial papers—of the Plattsmouth *Jeffersonian*, of which Marquett was editor for a time, of the DeSoto *Pilot*, of that rabid democratic sheet, the *Nebraska City News*, and other journalistic enterprises of the fifties. But enough has been said to indicate the nature of territorial journalism. It did a great work in the development of the territory; it was rough and pugnacious, but withal manly and efficient. Nothing is

more to be regretted in regard to our early historical records than the very general destruction of the old newspaper files. A couple of defective volumes at the state library, a complete file of the *Advertiser* in the possession of ex-Gov. Furnas, carefully preserved files of several papers in the possession of Byron Reed, and a few scattered volumes being kicked about the lumber rooms of the older newspapers, seem to be almost the extent of such records yet in existence, though some of the old settlers have preserved still others.

The State Historical society could very profitably undertake the work of cataloguing these newspaper files, the recording of the names of the owners, and the places of deposit.

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## THE CAPITAL QUESTION IN NEBRASKA, AND THE LOCATION OF THE SEAT OF GOVERN- MENT AT LINCOLN.

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BY HON. C. H. GERE.

[Read before the Society, January 12, 1886.]

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To found a city is a human ambition older than history. The name of the engineer that set the metes and bounds of the first block and street in Jerusalem, or Athens, or Philadelphia, or Minneapolis, may be obliterated by the tides of time, but his work endures to this day, and the man who would tamper with his records or shift his landmarks, is a miscreant by the unanimous voice of the nations. But there are other ambitions almost as exigent. Other than dreams of immortality nerve many a pioneer to make the fight for his rival site for the seat of government of a state, or of a county, or for a railroad station. It is a dream of corner lots, of speculation, of bonds and mortgages, and deeds and commissions, and sudden wealth.

The transformation of a rough pebble to a diamond, of a fragment of dirty looking carbonate, trodden under foot by a hundred prospectors, to a button of shining metal, are realizations of the fairy tales of childhood, no more seductive to the bearded son of the child, than the transformation of a square mile of wilderness, for the present dear enough at the cost of measuring it with compass and chain, by the breath of a law or an ordinance into a realm worth a prince's portion.