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A PRELIMINARY HISTORY
OF THE NEBRASKA ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, 1880-1982

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The Nebraska Academy of Sciences is the oldest scientific organization in the state of Nebraska and was formed to encourage the exchange of scientific data and to improve the communication between the various disciplines of scientific research in the different educational institutions. Those were the goals a century ago. Today they are basically the same:

To promote the utilization of scientific talent in the State of Nebraska in cooperation with local, state, federal, and private organizations in addressing all problems of the environment as they relate to science, and,

To dedicate its collective and individual talents to promoting the best possible education for young people, and to instilling in them awareness of the relationship of science, technology, and the changing environment.

Although the Nebraska Academy of Sciences is usually considered as having been organized in 1891, it was actually founded in Omaha in 1880 (Schultz, 1982). A copy (Anonymous, 1880) of the “Constitution and By-laws of the Nebraska Academy of Sciences” states in Article VII, Section 1, “The time of commencement of the Academy is the 30th day of January, 1880.” Seventy-five charter members were listed. These organizers were from 18 cities and towns in Nebraska.

The Union Pacific Railroad officials did much to promote the establishment of the Academy and at least 15 charter members were associated with the railroad company. Office space for the headquarters and meeting rooms of the Academy were furnished by the railroad officials in the Williams Block at Dodge and North 15th streets, near the Union Pacific office building. The Union Pacific endeavored to make Omaha the educational and cultural center of the west, and encouraged many other cultural and fraternal organizations to form and become active.

Although the Academy has been considered to have been organized in 1891 (Anonymous, 1891 and 1892; Pool, 1955), this date has been questioned by many members of the Academy for more than half a century even though no historical basis could be found. In doing research on early man and the geology of Nebraska during the late 1920s and early 1930s, the present writer and others had noted that Wilber (1881), on the title page of his book The great valleys and prairies of Nebraska and the Northwest, listed his affiliation as “Inspector of mining lands in the western states and territories; First Secretary, Illinois Natural History Society; Superintendent, Department of Geology and Mineralogy, Nebraska Academy of Sciences.” On page 231 he discussed mammoth remains in Nebraska and stated: “Most notable of these now extinct mammoths is one whose remains were found in Saline County, Nebraska, and which was first described by the writer in a paper read before the Nebraska Academy of Sciences, a portion of which is here introduced. . . .”

Other references to the Nebraska Academy of Sciences also were noted in publications and newspapers of the 1880s. However, it was not until 1981 that conclusive evidence was found that the Academy did exist as early as 1881. Professor Hill, of the Entomology Department, University of Nebraska-
Lincoln, and a Life Member of the Academy, found a 1881 letterhead of the "Nebraska Academy of Sciences." Hill had been doing extensive research on the life of the distinguished entomologist, Lawrence Bruner, of Nebraska. Bruner lived in West Point, Nebraska, in 1881 and taught in a country school from time to time and did research on insects, especially grasshoppers.

One of Bruner's relatives who lived in California loaned Hill some letters that Bruner had written to his wife-to-be, Marcia Dowell, of River Sioux, Iowa. One of the letters was written on Nebraska Academy of Sciences stationery which had the names of eight of the officers printed on it. Bruner had borrowed a piece of the stationery while staying at the home of the Academy's Curator, J. Budd, and wrote to Marcia Dowell on 17 July 1881 (Fig. 1). With this lead the writer immediately checked the archives of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the State Historical Society, the Nebraska Academy of Sciences, and the Union Pacific Railroad Museum.

Professor Samuel Aughey was the first president of the Academy, elected in 1880, and re-elected in 1881 and 1882 (Fig. 2). The other 1880 officers included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Vice President</td>
<td>L. Burnham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Vice President</td>
<td>R. R. Livingston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Vice President</td>
<td>J. W. Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording Secretary</td>
<td>J. T. Allan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corresponding Secretary</td>
<td>B. E. B. Kennedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>A. D. Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>O. C. Dinsmoor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curator</td>
<td>J. Budd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of Directors</td>
<td>S. Aughey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J. T. Allan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. D. Wilber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G. W. E. Dorsey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H. Kennedy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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FIGURE 2. Samuel Aughey, first president of the Academy, 1880-1882. Aughey was the first professor of science at the University of Nebraska and first Director of the University Museum. He (Aughey, 1876 and 1880) started the entomological, botanical, geological, and paleontological collections at the University. Charles E. Bessey (1912) stated this about Aughey after his death, "Let us honor him for his scientific spirit which he carried to the end of his long life."
The Union Pacific issued passes to science teachers of various high schools, colleges, and universities and also to other citizens interested in science so they could attend the monthly meetings of the Academy in Omaha.

Many of the early archival documents and records of the Union Pacific were placed in three metal cars and then the cars were sealed to prevent humidity from damaging the documents. This was done during the construction of the new Union Pacific building in Omaha. The cars were then taken to arid Nevada and placed on a sidetrack in the desert so that the contents of the cars could be properly preserved. Unfortunately the three cars could not be located when it was time for the return of the archival material. Somewhere there are three lost boxcars which contain irreplaceable historic documents! However, evidence is at hand to demonstrate that the Nebraska Academy of Sciences existed and met monthly during the early part of the 1880s and less frequently later.

During the late 1880s Omaha became an important industrial railroad town and Lincoln became the "educational center of the West." By the early 1890s Lincoln was known as the "Athens of the West." A map of Lincoln compiled by Adna Dobson in 1893 shows eight college and university campuses. In addition the Lincoln Business School was founded in 1887, and in 1889 the Nebraska Conservatory of Music was established at the southeast corner of "L" and 19th streets. These great changes in the two cities undoubtedly led to the reorganization of the Academy in Lincoln in 1891.

Little did the scientists of the 1880s and 1890s know that they were living during the last 20 yrs of the "Little Ice Age." During 12 of those years a great drought was taking place, and there were many disastrous floods affecting Lincoln along the Antelope, Oak, and Salt creeks. A great financial depression also was causing many hardships in the mid-1890s. The population of Lincoln dropped from 55,154 in 1891 to 40,159 in 1900. The population of Douglas County dropped from approximately 180,000 to about 150,000 during this same time.

Nevertheless, the Academy continued to flourish under the leadership of great scientists who became its presidents: J. S. Kingsley (1891-1892), zoologist, University of Nebraska; C. E. Bessey (1892-1895), botanist, University of Nebraska; A. W. Norton (1895-1896), psychologist, Peru College; and E. H. Barbour (1896-1897), geologist, University of Nebraska. Bessey was president again in 1914-1915. He was also Acting Chancellor of the University of Nebraska from 1889 through 1891 and from 1899 through 1900, but still found time to take active leadership in the Academy's reorganization and program. Space does not permit elaboration on all the outstanding individuals who contributed so much to the Academy. Ecological and environmental studies had their start in Lincoln at the University (Tobey, 1981) and the Academy's continued program did much to promote these studies, especially during and after the droughts of the 1890s and 1930s.

The Academy became involved in international climatic and environmental studies in 1965 when the Academy agreed to publish 11 guidebooks for the National Academy of Sciences and the National Research Council for the 7th International Congress of the International Association of Quaternary Research and also hold an international symposium on "Loess and related eolian deposits of the world" in Lincoln. Professor Walter Mientka, president of the Academy in 1964-1965, and the Executive Committee encouraged the Academy to take on these responsibilities. C. Bertrand Schultz had been appointed a delegate to the 6th INQUA Congress in Poland in 1961, and Mrs. Schultz (Marian) participated also. Many foreign scientists wished to see the "Great American Desert" in Nebraska, where the largest sand dune area in the western hemisphere is found adjacent to the thickest windblown deposits (loess), and where Indian villages are buried under as much as 16 m of windblown dust and colluvial material.

The 7th INQUA Congress was held in the United States in 1965. The writer was a member of the U.S. International Executive Committee. He became senior editor of the 11 1965 guidebooks and the book on loess deposits of the world. Since then the Academy has become increasingly involved in the changing environments, including climates of Nebraska, the Great Plains, and the world. The Institute for Tertiary-Quaternary Studies (TER-QUA) was organized in 1968 and became affiliated with the Academy in 1974; it is concerned with the changing environments of the Great Plains past, present, and future.

Until 1960, the Academy flourished largely through the sole efforts of dedicated members who paid dues and gave of their time, although the State Legislature did provide funds for the printing of 12 small volumes of the Publications series through the early 1920s. In 1960 the Academy received the bulk of the estate of Rachael and Benjamin Maiben, two Life Members of the Academy, which included a 65 ha experimental farm near Palmyra, Otoe County. The State Legislature and the Department of Education have provided funds for publication of the Transactions of the Academy since 1969. Starting in 1972, "Friends of the Academy," which includes business organizations, foundations, and individuals, have generously provided funds in order to expand the work of the Academy.

All 12 sections and 10 affiliated societies of the Academy are active. The efforts of the science teachers' section has been productive and the Greater Nebraska Association of Teachers of Science (GNATS) has been organized. The Junior Academy
program also has been strengthened. Prospects look good for an excellent educational program for the Academy’s second century.

Special thanks are given to Kathy Egbert, Roscoe Hill, Ann Reinert, and Joseph Svoboda for their research assistance in discovering the origin of the Academy. Aid was also provided by Harold Becker, Valerie Blake, and Marian Schultz.

REFERENCES


____. 1891. Constitution, officers, and list of members of the Nebraska Academy of Sciences, organized January 1, 1891. Lincoln, Nebraska Academy of Sciences, Publication Number 1:1-8.


