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## Frontier Settlement and Community Development in Richardson, Burt, and Platte Counties, Nebraska, 1854-1870

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Frontier Settlement and Community Development in  
Richardson, Burt, and Platte Counties, Nebraska,  
1854-1870

by

Nicholas J. Aieta

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: History

Under the Supervision of Professor Kenneth J. Winkle

Lincoln, Nebraska

December 2007

Frontier Settlement and Community Development in  
Richardson, Burt, and Platte Counties, Nebraska,  
1854-1870

Nicholas J. Aieta, Ph.D.  
University of Nebraska, 2007

Advisor: Kenneth J. Winkle

The Nebraska Territory was established in 1854. Consisting of lands that encompass modern-day Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado, and parts of Montana, the region was quite extensive. Originally, this land was part of the Louisiana Purchase, and some of the land had been reserved for Native American relocation following various treaties of the 1830s and 1840s. As pressures mounted to open the land for white settlement, both Nebraska and Kansas were established as territories in 1854.

The objective of this research is to examine the foundations of community in Nebraska Territory during the years 1854-1870. Specifically, this dissertation examines the origins of community in Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties. An evaluation of the origins and demographic characteristics of the citizens is described. This includes analysis of a database of the citizens including examination of age, gender breakdown, and birthplace of early frontier dwellers.

This dissertation analyzes settlement patterns in the three counties with reference to the new environment of the Great Plains, cultural background of the settlers, and economic activities. In addition, this study pursues the question of motivation for creating certain institutions in this Great Plains territory and state. A brief study of community politics and legal affairs as well as the impact of creating school and religious institutions is examined.

Residence in the counties of Richardson, Burt, and Platte in Nebraska afforded their citizens the opportunity to construct the social institutions of their choosing while

starting life anew. Farmers, businessmen, craftsmen, and political figures all contributed to the new communities while marginalizing the original Native American inhabitants.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank a number of people for aiding me in the completion of this dissertation. Dr. Kenneth Winkle's infinite patience and advice was immeasurably helpful as I worked through this project. Dr. Winkle always had the extra reference, be it article, book, or dissertation, at the tip of his mind to share with me when more historical literature was needed to frame my research. He read through drafts quickly and with care, providing direction and corrective measures when necessary.

The History Department of the University of Nebraska awarded me the Addison E. Sheldon Fellowship as well as the Viola Florence Barnes Fellowship. In addition, I was given two teaching assistantships before the History Department entrusted me to a classroom of my own. That staff at the University of Nebraska's Love Library Special Archives was immensely helpful in tracking down all sorts of books that had disappeared off the regular Love Library shelves as well as some local material in the Botkin and Sandoz collections. Pete Brink and Carmella Orosco in particular, but also Mary Ellen Ducey and Traci Robison, endured endless requests for materials but also pointed me in new directions which I had previously not considered.

Shortly after I began my doctoral program, I worked at the Nebraska State Historical Society for Jill Koelling cataloguing photographs. Chad Wall and Cynthia Monroe helped me learn more about the rest of the available materials and aided me in beginning this project during the year that followed my employment. Most recently, Linda Hein, Mary Jo Miller, and Matt Piersol were of immense help. Tirelessly, each found new sources, aided with technical problems, and pushed me to consider new

questions. I could not have completed this dissertation without their efforts and expertise. Tom and Laura Mooney provided information and materials connected to the archives, but more than that, they were sounding boards and their company was a welcome refuge from the daily grind of archival work.

Matt Engel created the locator map on page three and showed me the basics of using Adobe Illustrator to generate my own maps. Greta Clinton-Selin, a former student and friend, read this manuscript as well as certain sources in order to provide intellectual direction as well as edits to syntax. Her work in these avenues and in taking care of my daughter Willa allowed for the completion of this dissertation.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. My parents Joseph and Joanne encouraged me from an early age to pursue books and learning with great passion. When I failed to complete a third grade paper on the Great Sphinx, my dad handed me primary documents for my next report, due later that same year, on the Donner Party. The following year, William Bradford's *Of Plimouth Plantation* was thrust into my hands as I had been assigned a report on Miles Standish. My sister Melissa has always been supportive of my work as a history teacher. My wife Janelle, whom I met when I began this program at Nebraska, has been a great inspiration to me, and quite simply, made me a better human being. She never allowed me to give up on completing my work and supported me when I had to leave home for long stretches at a time. For Janelle, our daughter Willa, and our soon to be born child, I dedicate this dissertation.

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## INTRODUCTION

"We shouted hurrah for Nebraska as we first touched its fertile soil & sniffed its balmy breezes," New Yorker Benjamin R. Folsom wrote in October 1854. After a few days of exploration, Folsom and the men accompanying him had examined much of what would soon become Burt County, Nebraska. They saw "very little timber...the fattest deer" and potentially fertile land in great quantities, before returning to Council Bluffs, Iowa.<sup>1</sup>

Folsom and others like him moved to Nebraska in increasing numbers after the territory was officially established in May 1854. Who were these people? From where did they come and why? What sort of life did they establish for themselves upon arrival? These and other questions about Nebraska's more recent residents have yet to be thoroughly investigated.

This dissertation is a community study of territorial Nebraska between 1854 and 1870. Detailed analysis of three counties, Burt, Richardson, and Platte (see map 1), provides a portrait of Nebraska communities prior to and immediately following the Civil War. Some additional analysis will provide a glimpse into rural communities on the Great Plains frontier more broadly. It has been argued that much of Nebraska was not settled until after statehood, which in all likelihood explains the paucity of studies covering the period before 1867. More often than not, if the Nebraska frontier is discussed at all when considering western movement during the 1840s and 1850s, it is either in reference to travel on the Oregon Trail, or lumped in with the story of Kansas.

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<sup>1</sup>Benjamin R. Folsom, Journal, Record Group 4300, Nebraska State Historical Society.

The examination of community development has long been the subject of sociological studies. These studies often sought to address questions of continuity and change in American society, specifically looking at social change as a movement from one definite point in time to another and looking at trends in data that reveal demographic compositions, employment patterns, housing, school attendance, class stratification and much more. Communities, which consist of a body of people with a degree of consensus, inhabiting a common territory, develop social structure which is the totality of the relationships among community members. How newer residents are assimilated into a given community can also be an important issue as can analyzing the process by which social structures emerge.<sup>2</sup> Commonality is not the only important facet of community building however. Arguments have been advanced that suggest that conflict can have a positive influence in relation to developing and maintaining social order. Conflict is not necessarily dysfunctional in community construction, nor is it a situation to avoid.<sup>3</sup>

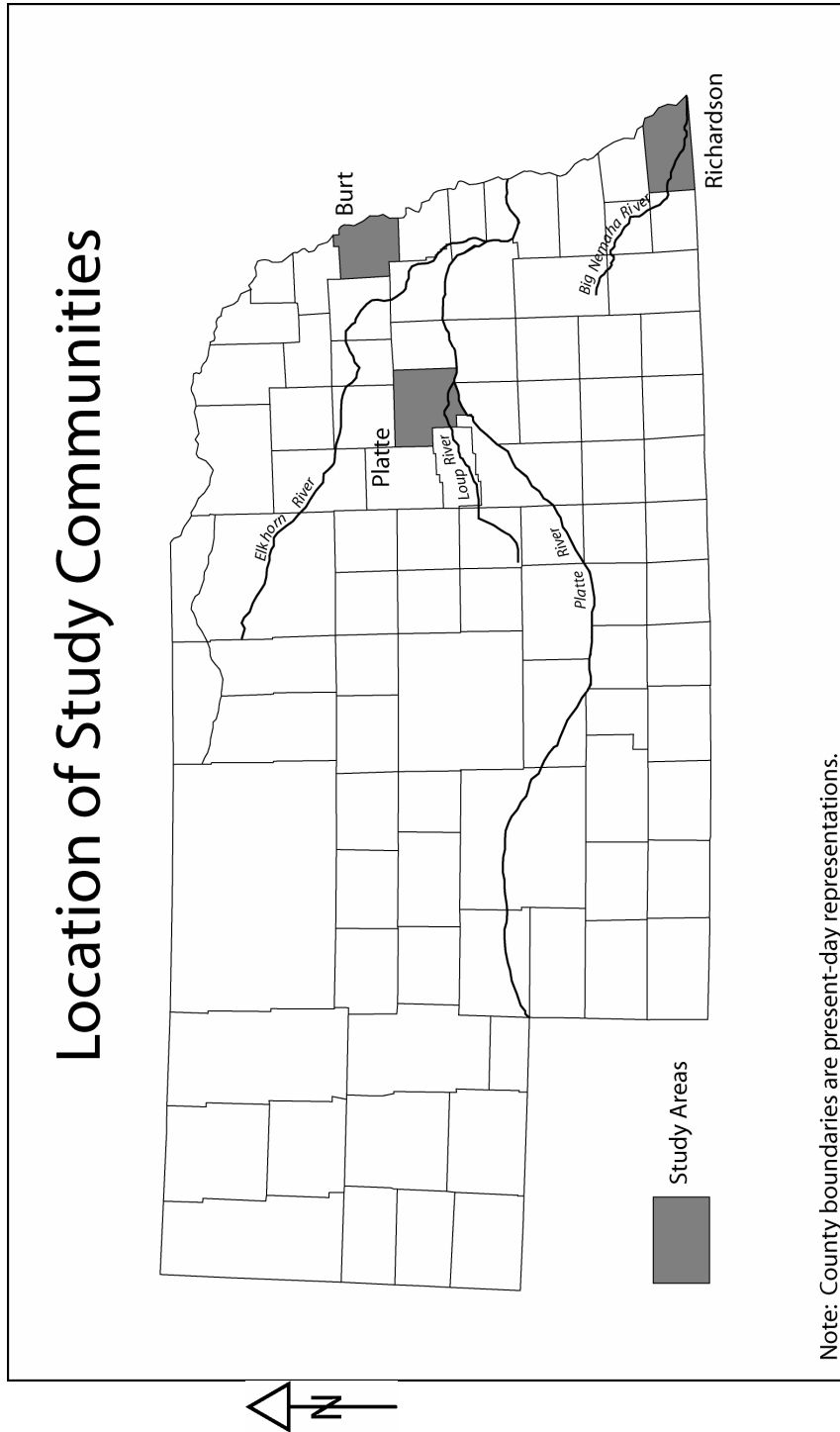
Some past approaches to community study have been undertaken by sociologists, anthropologists, and historians. Particularly after the 1950s, historians have taken on the task of defining community as a place in which citizens' efforts are engaged in order to build a better place and an activist social life is crucial to developing this community. Questions of whether economic change or geographic mobility effect community are considered as well as the issue of how people who live together try to create a neighborhood or association from place. The structure, function, and behavior

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<sup>2</sup> Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1929); William Lloyd Warner and Paul Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941)

<sup>3</sup> Lewis A. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1954); Coser, *Continuities in the Study of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1967).

**Map 1:** Nebraska with Richardson, Burt, Platte Counties identified<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Map created by Matthew R. Engel.

of residents combine to determine evolution of community. Occasionally, researchers even examine the idea of how a community comes to fail. Historians in particular examine these questions in relation to themes over time.<sup>5</sup>

In *River Towns in the Great West*, Timothy Mahoney traced the development of a regional urban system in the Upper Mississippi Valley. He examines that the region is largely determined by economic and geographic factors, particularly transformation due to the arrival of the railroad. In *Provincial Lives: Middle Class Experience in the Antebellum Middle West*, Mahoney returned to these previously examined towns, this time focusing on individuals and looking at their community structure. Mahoney effectively examines the coming of “order” and “gentility” to these towns and budding urban centers ultimately concluding that a series of regional communities are constructed. As in *River Towns*, Mahoney finds in *Provincial Lives* that the arrival of the railroad does something to these communities. While this type of transportation technology can make connections between divergent towns and regions, perhaps the railroad also signals the end of a form of community as a “metropolis” and national culture become more dominant.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dwight Sanderson, *The Rural Community* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1932); Elvin Hatch, *Biography of a Small Town* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Lewis Atheron, *Main Street on the Middle Border* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954); Merle Curti, *The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier County* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959); Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825-1870* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1978); Michael H. Frisch, *Town into City: Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Meaning of Community, 1840-1880* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972); Herman R. Lantz, *A Community in Search of Itself: A Case History of Cairo Illinois* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972); Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

<sup>6</sup> Timothy R. Mahoney, *River Towns in the Great West: The Structure of Provincial Urbanization in the American Midwest, 1820-1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Timothy R. Mahoney, *Provincial Lives: Middle-class Experience in the Antebellum Middle West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

This notion of a distinct regional culture is an interesting one and to develop such a culture necessarily forces the mashing together of people from different walks of life. The communities and social structure of western and frontier locales is based on efforts by Americans to bring their own values, traditions, etc. with them to new locations. Settlers who were what Timothy Mahoney terms “contributors” (farmers and entrepreneurs) start community building and sometimes conflict arises between newer and older waves of settlers as a result.<sup>7</sup> Underlying it all however, is the idea that these communities can and will come into being so as to “civilize” these western regions.

The internal migration that Frederick Jackson Turner suggested was crucial to developing American values and spreading American understanding of community gets some play here. If the nineteenth-century is the stage of America’s highest levels of migration and these high levels came about due to long distance westward movement to farms and rural areas, there must be some reason. Turner’s notion that there was a relationship between geographic and social mobility is important to consider in examining community construction.<sup>8</sup> Mahoney describes these community structures as the result of some Americans coming and saying there was a need for “gentility” and perhaps this need might partially be explained by physical movement of new residents combined with their desire for social status or improved economic opportunity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Mahoney, *Provincial Lives*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Patricia Kelly Hall and Steven Ruggles, “‘Restless in the Midst of Their Prosperity’: New Evidence on the Internal Migration of Americans, 1850-2000,” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 3 (2004): 829-846; Hall and Ruggles provide findings consistent with Turner’s theories that the nineteenth-century saw the highest levels of migration in American history and that most of these migrations resulted from long travel west to farms. In addition, their study explores the relationship between geographic and social mobility.

<sup>9</sup> Mahoney, *Provincial Lives*, particularly Chapter 4; for agreement on the idea that residents of the West hoped to tame the frontier quickly, also see C. Robert Haywood, *Victorian West: Class and Culture*

Whereas Mahoney's discussion centers on urban communities of the Midwest, this study will focus on rural neighborhoods. There is some overlap in that urban or semi-urban communities develop in both locales and that in both regions monetary advancement and social systems on par with national examples are desired. These rural communities which Turner and later Merle Curti would argue are built on the desire for economic opportunity afforded by cheaply available land are a part of nineteenth-century migration patterns. Migrating to a rural location was an opportunity for both foreign and native born residents. The crowded laboring urban men of Stephan Thernstrom's Newburyport did involve formerly rural denizens, but in the period immediately preceding and following the Civil War, the possibility increased for opportunity in the West. People sought to "start over" to paraphrase William Willingham's discussion of the eastern Oregon Frontier. In studying these evolving communities, regardless of location or time frame, it is important to discuss social structure, economic successes and failures, why community exists and can explain human action and the impact of environment on community construction.<sup>10</sup>

While it may be old-fashioned and somewhat Turner-like to make this claim, the communities constructed in Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties and the opportunities these neighborhoods represented to residents were for the most part developed through the utilization of cheaply available land. Through the work of Nebraska's newest

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in *Kansas Cattle Towns* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991). Haywood challenges the idea that there was no civilized component to the cattle town societies. He argues that most residents of Kansas wanted their communities to tie together the values and philosophies of East and West, but most importantly, they sought to "tame" the West. Finally, Haywood concludes that ideology and what people had in their minds was more important than environment in shaping community.

<sup>10</sup> Curti, *The Making of an American Community*; Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress*; William F. Willingham, *Starting Over: Community Building on the Eastern Oregon Frontier* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 2006); Mahoney, *Provincial Lives*, 6-11.

arrivals, the frontier of Nebraska moved from territory to state and a model of development was provided for the larger region of the Great Plains. These communities were part of a period in Nebraska's development after white settlement had been firmly established in the eastern portions of the territory. In examining frontier development historians have taken either optimistic or, arguably, overly pessimistic views. This study of the Nebraska territory's development draws on a vast array of historical research and writing on the question of community creation and to a lesser degree, what that means for developing the frontier. Some of the literature does not directly relate to the origins of communities in the nineteenth-century American West, but still sheds light on the ideology and strategies behind human societies in development.

As a community study, an important component of this work is the relationship between community and politics within the study's area. Did the more recent residents of Nebraska create new forms of political expression? Were their systems altered at all by their surroundings? How much influence did their individual pasts have on democratic institutions? Democracy, it can be safely said, was not born on the frontier, but was it even practiced? Most historians today argue that it was more than just an Eastern culture that influenced the West. There were Canadians, Native Americans, Germans, Swiss, French, Irish, Southerners, Yankees and even the odd Sardinian residing in Nebraska.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dixon Wecter and others would argue that cultural advance on the frontier shaped the region. Eastern culture, Wecter believed, transformed the frontier. Dixon Wecter, "Instruments of Culture on the Frontier," *Yale Review* 36 Winter 1947, 242-256; Thomas Wertenbaker, "The Molding of the Middle West," *American Historical Review* 53, January 1948, 223-234. One question that is commonly asked is whether the "new" culture in the West was inferior to that of the East or merely different. See Arthur K. Moore, *The Frontier Mind* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957). For cogent treatment of the concept of the frontier in American History, see David Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993). For a discussion on politics and participation in antebellum America, see Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart Blumin,

This study explores political, social, and cultural trends in the years preceding the Civil War, as well as the five years immediately following its conclusion. By correlating existing political records with social, cultural, and economic data, I believe portions of Nebraska's political identity and choices come to be revealed. The community of voters evolves in each of the three case-study counties, in some ways disclosing cultural and ideological divisions that manifest themselves in political struggle. Each county contributes a different group as the majority, be it Northerners, Southerners, or immigrants. The tracking of political behavior in these communities exposes much about allegiance systems within the counties. The history of the residents, in addition to their economic and institutional lives says much about Nebraska as a whole, as well as commenting more generally on communities in the American West.

Another point of debate centers on whether or not the frontier created economic and political equality for these new Nebraska neighborhoods. Initial examination seems to indicate the answer to be no. Was there truly a spirit of freedom on the frontier? If so, why are residents of Burt County eager to implement laws demanding repayment for damage caused by loose stock? Why are mark and brand records so important in Richardson County? Was individuality in these Western communities considered an important attribute or were tight-knit communities, replete with government and laws more crucial to success stories?

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"Limits of Political Engagement in Antebellum America: A New Look at the Golden Age of Participatory Democracy;" Altschuler and Blumin, "Politics, Society, and the Narrative of American Democracy;" Harry L. Watson, "Humbug? Bah! Altschuler and Blumin and the Riddle of the Antebellum Electorate;" Jean Harvey Baker, "Politics, Paradigms, and Public Culture;" and Norma Basch, "A Challenge to the Story of Popular Politics," in "Political Engagement and Disengagement in Antebellum America, A Round Table," *Journal of American History* Vol. 84, No. 3 December 1997, 855-909.



The communities created in Nebraska during the territorial period and after may have made an effort to hold onto some of these unique cultural traditions. This question has been insufficiently studied. Most histories of Nebraska covering the period between 1854 and 1867, concentrate on the political significance of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. James C. Malin's *The Nebraska Question* is one such example. Similarly, in the later editions of *History of Nebraska* by James Olson and Ronald Naugle the authors largely address political concerns within their section on the territorial days. In addition, James Potts' dissertation, "Nebraska Territory, 1854-1867," provides a clear synthesis and analysis of territorial politics in Nebraska.<sup>12</sup>

Older histories of Nebraska, such as A.T. Andreas' *History of the State of Nebraska*, provide more insight into the individuals who made up Nebraska's populace. This more distant history by Andreas, as well as similar books by Addison Sheldon, tends to concentrate on those men who became extremely successful and influential within the state.<sup>13</sup> Little has been said about those who struggled through day to day existence and even less has been said about the fate of women, children, and minorities in those early years.

The origins of community construction in Nebraska emerged prior to the arrival of whites in the region, although the focus of this study will be on the time period of the

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<sup>12</sup>James C. Malin, *The Nebraska Question, 1852-1854* (Lawrence, Kansas: privately printed, 1953); James Byron Potts, "Nebraska Territory, 1854-1867: A Study of Frontier Politics" (Ph.D. dissertation, History, University of Nebraska, 1973), especially 27-55; James C. Olson and Ronald C. Naugle, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997),

<sup>13</sup>A.T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska* 2 volumes. (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1882); Addison Sheldon, *Semi-Centennial History of Nebraska; historical sketch* (Lincoln: Lemon Publishing Company, 1904); Sheldon, *History and Stories of Nebraska* (Lincoln and Chicago: The University Publishing Company, 1913); Sheldon, *Nebraska, the land and the people* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1931).

“white frontier.” Looking backwards from circa 1854, one can see scant evidence of an Anglo-European community in the region. There were efforts made by the French in St. Louis to create trade networks across the region, but these were a different type of community altogether. Additionally, these communities were, for the most part, determined by access to certain trade goods of value as well as by the Native American presence in the region.<sup>14</sup> As Timothy Mahoney argues in *Provincial Lives* some examination of these social systems can help one ascertain the types of restraints and dynamics that shaped later societies.<sup>15</sup> For many years, between the sale of Louisiana lands and the official organization of Nebraska by law in 1854, the notion of an Anglo-American community was fleeting. The presence that did exist will be fleshed out in chapter two when the background of the region is more fully explored.

The community development of Nebraska on which I shall focus includes Richardson County in the southeastern section of the state, Burt County on the northeast central border of the Missouri River, and Platte County, located along the Platte River. Each county possesses different demographics that are clearly revealed in the census records. Richardson, at least through 1860, was settled by a high percentage of Southerners. Burt held high numbers of Northerners and Platte was a haven for migrants from Europe. As a result, each county reveals different habits and traditions manifested in agricultural practice, house building, and other approaches to rural life. From

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<sup>14</sup> David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979). Wishart focuses on the geography of the fur trade, contrasting the Upper Missouri with the Rocky Mountains. While examining the mechanics and strategy of the trade, he also focuses on the trade's significance in the development of the West. This book's focus is not community, although descriptions of how the fur trade undermined native communities are part of the story.

<sup>15</sup> Mahoney, *Provincial Lives*, 13.

analyzing these three counties, generalizations about behavioral patterns, gender ratios, and politics in Nebraska and other Great Plains territories may be made.

A combination of statistical analysis from the censuses of 1854, 1855, 1856, 1860 and 1870, along with an examination of county histories, tax lists, marriage records, newspapers, and selected land office records is the basis for much of the dissertation. The censuses provide a great deal of data and allow for an in depth study of the residents of the Nebraska Territory. For each year of the census, the name and sex of the household head is identified as well as the number of people in each household. The place of birth for each head of household is also noted. In some cases additional information, such as political party membership, is also noted. For the years 1860 and 1870, each member of the household is identified by name, gender, race, age, and occupation. Further, the 1860 and 1870 censuses identify the birthplace of each household member, the occupation, and the value of real and personal estate. There is also information about such questions as marital status, schooling, literacy, and criminal conduct.

By examining existing mortality sheets for 1860 and 1870, details on deaths for the previous year can be ascertained. Study of the agricultural records from the censuses of 1860 and 1870 record the types of crops planted and the amount of livestock owned. Therefore, from census records, a fairly detailed portrait of the regional origins, ethnicity, and lifestyles of the population base from these three counties can be drawn for the years 1854-1870.

Studies of the American West invariably deal with geography and population movement; although this study will primarily be focused on community development,

some discussion of this phenomenon must include discussion of geographic mobility and the reasons for it. In the past, it was argued that the American West possessed unique properties that affected its historical development as both a geographic place and a time in history. Frederick Jackson Turner and Walter Prescott Webb argued that the frontier, specifically the western frontier, contributed to American progress in ways very different from other regions of the country. For Turner, economic development was the key to his analysis of the West. Webb agreed with Turner to a degree and added that the environment played an important role in shaping the lives of settlers as they spread out onto the Great Plains. Adherents to the New Western Historians' philosophy however, disagree with the interpretation of both Turner and Webb. It has become increasingly clear that any explicit following of the Turner Thesis does not always adequately reveal the history of the American West.<sup>16</sup>

Although Turner and Webb discuss the influence of the open lands on those who moved west, neither historian did much research on detailing what aspects of eastern culture may have been brought with the early settlers. Many older histories of westward movement spend little time examining the roles of the individuals who uprooted themselves, while more recent works do address this issue.<sup>17</sup> More emphasis is placed on

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<sup>16</sup>Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," American Historical Association, *Annual Report*, 1893 (Washington, DC: 1893); Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains*. (Boston: Ginn, 1931). Further critiques of the Turner thesis can be found in Burton J. Williams, "The Twentieth-Century American West: The Old Versus the New," *Rocky Mountain Social Science Journal* Vol. 6 October 1969 and Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin, eds., *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991).

<sup>17</sup>Peter Boag, *Environment and Experience: Settlement Culture in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Oregon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Paul Burke and Donald DeBats, *Washington County: Politics and Community in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

discussing the political development of western states or the implications of American expansionism than in presenting the community life of the West's newest residents.

Works like Jack Eblen's *The First and Second United States Empires* are clear examples of the former. Eblen discusses American expansion west from the Northwest Ordinance to the admission of Arizona and New Mexico as states. Eblen utilizes a legal framework, studying the entire process of creating settlement and government in the United States. The political aspect of this westward movement is the most important to Eblen. He argues that the United States, in pushing across the continent and then beyond into the Pacific, was composing its own empire. He contends that the establishment of territories like Nebraska was very similar to the development of colonies by the British before 1775. The United States would use these territories for natural resources and as outlets for their population, while dangling the full powers of statehood before them. In discussing the politics and government of the territories, however, Eblen does not seek to include any details from the lives of the residents of these regions, native or immigrant.<sup>18</sup> These criticisms aside, Eblen's other important work in the field of demography has made contributions to advance the study of the frontier community.<sup>19</sup>

In sharp contrast to Eblen's work on American empire stand John Mack Faragher's *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* and Glenda Riley's *The Female Frontier*.<sup>20</sup> Both works concentrate on the lives of the people in the West, although not

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<sup>18</sup>Jack Ericson Eblen, *The First and Second United States Empires: Governors and Territorial Government, 1784-1912* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968).

<sup>19</sup>Eblen, "An Analysis of Nineteenth-Century Frontier Populations," *Demography* 2 (1965): 399-413.

<sup>20</sup>John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979); Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press,

specifically Nebraska, rather than focusing on the political story. While politics and government are obviously important parts of the story and theories like Eblen's have merit, the lives of those people who moved west must be considered. This is why I raise questions about the origins of the residents of Nebraska. The political process was often out of their hands; clearing fields, choosing livestock and building houses were not.

Don Harrison Doyle studied the urban frontier in *The Social Order of a Frontier Community*. In addition to suggesting that the terms urban and frontier can have multiple definitions, Doyle examined in close detail the community development of Jacksonville, IL as it grew from a few hundred residents in 1825 to over 5,000 by 1860. Jacksonville never became the major city some of its residents hoped for, but what Doyle reveals about the community structure is important to examine. Despite limited industrial capacity and a significant lack of connection via railroads, Jacksonville's voluntary associations and the growing level of public control over time allow Doyle to attempt analysis of problem solving in the community, especially considering the difficulties inherent within a constantly changing community.<sup>21</sup>

Kenneth Winkle's *The Politics of Community* deals with this last point effectively – the ever changing community and the challenges it presents. This study fits in with social and community history as it focuses on the constant and widespread population turnover that seemed to occur throughout American society in the nineteenth-century. Winkle takes the themes of movement and community construction and puts them into a

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1986); Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: a Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community*; Especially on page 255 where Doyle points out that in some people's minds the small town's failure was revealing an element of "chosen success."

new framework – electoral political participation. Examining relationships between migration and political participation, Winkle discusses the issue of self-defining in relation to whether someone is considered part of a community or not. Voting, an expression of community participation for adult white males was undertaken in order to confer order and authority in a region. Because antebellum Ohioans were constantly on the move, eligibility in voting was difficult to determine. In some cases, ones residence in a community for voting purposes could be determined by agreement within the community that you indeed lived there – in other cases a simple statement that you intended to be a part of the community sufficed. Winkle’s study reveals that it was the more persistent residents of towns and counties who maintained authority. While voter participation was certainly encouraged – this helped new arrivals feel a part of the community – Winkle concludes that the non-transients had significantly more power than transients.<sup>22</sup>

James Shortridge’s *Peopling the Plains, Who Settled Where in Frontier Kansas*<sup>23</sup> is an excellent demonstration of how to study the origins of migrants to the Great Plains. Indeed, in his preface, Shortridge encourages work in his wake. By examining the origins of the local citizenry, much can be revealed about why the area took shape the way it did. As David Hackett Fischer argues in *Albion’s Seed*, migrants do not abandon

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<sup>22</sup> Kenneth J. Winkle, *The Politics of Community: Migration and Politics in Antebellum Ohio* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); see also, Winkle, “The Voters of Lincoln’s Springfield: Migration and Political Participation in an Antebellum City,” *The Journal of Social History* 25, no. 3 (1991): 595-611.

<sup>23</sup> James Shortridge, *Peopling the Plains, Who Settled Where in Frontier Kansas* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995). See also, John Modell, “The Peopling of a Working Class Ward: Reading, Pennsylvania, 1850,” (*Journal of Social History* Fall 1971, p.71); John C. Hudson, “Who was ‘Forest Man?’ Sources of Migrations to the Plains,” (*Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 6 No. 2 Spring 1986, p.69). Modell and Hudson examine internal migration.

their cultural heritage after they move. Often they embrace it, seeking to create ever stronger ties to the place from which they have removed.<sup>24</sup> In the American West, white citizens were almost always migrants from somewhere. Even if they were merely from different geographical regions of the United States itself, the young nation had already developed unique cultural traditions, ones that might blend or clash along the “new” frontier.

In both style and methodology, I borrow from works not usually associated directly with the study of community development of the American West. *Albion's Seed*, while somewhat flawed, does provide a fascinating model with which to examine the flow of culture from east to west. Because community will be an important element of this work, examining New England provides an established model of focused neighborhood study. Michael Zuckerman's *Peaceable Kingdoms* and Kenneth Lockridge's *A New England Town* provide opposing, but interesting, viewpoints on the development of community in the northeast.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>25</sup>Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms; New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1970); Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years, Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York: Norton, 1970). Further examples of New England study can be found in Sumner Chilton Powell, *Puritan Village; The Formation of a New England Town* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1963); Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970); John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Edward Cook, *The Fathers of the Towns: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth Century New England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) and Charles S. Grant, *Democracy in the Connecticut Frontier Town of Kent* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961). For a different time period, see Robert Doherty, *Society and Power: Five New England Towns, 1800-1860, a Comparative Study* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977).



Not all Nebraska migrants came from New England, however, and so other histories must be consulted for guidance in dealing with different cultural areas. One region of the country surprisingly well represented in Richardson County, Nebraska, is the South. Robert Ireland's *Little Kingdoms* and Stephanie McCurry's *Masters of Small Worlds* are two useful works in this vein.<sup>26</sup> Ireland examines several counties in Kentucky during the years 1850-1891 and McCurry's study is an insightful look into the very issues, such as gender relations, household structure, and everyday life that this dissertation seeks to uncover.

Many volumes of western American history contribute to help shape elements of this dissertation. In dealing with communities in the West, Peter Boag's *Environment and Experience* along with *Washington County* by Paul Burke and Donald DeBats are two such recent examples. Susan Gray in *The Yankee West* and Kay Carr's examination of three Illinois towns are equally important. The latter two have strengths and weaknesses in both analysis and choice of areas of study which serve as perfect foils to one another.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Robert Ireland, *Little Kingdoms: The Counties of Kentucky, 1850-1891* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1977); Ireland, *The County Courts in Antebellum Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1972); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>27</sup>Boag, *Environment and Experience*; Burke and DeBats, *Washington County*; Susan Gray, *The Yankee West: Community Life on the Michigan Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Kay Carr, *Belleville, Ottawa, and Galesburg: Community and Democracy on the Illinois Frontier* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996); Charles Howard Richardson, "Early Settlement of Eastern Nebraska Territory: A Geographical Study Based on the Original Land Survey" (Ph.D. dissertation, Geography, University of Nebraska, 1968). Susan Gray's study utilizes penetrating analysis on a homogeneous population. Kay Carr, while studying a more varied group of people, falls somewhat short in analysis.

To the residents of territorial Nebraska, land was of great significance. As a largely rural agricultural region, examination of farming, land use, and perhaps more importantly, land purchase, must be undertaken. Allan Bogue's *From Prairie to Corn Belt* and Paul Gates's *The Farmer's Age* are two such studies on agriculture during this period.<sup>28</sup> The question of land ownership in territorial Nebraska is an essential one, particularly when trying to discover the persistence of those who settled there. To address this question, and the method of purchasing land, sources from Bogue and Gates, as well as other studies from Susan Gray, Robert Swierenga, and Sean Hartnett serve as good models.<sup>29</sup>

James Davis for example offers the former perspective on Illinois. He takes a different stance than other historians who have looked at Illinois's past emphasizing the darker aspects of human development. Davis believes that a powerful consensus is important to understand. This consensus was built on Protestantism, republicanism, land ownership, racial exclusivity, trust in judicial process, and "a need for broad tolerance if, not acceptance." In a critique of Davis's work, Andrew R.L. Cayton agreed, noting that delineating daily existence on the frontier was less about misunderstanding and violence,

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<sup>28</sup>Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt; Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); Paul Gates, *The Farmer's Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960); See also, Gilbert Fite, "Agricultural Pioneering in Dakota: A Case Study," (*Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 1 No. 3 Summer 1981).

<sup>29</sup>Bogue, *Money at Interest; The Farm Mortgage on the Middle Border* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955); Gates, *Landlords and Tenants on the Prairie Frontier; Studies in American Land Policy* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1973); Sean Hartnett, "The Land Market on the Wisconsin Frontier: an Examination of Land Ownership Processes in Turtle and LaPrairie Townships, 1839-1890" (*Agricultural History* Vol. 65 No. 4 Fall 1991, p.38); Gray, "Local Speculator as Confidence Man: Mumford Eldred, Jr., and the Michigan Land Rush" (*Journal of the Early Republic* Vol. 10 Fall 1990, p. 383); Robert Swierenga, *Acres for Cents: Delinquent Tax Auctions in Frontier Iowa* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976); James Oberly, *Sixty Million Acres: American Veterans and the Public Lands* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1990).

than about the mundane and no less important business of creating and sustaining households and communities. In some ways, Davis took a traditional Turner-like approach, describing the Illinois frontier as one that was a transitional stage of development.<sup>30</sup>

Depending how one defines consensus, there could be room for agreement or disagreement on this point regarding Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties, the remainder of Nebraska, and the entire Great Plains. Similar to what Davis has revealed in Illinois, these three Nebraska frontier counties developed communities. Somewhat unlike Davis's conclusions about Illinois, these communities were not developed fully within the context of a powerful consensus. Certainly there was a degree of consensus – the majority of early Nebraska residents were white, Protestant, and male. Most citizens shared the same concerns, i.e., gaining ownership of land and creating some sense of order. That said, every county was unable to accomplish these goals without some degree of conflict. Benjamin Folsom in Burt County faced challenges as fellow residents were unhappy with his possession of so much land within the county. The Richardson County residents struggled for political power and attempted to maintain racial exclusivity by limiting the access to authority held by the region's earliest residents, both natives and those of mixed descent. In Platte County, the surface level consensus was balanced by a greater variety of backgrounds due to the wide array of immigrants. Then there was real and difficult conflict in the early 1860s with natives. So, while consensus might have been the main goal or “shaper” of society, it was not alone nor even dominant at times in building these

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<sup>30</sup> James E. Davis, *Frontier Illinois*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Andrew R.L. Cayton, review of *Frontier Illinois* in *Journal of American History* (December 1999): 1335-1336.

communities. It is impossible to ignore that in the territory as a whole, conflict with natives and fears over the Civil War did lead to stress on a high level. The Dakota uprising in 1862 is one such example.

It would be further impossible to suggest that community construction on the Great Plains in general was always undertaken with consensus in mind. Not only were there wars with the region's original residents, but also extended conflict between farmers and ranchers, farmers and railroads, etc. all served notice that people were not always in agreement with, but often violently in opposition to one another. The true difficulty is in creating a rigorous measurement for assessing consensus. How, then, does one create such a framework?<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, Davis is not suggesting that violence was anathema to the Midwestern frontier. Fistfights, duels, etc. existed but Davis argues that the rugged individualism associated with this kind of behavior is less common than often believed or perhaps exaggerated in some cases. While crime, violent or otherwise occurred, the emphasis in community building helps to demonstrate that cooperation and compromise alongside consensus are most important. Davis utilizes statistics to support his point, thereby revealing that there were low numbers of people who suffered violent deaths. While Yankee Protestants in Illinois may have viewed the upland Southerners as "indolent," certainly in Davis's mind Illinois residents developed community more through tolerance and cooperation. The same can be said for religious conflict. Catholics and Protestants

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<sup>31</sup> This is an important question raised by Everett W. Kindig, review of *Frontier Illinois* in *Journal of the Early Republic* Vol. 19, No. 2 (Summer 1999): 346. I would propose that some level of consensus might be measured by the speed at which counties can organize certain basic services (road building, courts, etc.) and perhaps by measuring the level of turnover in county offices. Admittedly, these are largely shallow and imperfect measurements, but perhaps they may provide a baseline from which success at building consensus may be measured.

may have had distrust, but in the end the aim of building a neighborhood out of the frontier was more important than continued conflict. Even bitter fights over the location of county seats, a common occurrence in frontier regions across the Great Plains and most prominently in Richardson County in Nebraska, were simply part of the community building process. Davis suggests that the “contestants played by the rules, more or less.”<sup>32</sup>

As with the frontier of Illinois that Davis described, Nebraska had some examples of violent action including crimes ranging from vigilantism to election fraud to outright murder. However, violent conflict was really the exception, not the rule. While it could be argued that consensus was not the direct result of this lack of conflict in the three counties, perhaps a minimal amount of strife helped build some measure of cooperation. As already noted this situation does not happen as a result of the exclusion of disagreement. Certainly county seat fights were not always played out by what Davis called “the rules.” By investigating Richardson County, one can see that rules were less, rather than more followed. The literal horse trading for votes, attempts at foisting drink off on voters while disguising from whom it came, and outright vote manipulation elevated one town to prominence while dooming another to obscurity. The town doomed for obscurity, in this case Rulo, Nebraska, remained a small community, significantly smaller than eventual winner, Falls City.

But Davis and other historians looking at the Trans-Appalachian west are looking at more than just their particular regions of study. Davis argues that this is more of a consideration about the evolution of an entire frontier society. Davis’ work on Illinois

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<sup>32</sup> Davis, *Frontier Illinois*, 328.

and others from the series in which his book is included are arguably case studies for places beyond the border of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio or Missouri.<sup>33</sup> In examining Illinois, Davis discusses the creation and topography of the state in order to demonstrate how these factors shaped and directed settlement. Davis found the first residents (natives) to be just as in flux as later arrivals, a situation similar to that of LaSalle and other French traders and explorers. Davis's strength in analyzing population shifts gives a reader fodder for thought when working through other material.<sup>34</sup> If indeed a new kind of frontier society is created by the melding of Northern and Southern migrants, then frontier Illinois works as a fine example. Questions that Davis raises are fodder for further reflection. When the frontier ends does it always get replaced by a capitalist society? Are the "great men" of history or major political figures essential to the tale or only vital to the degree that they influenced evolution of the frontier society? In examining territorial Nebraska, and in particular Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties, these two questions are of great importance.

The melding between North and South was particularly true in Richardson County as the majority of the earliest residents hailed from the Upper South. Because these residents were from slave holding states like Missouri or Kentucky, some issues were presented. However, in the Civil War experience and the years afterwards, Richardson County and the territory writ large generally experienced good relations between these formerly warring sides. There is little evidence to suggest that Nebraskans

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<sup>33</sup> Davis, *Frontier Illinois*; Andrew R.L. Cayton, *Frontier Indiana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720-1830*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> See James E. Davis, *Frontier America, 1800-1840: A Comparative Demographic Analysis of the Frontier Process*. (Gledale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1977).

sided with the Confederacy during the war, although some residents in the postwar period were veterans of the Southern forces. The Southerners who had moved to the region prior to the war were made a part of the larger community in most cases and thought of themselves as Westerners more than anything else.

The question then remains across all three counties and territorial Nebraska, how does one assess the success or failure of consensus building? If the matter is to mean that differences may be set aside long enough to establish government, tax boards, commissioners, road projects and so on, then each county was successful. Yet, is this a rigorous enough measure for consensus? Whereas Davis arguably succeeds in explaining that frontier conditions created very powerful motivations for social cohesion in Illinois, this is not necessarily an accurate conclusion across frontier development writ large. Mark Wyman for example, looks at Wisconsin as a place where contact, conflict, and cooperation went hand in hand. Not only does Wyman see these attributes among settlers themselves, but also as the backdrop for an interracial battleground. Wyman examines isolation and man versus nature as Mark Fiege does in Idaho, but in a different manner. As with Fiege, Wyman sees nature as a determinant of conflict, and something about which with which humans must come to consensus. Nature changes people and creates conflict which must be resolved. Perhaps this is accomplished through examining how people impose their wills on the land (e.g. timber, mining, farming) or perhaps it is achieved through agreeing as a community how to face nature and work with it as well as

attempting to control it.<sup>35</sup> In attempting to measure community building and consensus, Wyman includes discussion of local natives, French, and métis, later demonstrating how succeeding groups of Anglo-Americans provided new challenges to these inhabitants. The natural environment plays a major part in Wyman's story of Wisconsin and can be shown to play a large role in understanding Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties as well as the Great Plains more broadly.

The dissertation is organized primarily along thematic lines to allow for greater comparison and simultaneous analysis of the counties within each chapter. The introduction traces ideas of community in United States history, as well as the historiography of materials dealing with more recent human existence in the American West. Chapter one describes briefly the history of Nebraska prior to large-scale white settlement and introduces background behind the formation of Nebraska as a territory. The geographic dimensions of the new territory are defined, as is the political history of its creation. Included in this section are the origins of Burt, Richardson and Platte counties, consisting chiefly of background on some of the more prominent founding residents, as well as the changing geographic boundaries. Through these initial chapters, the scene upon which new settlers arrive is set.

In the second chapter, I analyze the information gathered from the census records which provide a portrait of the various backgrounds of the individuals moving to Nebraska. Although the more specific data is limited to heads of household for the first three years of the census, a general view of the settlement of the counties in the earliest

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<sup>35</sup> Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Mark Wyman, *The Wisconsin Frontier*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).



years emerges. Data from the mortality sheets also allow access to a fuller accounting for life in the counties from birth to death.

In some cases, additional records that record marriages exist for these years. Such records provide further glimpses into the lives of Nebraska's earliest white residents. This information reveals something of the rate of marriage in the counties and more about the nature of religion in the region, if the name and denomination of the individual performing the ceremonies is also recorded. Religious persuasion, when known, can disclose much about the cultural background of the residents of these three counties.

The importance of gender ratio, occupation, and nativity to these settlers is explored, and some attention is paid to the influence of these factors on settlement patterns and political practices. Each county will be studied statistically and then each will be compared with one another. Such an approach will make it possible to better understand Nebraska, the Great Plains and the American West.

In chapter three, questions regarding the agricultural endeavors of the settlers are addressed. This section addresses one of my central questions: how was the land used? The amounts and kinds of products grown in each county, as well as numbers of livestock owned, are detailed. The types of crops planted and ownership of particular livestock can reveal much about cultural transfer in the region. The significance of land, in the West generally, and in Nebraska specifically, is an important aspect of this chapter. James

Shortridge, in *Peopling the Plains*, points out that the choice of draft animals can be used to make a distinction between rural Northerners and rural Southerners.<sup>36</sup>

The United States land office did not formally begin selling land to Nebraskans until 1858. As a result, some records of land sales for the years 1858-1870 are referred to at this point. This information indicates the manner and amounts of land purchases. Because some of the counties created land claim groups, their history as it predates formal land filing is discussed as well.

Some available land sale data indicates which land in the counties was purchased or granted to railroads or private individuals. The development of railroads during this period strengthens the theory that Nebraska is a link between East and West. The land transfers indicate the method of payment for land while also providing an indication as to persistence of the settlers. Those inhabitants doing fairly well for themselves, like Burt County's Benjamin Folsom, demonstrate this fact by purchasing new lands throughout this ten year period. In this chapter, the question of the true beneficiaries of cheap western land is addressed.

When land was taken by these frontier residents it was an action of more than simple land claim. The legal and physical claims to the land laid hold of the Nebraska territory and transformed the Great Plains. How then did people in Richardson, Platte, and Burt counties have an impact on the nature around them? Thus far, one finds it is mostly by taking the land and turning it from prairie and natural growth to human

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<sup>36</sup>Shortridge, *Peopling the Plains*, 192-194. Shortridge points out that Southerners preferred to use mules over horses as their chief work animal. His map of the horse to mule ratio follows very closely the nativity maps.

constructed/constrained farming with all the itinerant limits and benefits. These counties are all in areas that had been inhabited by humans for quite some time, but the previous humans had generally been semi-sedentary (e.g. Pawnees, fur traders, travelers headed to Oregon) and had not necessarily farmed and transformed the land to such a great extent. In counties where the livestock were significant there was another transformation - ungulates of a domesticated nature affect land differently than the more natural "fat deer" spied by Benjamin Folsom or the bison hunted by Lakotas and Pawnees. The prairie, therefore, was transformed as different "weights" from feet (human and animal) trod upon it. Even those migrants to the region who had been farmers in other states or countries were introducing something new to the environment. These new types of animals, plows, farming techniques, eventually the "iron horse" of the railroad - all made significant changes to the appearance of the land, in some cases changing people's perceptions of "nature."

The land too provided a challenge to these migrants and certainly caused change for these individuals as well. The soils, alluvial and otherwise, provided challenges to these migrants and certainly caused challenges for that were to affect what types of crops succeeded in these counties or not.<sup>37</sup> In Richardson County, in particular, a very small number of slaves arrived by 1854, but nature and politics combined to prevent any additional spread of the peculiar institution. The kinds of crops traditionally associated with antebellum slave regions were therefore not grown in large numbers throughout the counties or the territory of Nebraska more broadly. Nebraska, unlike Kansas, was

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<sup>37</sup> For discussion on difficulties with soil and farming in Nebraska about 60 years after the focus of this study, see Walter Hansen, "Dissected Drift Plain of Southeastern Nebraska." *Economic Geography*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (October 1936): 381-391.

therefore able to avoid wide scale violence over the issue of slavery, while the natural environment absorbed a different kind of land use having been spared such exhausting crops as tobacco and cotton.

The region's soil, plants, and weather had an impact on the human residents. Think of Benjamin Folsom's observation in Burt County – "fattest deer...very few trees." The limits on rainfall in the Plains create a situation where trees tend to cluster in any watercourse but do not exist in large numbers. This gives nature a great deal to say about the lives of early Nebraskans. Houses, heat, fencing – all of it was shaped and influenced by the nature surrounding the residents. Weather, in addition to the amount of rain, played a role. As is often common in frontier settlements, the issue of a "big snow" was in the hearts and minds of settlers.<sup>38</sup> Platte County residents for example experienced a situation where nature prevented dispensation of justice – ultimately this led to aberrant behavior in the form of vigilantism. This violence was precipitated by a struggle over from whose woodpile was such and such amount of wood stolen. Interesting that the severe winter, combined with a limit on available wood could then result in murder followed by a lynching.

Chapter four examines how schools and churches constructed during the period contributed to their communities. Some limited financial information provides more details on the status of these early Nebraska residents and in what they were willing to invest. A central theme of persistence versus mobility is important to study in the West and must be appraised. Did the religious organizations and educational opportunities improve community life for Americans in Nebraska?

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<sup>38</sup> see Faragher, *Sugar Creek*; also, Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community*.

America continues to celebrate itself as the “land of opportunity” into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The self-made man, as Stephan Thernstrom described him over forty years ago, is a folk hero, successful because of “the distinctive fluidity of our social order.”<sup>39</sup> Thernstrom asked whether this myth had any resemblance to reality. Further, he explained that there are key problems in even attempting to address this important question – how does data prove or disprove it? What can one do in the face of a dearth of information on the working and middle class residents of a community? While Thernstrom was focused on city dwellers, James Henretta argued convincingly almost 25 years later that Thernstrom was also responsible for inspiring a new way of examining American society and measuring its success or failure. In some ways, argued Henretta, it is Thernstrom’s *Poverty and Progress*, not Merle Curti’s *The Making of an American Community* that served to inspire a generation of community studies.<sup>40</sup> The question, “is American society open or not” is key to Thernstrom’s work.<sup>41</sup> Whether one examines rural or urban communities, it remains an important question to ask. What becomes of these early residents? Are they advancing and growing wealth because of Turner’s open land or because society has these gaps in which people can move up or down based on numerous factors or is it sheer force of will? This study deals with aspects of the lives of numerous unheralded Americans and immigrants who settled in selected counties of the Nebraska territory. By looking at starting points and changes in fortune when possible, some conclusions may be drawn about the nature of frontier and social mobility in the

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<sup>39</sup> Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 1.

<sup>40</sup> James Henretta, “The Making of an American Community: A Thirty Year Retrospective,” *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (September 1988), 506-512.

<sup>41</sup> Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress*, 2.

Nebraska territory, and by extrapolation, in the Great Plains more broadly. The successes and failures of the citizenry, as well as the duties undertaken and revealed by County Commissioner reports, may be revealed by looking at expenditures and involvement in country government.

Nebraska generally, and Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties more specifically are the focus areas. These three counties are different from one another in terms of their initial settler streams and therefore provide a broader understanding of the territory and a jumping off point for the Great Plains. The intent is to provide discussion of how historical data might allow one to draw broader conclusions about larger regions. As was true for Thernstrom, this is not an easy task. Even those residents of the territory who might be termed as “professional” or educated did not leave behind much in the way of written records. But in the more than forty years since Thernstrom’s study, and perhaps because of it in some measure, there has been great use of the United States Census to try to shed light on the social standing of average people. The data is just part of the story though. Arguably, because of the geographic fluidity of western settlers, it is more difficult to see how much social mobility takes place, but the effort should be made nonetheless.

The time frame selected was intentional in an effort to try to capture the changes that occurred in Nebraska, the Great Plains, and America in the years immediately preceding and following the Civil War. Nebraska’s growth from a rough hewn frontier in 1854 to fledgling communities in 1860 is significant – the leap takes on greater proportions in many areas of the newly crowned state by 1870. Immigration, the

resolution of sectional conflict, transportation technology, and government control over the native population all had a hand in this rapid development.

Politics, courts, law, and community in the counties are discussed in chapter five, with special attention paid to Richardson County. The various struggles over choosing the county seats, early laws, and jury records are outlined. It is clear that very early in their history, Nebraskans organized in an effort to create law and order within their communities. Their varying degrees of success or failure are discussed. In Platte County, corporation construction is one such example as social struggles emerged over humans' desires to make the Platte more passable. Bridges or ferries were a distinct type of order humans placed on nature, but an order nonetheless, controlling where humans can cross natural boundaries (rivers, creeks, streams, etc.) Naturally, humans could gain advantage by controlling the access to such passage and naturally that control led to competition. Here then, is an example of how people attempting to control nature ended up having social problems, such as physical confrontations over the authority under which bridges were constructed. This phenomenon is repeated in other ways across the territory and in other forms – where a railroad goes shapes the future of a community for example as nature is conquered via quicker means of transport. A port or a ferry in places like Decatur (Burt County) or Rulo (Richardson County) could make or break a community. Across the territory, later the state, and the Great Plains more broadly, this drama was replayed again and again, as people gained and lost in the face of nature. People's relations with nature are never quite finished – we constantly seek the

improvement of our surroundings, and whether by new technology or natural disaster, find that our control over nature is inherently ethereal.<sup>42</sup>

In order to have any success in controlling landscape and nature and making it productive by human-designed standards, learning cooperation is the best way to maintain control. It is important to at least consider the day to day struggle for persistence in these counties and does that say something about the Nebraska territory and Plains as a whole? One must understand and better define the term “natural” in relation to developed lands.

While the study focuses on three small communities in the Trans-Mississippi west, the aim again is to unpeel layers of the larger region of the whole Nebraska territory and the Great Plains. In some ways, the hope is to be able draw larger conjecture about America’s frontier and historian’s relationship with Turner-like logic. Clearly, to draw concrete conclusions when using a small sample is a challenge, but at the very least, a model for future study will be laid out here. The concluding chapter must address issues such as using Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties as models to investigate Nebraska and the Great Plains. Shortcomings in sources and analysis will be discussed, especially in the context of one of the salient questions – the issue of social mobility. Limited comparisons to the territory writ large and its Great Plains neighbors may prove useful in testing the hypothesis that Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties may provide an accurate model or predictor for certain points of frontier study.

The entire work is largely a study of the territorial period of Nebraska. Despite statehood being granted in 1867, the study must be carried through to the 1870 census in

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<sup>42</sup>This line of thought is inspired by Fiege, *Irrigated Eden*, 41.



order to have a more complete picture of Nebraska in its earliest years. The conclusion discusses the types of communities created in the sample counties of the fledgling state, the changing patterns of ethnicity, and the growth of the economy as demonstrated through agricultural data and the expansion of connectors like the railroads, and the importance of creating legal order in a new place. Additionally the question as to whether moving to these counties, Nebraska, or the Great Plains is a gamble is addressed. If so, how does one define the limits or range of risk associated with this particular bet? Risks in the region included acquiring land, competing for local, national, and global markets, and finding a way to “dominate or adapt” the natural environment. Everything from agricultural periodicals to newspapers to government reports to personal reminiscences all can give insight to these questions. For the most part, the dissertation seeks to serve as a model for further study of the states on the Great Plains. The work includes maps and tables to better illustrate the differences of nativity in the sample counties.

As Gerald Nash has shown in *Creating the West*, historical interpretation of the American West has undergone dramatic transformation since Frederick Jackson Turner's seminal piece, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History."<sup>43</sup> So much has changed regarding interpretation of the American West since Turner that his basic argument that the American democratic spirit grew with and because of the frontier (i.e., a large space full of cheaply attainable land) has largely been dismissed. The previously

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<sup>43</sup>Gerald D. Nash, *Creating the West; Historical Interpretations 1890-1990*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991); Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History."

nostalgic studies of the American West have given way to sometimes highly critical works, which focus on the theme of conquest of both humans and the environment.<sup>44</sup>

Still, large questions remain unanswered by the more recent generation of historians who have brought new perspectives to the study of the American West in the last twenty years. Increasingly, historians have concentrated on what was wrong with the expansion of the frontier, rather than what was right. A more even-handed approach, combining some of Turner's optimism regarding the beneficial aspects of the frontier with the more negative pessimism of recent days, is necessary.

As did James Shortridge in Kansas, the question of how to examine a specific place on a local level and then draw patterns for that larger place and region as a whole is addressed. When faced with collections of hard data, it is important to remember the ideas and questions more so than the information. Interpreting the data is one thing, summarizing theoretical and methodological foundations yet another, but above all, the information must be placed in some type of historical perspective. The data may say one thing, but it is still simply bits of information out of which one pulls strands of people's

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<sup>44</sup>The arguments refuting Turner are myriad. Thomas Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932); Abernethy, "Democracy and the Southern Frontier," *Journal of Southern History* 4 February 1938, 12-13. Abernethy is one of the earlier Turner critics to state that according to his research, frontiers people were often the most anti-democratic. Webb, *The Great Plains*; Isaiah Bowman, *The Pioneer Fringe*. (New York: American Geographical Society, 1931). Bowman and Webb emphasized the importance of technology's impact on settlement in the American West. Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); Worster, "New West, True West: Interpreting the Region's History," *Western Historical Quarterly* 18 April 1987, 141-56; Richard White, "American Environmental History: The Development of a New Historical Field," *Pacific Historical Review* 54 August 1985, 297-335; White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: a History of the American West*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991). Worster, White, and Cronon are three of the more prominent examples of historians studying the effects that increased human settlement has had on the American West. Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987). Limerick emphasizes the history of the West as a place of conquest, where both human lives and the environment are inexorably changed by policies and conflicting philosophies of life.

stories. The people's lives are what to examine and from these lives conclusions are drawn. Merle Curti demonstrated that you could use masses of data to draw generalizations about a community. By linking records and so forth, a new world of social and economic life was revealed. This contribution of Curti's is both philosophical and methodological. Like Shortridge years later, Curti reveals the life behind numbers and data, but it took the work of historians like Stephen Thernstrom to move the idea of social history out of footnotes and into actual works.

In accord with James Shortridge, I believe there are ways in which to study the region, which do not focus primarily on the political or economic. These methods reveal much about the people who decided to make Nebraska their home, including where they came from, how much of their past lives they carried with them, their levels of persistence, and their experiences in developing the middle region of this nation.

## CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO SETTLEMENT

Officially opened to white settlement in 1854, the territory of Nebraska provided a new home for migrants from various points in the United States and abroad. In examining the ebb and flow of settlers' migration to Nebraska, one discovers that migrants generally followed two routes into the territory, the first being a "northern stream," the second "southern." The third point of origin for new Nebraskans was Europe.<sup>1</sup> The new residents of the region carried various cultural backgrounds with their personal possessions, making their own stamps on Nebraska's development in communities across the territory.

This chapter will set the stage on which white settlement in Nebraska was established. In addition, this section examines the general background of the study counties within Nebraska. Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties were all established within two years of the declaration of territorial status in 1854. By 1860, these three counties numbered among the more established ones in the territory of Nebraska. The three counties possess unique features that create different rationales for their being chosen, but each provides a piece of the settlement mosaic that created territorial Nebraska.

Nebraska, for the most part, is a large prairie-plains flatland, situated at about the middle of what geographers define as the Great Plains of North America. The state is bordered to the east by the Missouri River and the Platte River, a leading tributary of the Missouri that winds its way across the center. This study focuses on counties formed in

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion on migration and difficulties in its study, see John C. Hudson, "Who was 'Forest Man?' Sources of Migration to the Plains," *Great Plains Quarterly* 6 (1986): 69-83; John C. Hudson, "Migration to an American Frontier," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66 (June 1976): 242-265; John C. Hudson, "North American Origins of Middle-Western Frontier Populations," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 78 (September 1988): 395-413.

the eastern quarter of Nebraska, a region that generally encompasses alluvial lowlands and loess from a topographical perspective. The primary soils in the three counties include alluvium, prairie, and Chernozem soils. The latter two are among the richest in the world. As Nebraska farmers would find out, the problem with the region is not the soil, but easy access to water or sufficient rainfall. The climate for the region was in line with others on the Great Plains, a place known for extremes and unpredictability. As early visitors and pioneers reported, storms, both rain and snow, could be extremely severe. Rainfall in the eastern part of the state averages about 27.8 inches, although between 1865 and 1870, that number was about 32.5 inches. Partially due to this low rainfall, the state has fewer trees than its eastern neighbors, a fact not lost on some early residents and one that played a role in determining how and where early settlements were constructed.<sup>2</sup>

While the Great Plains was certainly a challenging environment in which to develop a frontier settlement it was certainly not impossible to achieve success. The problem faced by many Americans in the years prior to the creation of the Nebraska Territory was that the reality and myth of the Great Plains often collided with one another creating false impressions of the region. As Ray Allen Billington said, there were really two frontiers during the pioneer period: “One was a frontier of fact, where sweating dirt farmers toiled endlessly to triumph over nature’s obstacles and the greed of their fellow men. The other was a frontier of myth, existing only in the minds of eastern

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<sup>2</sup> James C. Olson and Ronald C. Naugle, *History of Nebraska* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 6-12, 405.

humanitarians, western promoters, and romanticists everywhere.”<sup>3</sup> Those romanticists had interesting views of the region. “It was a world almost without feature,” wrote Robert Louis Stevenson, “an empty sky, an empty earth front and back...the green plain ran till it touched the skirts of heaven. Along the track innumerable wild sunflowers, no bigger than a crown-piece, bloomed in a continuous flower-bed; grazing beasts were seen upon the prairie at all degrees of distance and diminution.”<sup>4</sup> Charles Murray, another visitor from across the Atlantic, observed “beautiful rolling prairie, interspersed with trees...the grass, which was extremely rich and luxuriant, was sprinkled with gay flowers.”<sup>5</sup> Yet Murray also sounded a note of complaint, stating that on his trip to live among the Pawnees “no game had been seen or killed, and every hour’s experience tended to convince me of the exaggerated statements with which many Western travelers have misled the civilized world in regard to the game on these prairies.”<sup>6</sup> Exaggerated statements are important to understanding Euro-Americans’ perceptions of the Great Plains.

From the time Coronado rode north from Mexico in search of gold, the Great Plains have held out promise and disappointment to visitors and residents alike. A few very important ideas to keep in mind however are about perception, knowledge, and how that knowledge is communicated. As G. Malcolm Lewis has written, native inhabitants

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<sup>3</sup> Ray Allen Billington, “The Garden of the World: Fact and Fiction,” in *The Heritage of the Middle West*, ed. John J. Murray (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *Across the Plains*, Project Gutenberg, <http://library.unl.edu/search/tacross+the+plains/tacross+the+plains/1,16,27,B/1856~b3200748&FF=tacross+the+plains&1,,3,1,0> (Accessed July 6, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Sir Charles Augustus Murray, *Travels in North America During the Years 1834, 1835, 1836, including a Summer Residence with the Pawnee Tribe of Indians in the Remote Prairies of the Missouri and a Visit to Cuba and the Azore Islands* volume 1 (London: R. Bentley, 1839), 183

<sup>6</sup> Murray, *Travels*, volume 1, 188.

of the region had very clear ideas about the distinctiveness of the Great Plains. Natives knew that although that great resource of the plains, the bison, had to be hunted there, plans had to be made when leaving wooded regions. Natives understood that everything from kindling to tent poles to water sources had to be very carefully considered. Travel was dominated partially by the movement of the animals, but also by availability of certain resources.<sup>7</sup> Those Europeans and Americans who came across the region tried to explain what it was they were seeing, but often came up short. In addition, as a swirl of languages told the tale of this immense region, there were sometimes problems in translation. Was the region barren, a meadow, a prairie, a savannah, or a desert? All of these words were used but usually in the context of but one part of the whole. By the end of the eighteenth-century efforts were under way to create “a single geographical image” for the Great Plains.<sup>8</sup>

American perceptions of the region were decidedly colored by the writings of Zebulon Pike. Pike was a New Jersey native who also lived in the Midwest as the son of a soldier and then as a young cadet himself. While Lewis and Clark were still crossing the continent, Pike was ordered to discover the headwaters of several major rivers including the Mississippi and Arkansas. It was the latter trip that had a major impact on people’s perceptions of the Great Plains. In 1810 Pike’s publication of a volume discussing his journeys he offered a particularly negative view of portions of the

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<sup>7</sup> G. Malcolm Lewis, “The Cognition and Communication of Former Ideas about the Great Plains,” in *The Great Plains: Environment and Culture*, ed. Brian W. Blouet and Frederick C. Luebke (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 31.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis, “Cognition and Communication,” 32-34. Lewis points out that Canadian fur trader Alexander Henry the Elder marked a map with the term “Great Plains” as early as 1776. Peter Pond, another Canadian fur trader sent a map to St. John de Crevecoeur marked “immense Pleins.” Finally, Alexander Mackenzie published a piece written between 1793 and 1801 that called the area immense plains.

Louisiana Territory. Pike suggested that the region was a “vast tract of untimbered country which lies between the waters of the Missouri, Mississippi, and the western Ocean.”<sup>9</sup> Pike believed he needed to offer some kind of explanation for the region’s appearance. He concluded that the area was never really fully timbered and that with so little water trees could not grow. “These vast plains of the western hemisphere, may become in time equally celebrated as the sandy desarts [sic] of Africa; for I saw in my route, in various places, tracts of many leagues, where the wind had thrown up the sand, in all the fanciful forms of the ocean’s rolling wave, and on which not a speck of vegetable matter existed.”<sup>10</sup> Seemingly in an effort to find something positive to say, Pike suggested that with such a physically challenging environment facing Americans, population might find itself restricted. Pike believed that such restriction was important for the “continuation of our union,” especially given that “our citizens are prone to rambling and extending themselves.” Finally, with some justification, Pike suggested that we “leave the prairies incapable of cultivation to the wandering and uncivilized aborigines of the country.”<sup>11</sup>

A decade after Pike’s “dissertation” was published Stephen Long undertook an expedition to the Rocky Mountains. Long concluded that Pike was correct and his report, compiled by Dr. Edwin James, confirmed that the region should be considered as a

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<sup>9</sup> Zebulon Pike, “A dissertation on the soil, rivers, productions, animal and vegetable, with general notes on the internal parts of Louisiana, compiled from observations made by Capt. Z.M. Pike, in a late tour from the mouth of the Missouri, to the head waters of the Arkansaw and Rio Del Norte in the years 1806 and 1807; including observations on the aborigines of the country,” in *The Journals of Zebulon Montgomery Pike with letters and related documents*, ed. Donald Jackson, volume 2, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 27.

<sup>10</sup> Pike, “Dissertation,” 27.

<sup>11</sup> Pike, “Dissertation,” 28.



desert.<sup>12</sup> Near the Platte River, the explorers described one region of plains as “presenting the aspect and hopelessness of irreclaimable sterility.”<sup>13</sup> Long’s map of the area he explored was later labeled “Great Desert,” and then adjusted to read “Great American Desert.” The region was further maligned by these words: “it is almost wholly unfit for cultivation...the scarcity of wood and water, almost uniformly prevalent, will prove insuperable obstacle in the way of settling the country.”<sup>14</sup> From roughly 1821 until at least the Civil War, Americans may have “gone west” but they largely skipped past Nebraska, perceiving it to be part of the area unfit for cultivation. This is not to suggest that everybody in America shared this perception. As Martyn J. Bowden has pointed out, it was unlikely that the notion of a great desert in the region was a widely disseminated idea.<sup>15</sup>

As has been noted, perception and myth are very important even in the hands of historians and geographers looking at the region years after settlement. Bowden suggests that the fluctuations in Great Plains environment could lead to historians drawing certain conclusions. Specifically, Bowden targeted Frederick Jackson Turner, William Prescott Webb, and James Malin as people who may have seen a wider array of changes to the

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<sup>12</sup> Edwin James, *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains, Performed in the Years 1819 and 1820, by Order of the Hon. J. C. Calhoun, Secretary of War: Under the Command of Major Stephen H. Long. From the notes of Major Long, Mr. T. Say, and other gentlemen of the exploring party.* 3 volumes (Philadelphia: H. C. Carey and I. Lea, 1822 and 1823).

<sup>13</sup> James, *Account*, volume 2, 147.

<sup>14</sup> James, *Account*, volume 3, 236, 237.

<sup>15</sup> Martyn J. Bowden, “The Great American Desert in the American Mind: The Historiography of a Geographical Notion,” in *Geographies of the Mind* eds. David Lowenthal and Martyn J. Bowden. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976): 119-147; Bowden, “The Perceptions of the Western Interior of the United States, 1800-1870: A Problem in Historical Geography,” *Proceedings, Association of American Geographers* 1 (1966): 16-21; also see Lewis, “Cognition and Communication,” 33-37, especially figure 2 on 36.

Great Plains environment than the people about whom they were writing.<sup>16</sup> For example, in a 1957 article, Webb stated emphatically that to know the West is to start in its middle “because that is where its dominating force – the Desert – resides.”<sup>17</sup> This article reinforced a point Webb made some twenty-six years earlier about the existence of a culture of knowledge culminating in acceptance of the desert ideology.<sup>18</sup>

And yet there were myriad views that emerged suggesting people did not universally think of the region as a desert. Latter Day Saint William Clayton’s journey through Nebraska on the way to the valley of the Great Salt Lake touched on lands that would become Burt and Platte counties. Clayton, originally from England, was a Mormon convert who lived at the Winter Quarters in Nebraska in 1846 and 1847. On his journey, Clayton observed that certain areas, particularly close to the future Platte County, had plenty of timber and good access to water.<sup>19</sup> Clayton found the land near the Elk Horn to be “one of the most beautiful I ever saw. The bluffs on the east are nicely rolling and beautifully lined with timber.”<sup>20</sup> Clayton did acknowledge some shortcomings. As he moved west of what would become Platte County, he observed

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<sup>16</sup> Bowden, “The Great American Desert in the American Mind.”

<sup>17</sup> Walter Prescott Webb, “The American West, Perpetual Mirage,” *Harper’s Magazine*, May 1957, 25. This article not only confirms Webb’s views of the region as desert, but openly critiques Americans for having “abolished” the Great American Desert and for not realizing that the desert will prevail over “puny men.”

<sup>18</sup> Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1931), 147-148, 152-160.

<sup>19</sup> William Clayton. *The Latter-Day Saints’ Emigrants’ Guide: Being a Table of Distances, Showing All the Springs, Creeks, Rivers...And All Other Notable Places, from Council Bluffs, to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake* (St. Louis: Republican Steam Power press, Chambers & Knapp, 1848), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Clayton, *William Clayton’s Journal: A Daily Record of the Journey of the Original Company of “Mormon” Pioneers from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1921), 78.

“there is very little timber.” Yet, Clayton did not see a desert but rather “beautiful rolling bluffs” and “a splendid table of land.”<sup>21</sup>

An extremely positive portrayal can be found in C. W. Dana’s description of the West as “The *Land of Promise*, and the *Canaan* of our time.”<sup>22</sup> It was a region which “broadens grandly over the vast prairies and mighty rivers, over queenly lakes and lofty mountains. With a soil more fertile than human agriculture has tilled.”<sup>23</sup> Men in the west would make great strides; there would be no “idlers in their vineyard.”<sup>24</sup> This place, asserted Dana, will be the future because it is truly “the garden of the world.”<sup>25</sup> Of Nebraska, it was observed that the territory was at least equal, if not superior, to Kansas. Its soil was “rich and rolling, well watered, and healthy.”<sup>26</sup> Historian Ray Allen Billington attacked such boundless optimism about a century later, stating that one of the first problems facing these early settlers was gaining access to this “healthy” and great land. Focusing on Iowa, Billington pointed out that the settlers were typically moving ahead of the surveyors. As a result, new farmers often had difficulties in reaping the bounty of these “rich and rolling” western lands. Billington concluded that it was certainly not “the Garden of the World,” but also observed that people’s thoughts were much more influenced by what they believed frontier to be, rather than what it actually was.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Clayton, *Journal*, 93.

<sup>22</sup> C. W. Dana, *The Garden of the World, or, The Great West; Its History, Its Wealth, Its Natural Advantages, and Its Future. Also Comprising a Complete Guide to Emigrants, with a Full Description of the Different Routes Westward* (Boston: Wentworth and Company, 1856), 13.

<sup>23</sup> Dana, *Garden of the World*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Dana, *Garden of the World*, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Dana, *Garden of the World*, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Dana, *Garden of the World*, 236.

<sup>27</sup> Billington, “The Garden of the World: Fact and Fiction,” 35, 37, 51-52.

Once again, perception plays an important role in addressing the question of what lands were actually like. Not only could fluctuating environments shape the opinions of our forebears, but also the minds and thoughts of those who studied these settlers afterwards. This vision of the Great American Desert may have derived from a few people rather than a reality. Nathan H. Parker published *The Kansas and Nebraska Handbook* in 1857, including a “new and accurate map” that made no mention whatsoever of any desert.<sup>28</sup> Parker’s general impressions of the two new territories are very positive, with the exception being the “troubles” in Kansas related to arguments over the extension of slavery.<sup>29</sup> So with shifting views such as Parker’s appearing, the question remains, why did people draw negative conclusions about the Great Plains to start? Merlin Lawson and Charles Stockton have attempted to answer these questions. Given climatological data and studies of tree rings along the paths of exploration, it is probable that Stephen Long witnessed some level of drought on part of his trip. Pike on the other hand, particularly on his journey back from custody in New Spain, was moving through at a time of above normal moisture. Therefore, perception more than reality is the key to understanding descriptions of the Great Plains. Long and Pike, both Easterners, not only had their upbringing working against them, but also had limited observation time of the region. Without multiple studies, these travelers could not hope to get opinions and conclusions even close to 100% accurate. Long and Pike were not

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<sup>28</sup> Nathan H. Parker, *The Kansas and Nebraska Handbook, for 1857-8. With a New and Accurate Map* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1857), frontleaf and inside cover.

<sup>29</sup> Parker, *Handbook*, specifically about positive descriptions of Nebraska 129-140; on “border ruffians” and hope for the future in Kansas, 104-110.

necessarily wrong, but their conclusions were based upon shoddy evidence and, at least in Long's case, he may have been right, but only at that particular point in time.<sup>30</sup>

Prior to the arrival of Europeans and their American descendants, Nebraska had been home to several other communities. Native American tribes, predominantly the semi-nomadic Pawnees, but also including the Omahas, Otoe-Missourias, Ioways, Poncas, Dakotas, and Lakotas, resided or hunted in the region.<sup>31</sup> Before the historical Pawnees, archaeological evidence suggests that the region was home to other semi-sedentary groups that practiced agriculture starting around the year 1000 A.D. Further back in time, the region was probably home to prehistoric nomadic hunting groups.<sup>32</sup> The other aforementioned Native American tribes, excepting the Dakotas and Lakotas, were recent immigrants to the region, probably arriving in the eighteenth century, although each group adopted their new native land very quickly.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, and unlike other regions of North America, the native population of the Great Plains did not reach a climax (about 250,000) until after the Europeans introduced the horse to the continent.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Merlin P. Lawson and Charles W. Stockton, "Desert Myth and Climatic Reality," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 71 no. 4 (December 1981): 527-535; Merlin P. Lawson, *The Climate of the Great American Desert* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), particularly chapter 2.

<sup>31</sup> For an excellent discussion of Native Americans in Nebraska just prior to and after territorial status, see David J. Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness: The Dispossession of the Nebraska Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), especially pages 1-185.

<sup>32</sup> Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 13-18; Robert W. Furnas, ed. *Transactions and Reports of Nebraska Historical Society* 1 (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1885): 76-83. This particular entry into *Transactions* contains an Omaha origin story that also discusses the importance of corn to the tribe. It was submitted by Henry Fontenelle whose mother was Omaha.

<sup>33</sup> Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Merwyn Garbarino, *Native American Heritage* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1988), 249.

Across the Great Plains, over thirty different tribes occupied the land and may generally be divided into two major categories. In the eastern prairies lived horticultural people who combined farming with hunting for subsistence. To the west, on the high plains, the tribes were nomadic hunting communities. These nomads struggled with one another over land and access to their primary resource, the bison. Horsemanship was taken so seriously by the eighteenth century that many plains tribes believed “they had always been nomads of the Plains.”<sup>35</sup> The central and eastern part of what became the Nebraska Territory had a population of natives that would be described as semi-sedentary. The Pawnees, Omahas, Otoe-Missourias and Poncas lived on or near prairies and plains, growing crops of corn augmented by beans and squash. These tribes would also hunt bison, deer, and elk as main meat sources. When hunting bison in particular, the tribes moved out deeper onto the plains in more mobile housing. The Ioways, related to the Otoe-Missourias, lived for the most part just across the Missouri River practicing a similar lifestyle. While native communities shared some characteristics, there remained a great deal of diversity as well. Not only their immediate environment, but individual tribal histories played a large role in defining everything from cosmology to politics and daily living. Historian Paul H. Carlson suggests that “the Plains Indians differed from one another within a broader plains culture area in much the same way that eighteenth-century European peoples differed from one another within a broader western culture.”<sup>36</sup> Because Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties all included at least portions of the

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<sup>35</sup> Garbarino, *Native American Heritage*, 254; for an in depth discussion on the importance of horses and bison, see Paul H. Carlson, *The Plains Indians* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 36-50.

<sup>36</sup> Carlson, *Plains Indians*, 6; 1-7.

homelands of the Omahas, Otoe-Missourias, and Pawnees in particular, it is necessary to briefly discuss the background of these native communities.

Most numerous and farthest to the west in the study area lived the Pawnees, whose system of living was based more on their community and its role within its environment than on economic interactions between community members, or even with other tribes. After a drought in the thirteenth century, the Pawnees moved slightly eastward on the plains where provisions were a bit more available. Overall, the Pawnees seem to have been a prosperous, ritualistic, well-organized, and relatively peaceful group. In the early sixteenth century, an ancient division between two main groups of Pawnees seems to have caused some conflict. The Skidi group, who lived on Beaver Creek, and the South Bands, who lived on Shell Creek, disagreed on supremacy, and sometimes battled for power.<sup>37</sup>

Pawnees also had conflicts with neighboring tribes such as Apaches and Comanches. What became more detrimental to Pawnee numbers by the nineteenth century, though, were not only conflicts with whites and the increasingly powerful Lakotas, but also diseases that filtered through from European explorers. Many smallpox and measles epidemics between the 1750s and the 1830s decreased Pawnee population to a fraction of what it had been, although specific numbers are unknown. In 1840, the population of the Pawnee tribe was counted at 6,244, down from perhaps 20,000 a century before (even though birth rates were still high). This dramatic decrease in

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<sup>37</sup> Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), xv, 147-148.

population caused a drastic geographic change as well: what had once been many, many small communities spread across the region had become a handful of major towns.<sup>38</sup>

As Richard White states, in the Pawnees' life, "nature and culture exerted reciprocal influences."<sup>39</sup> Families planted together in the spring, moved with the hunt in the summer, and harvested together in the fall. Like the Euro-American communities on the Great Plains, more than any other geographical factor, the factor that determined where the Pawnees settled was where there was enough wood. They farmed multiple varieties of a handful of staples, and hunted mostly small game (more for hides than meat, although they did not waste the insides), but in the Great Plains ecosystem, wood was the scarcest necessity. The Pawnees needed wood both for building and for fires. Competition for timber became one of the main sources of conflict between Pawnees and white settlers. White suggests that the Pawnees were able to conserve wood, so that their depletion of it was much more gradual than that of the whites. Thus, defense became another reason Pawnees began to locate in larger central towns. This geographic change also made the commute to fields less efficient.<sup>40</sup>

Pawnee social, political, and economic structures were all interrelated and based on the cycles of the environment, although they did not culturally recognize the traditions as such. They saw their order as a result of their own creation, based on their cosmology. Each village's most respected citizens were the chiefs and priests. These men derived

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<sup>38</sup> White, *Roots of Dependency*, 152-156; Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 75, 80-82; Carlson, *Plains Indians*, 11-12.

<sup>39</sup> White, *Roots of Dependency*, 157.

<sup>40</sup> White, *Roots of Dependency*, 158-163.



their power from medicine bundles passed down through the generations within the village. The members of each village saw themselves as all part of the same family, traced back to a single female ancestor. Power within the village was passed through what White calls this "fictional" patriarchal family, composed strictly of male members of elite actual families. Individual families were matrilineal and matriarchal, although it was the men who were expected to distinguish themselves by their jobs, whether they were members of the elite chief/priest class, the semi-elite warrior class, or commoners. Within each family, all goods were shared freely, but were also shared within the village as needed. It was especially the chiefs' responsibility to make sure everyone was provided for. It devolved to the people to give gifts to the chiefs in exchange for knowledge and care, which would in turn be redistributed by the chiefs to other members of the community.<sup>41</sup>

Probably beginning in the late seventeenth century, through trade with other tribes, the Pawnees eventually replaced dogs with horses as their most important pack animals. Horses made the bison hunt much more profitable, and the hunt became by far the most important economic activity the Pawnee engaged in.<sup>42</sup> The hunt created new standards and divisions of wealth, as horse trading carried new meaning and importance, for practical hunting as well as status within the community. By the late eighteenth century, the bison hunt was virtually impossible without horses. The new responsibility of keeping horses created new frictions within families and communities as well. Wealth

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<sup>41</sup> White, *Roots of Dependency*, 171-176; There is a detailed description of yearly farming, hunting and gathering routines on page 171; Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 18-19.

<sup>42</sup> White, *Roots of Dependency*, 178-19; Carlson, *Plains Indians*, 53.

between different members of the town was now much more visible and stratified.

Within families, horses caused new disagreements about privileges and responsibilities.<sup>43</sup>

An additional challenge facing the Pawnees was the fact that the horses were hungry at all times of the year, even when the grasses they ate were scarce. This became more of a problem as herd sizes gradually increased over the years. Keeping horses disturbed the available plants for gathering, and the fires the Pawnees now more often lit to provide edible grasses were dangerous, even though they were very skillfully controlled. Still, the Pawnees found that the benefits of having horses far outweighed the new problems.<sup>44</sup>

The Pawnees were excellent agricultural engineers. They introduced, eliminated, and bred certain species of plants as needed. Unlike other tribes, they were able to sustain staple gathering crops for many years, even as the population grew.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, they were able to avoid destroying large numbers of the bison herds, at least until Americans and Lakotas or other tribes became more aggressive about hunting bison within the same areas. Once under American “control,” Pawnee pleas with their agents to respect herds were largely ignored by the American government.<sup>46</sup>

In the early eighteenth century, the Pawnees began to trade with Europeans, and in the early nineteenth century, with Americans. For the Pawnees, trade could be frustrating because the traders came sporadically. From the traders’ perspective, the Pawnees often seemed uninterested in many of the things they brought, especially

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<sup>43</sup> White, *Roots of Dependency*, 180-181.

<sup>44</sup> White, *Roots of Dependency*, 182, 185-186; Elliott West, *The Way to the West: Essays on the Central Plains* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 24-26.

<sup>45</sup> White, *Roots of Dependency*, 193.

<sup>46</sup> White, *Roots of Dependency*, 197; West, *Way to the West*, 69-70.

alcohol. Chiefs were able to restrict, and sometimes even ban, trading for alcohol, which allowed the tribe to avoid commercial subordination much longer than many other tribes. That the Pawnees did not require much from the traders in the early years had the added advantage that they did not over-hunt the small game in the region, so they had sustainable fur supplies until other tribes began to encroach on their hunting lands.<sup>47</sup>

According to tribal lore, the Otoe-Missourias left their lodges near the Great Lakes and removed by degrees to modern day Missouri and Nebraska. Along the way, these Siouan speaking people split into various distinct tribes. The Winnebagos for example stayed along the western shores of Lake Michigan while the Ioways broke off near the mouth of the Rock River. The final split occurred near the conjunction of the Grand River and the Missouri River. The remaining people then quarreled over a family disagreement about whether two lovers were appropriate for one another or not. The Otoes moved west, settling near the mouth of the Nemaha River in modern Richardson County, Nebraska. The Missourias remained far to the east in central Missouri.<sup>48</sup>

What would become Richardson County was a home that provided well for the Otoes. In fields the people planted corn, beans, squash, and pumpkins. Hunters brought in game ranging from raccoons and rabbits to deer, elk, and bison. Relatively soon after their arrival on the eastern edge of the Great Plains, the Otoes gained access to horses which aided in their summer bison hunts. The permanent homes of the Otoes were

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<sup>47</sup> White, *Roots of Dependency*, 189-192; Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 80; Wishart points out that “the four bands of the Pawnees remained powerful and confident throughout the 1820s.” For an earlier discussion of the Pawnees relationship with European powers, see George E. Hyde, *Pawnee Indians*, (Denver: University of Denver Press, 1951): 36-45; 49-59.

<sup>48</sup> R. David Edmunds, *The Otoe-Missouria People* (Phoenix: Indian Tribal Series, 1976), 1-2.

lodges along the Nemaha, Platte, and Missouri rivers. As a semi-sedentary tribe, the Otoes also used mobile animal skin tents while on the plains for a hunt.<sup>49</sup>

The Otoes were divided into clans, each of which traced themselves to a sacred bird or animal. Clans had responsibilities within the tribal community such as taking leadership in a hunt at particular times of the year or providing the fire from which the sacred pipe was lit.<sup>50</sup> Political leadership was developed within a framework of strong clan and family connections. Each clan was led by a hereditary chief and this group joined together to form a tribal council for group decisions.<sup>51</sup>

To the east, the Missourias lived a similar life in terms of society and politics although in a slightly different environment. By the late seventeenth-century, the Missourias had heard of new people living near their ancient homelands. Traveling Kaskaskia warriors brought news of white men and eventually guided a group of Frenchmen to the main Missouri village. A fur trade began which gave the Missourias access to new technology. At the same time, the Missourias were drawn into a larger world of native and European intrigue. The Missourias' traditional foes, the Sauks and Foxes, were part of the same fur trade and were now better armed. By 1730, some positive relations with the French, including a visit by Missourias to meet Louis XV, had come to an end. As the French turned their interest towards the Chickasaws to the east, the Missourias fell victim to attacks from the Sauks and Foxes.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Edmunds, *Otoe-Missouria*, 1-6; Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 2, 4-6; Carlson, *Plains Indians*, 5,7,8,30,52-53.

<sup>50</sup> Edmunds, *Otoe-Missouria*, 7; a general discussion of clans on the plains can be found in Carlson, *Plains Indians*, 68-69.

<sup>51</sup> Edmunds, *Otoe-Missouria*, 9-10.

<sup>52</sup> Edmunds, *Otoe-Missouria*, 15-18.

Initially, the Missourias responded to these attacks by allying themselves with the Osages. However, disease, continued warfare with the Sauks and Foxes, waning French interest, and a decline in the fur trade combined to create more trouble. Finally, around 1796 a large number of the Missourias were killed in a Sauk/Fox ambush. While some of the remaining members continued to live on their own and a few joined the Kansas or Osages, the majority of the Missourias rejoined the Otoes at their large village on the Platte River.<sup>53</sup>

Prior to this reunion, the Otoes had concentrated their dwellings near the confluence of the Salt and Platte rivers. Some Otoes lived among the Ioways on the eastern bank of the Missouri River. Like their eastern relations, the Otoes became increasingly familiar with white culture in the eighteenth-century. Some Otoes joined the Pawnees in the attack on Villasur in 1720. The larger problem the Otoe-Missourias could not have predicted was that warfare between white nations (e.g. France and Spain, France and Great Britain) and growing dependence on white products would create serious challenges for the tribe. The Otoe-Missourias, like the Pawnees, were caught in a nexus of international politics. British, French, Spanish, and ultimately the new American white faces proved alternately faithful or treacherous to the tribe, depending on their own interests.<sup>54</sup>

Tribal tradition indicates that the Omahas, like their neighbors the Otoes a Siouan language people, once lived in the lower Ohio River valley. Due to their swift adaptation to Plains life, there is little archaeological information about their life before moving

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<sup>53</sup> Edmunds, *Otoe-Missouria*, 18-20.

<sup>54</sup> Edmunds, *Otoe-Missouria*, 22-28.

west. The Omahas first appear in European documents in the 1670s with the location of the tribe placed on maps in southwestern Minnesota or northwestern Iowa. By 1714, the Omahas were living on the Missouri River in South Dakota. Here, their close contact with the Arikaras led to adoption of elements of plains material culture. Sometime around 1720, the Omahas had split with related tribal members the Poncas and settled in modern day Cedar County, Nebraska. Over the next thirty years, a group of Ioways who had been living with the Omahas since the late seventeenth-century moved away. This group also continued to live on first the west, and then the east side of the Missouri River.<sup>55</sup>

A patrilineal people, the Omahas had a central governing organization composed of a council of seven chiefs and overseen by two principal chiefs. The idea may have been enacted to avoid factionalism and cut across clan organization to create a system of checks and balances as well as help settle disputes. Later, this organization aided in coordinating interactions with Europeans and other tribes. As has been mentioned, the Poncas and Ioways who had lived with the Omahas at the start of the eighteenth-century were gone from the tribe by mid-century.<sup>56</sup>

The wars fought to the east between European powers had an effect on the Omahas. While the Omahas were familiar with the Spanish and French traders either directly or through other tribes, after the Seven Years' War, the geography of northeastern Nebraska had shifted. The Ioways moved away from the Missouri River

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<sup>55</sup> John M. O'Shea and John Ludwickson, *Archaeology and Ethnohistory of the Omaha Indians: The Big Village Site* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 16-17, 21; Judith A. Boughter, *Betraying the Omaha Nation, 1790-1916* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 10-11; Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 6.

<sup>56</sup> O'Shea and Ludwickson, *Archaeology and Ethnohistory*, 20.

settling near the Des Moines River by around 1765 with some crossing the Mississippi into Illinois. The Omahas meanwhile constructed “Big Village” in an effort to move away from rival Dakotas and get closer to Spanish and French trade routes. With some interruptions, this was to remain the principal Omaha village until 1845. The village was in a good location for agriculture, trade, hunting in all seasons, and fishing.<sup>57</sup>

Between 1775 and 1800, the Omahas became a powerful force in the region. With access to fertile land, the Omahas planted in May, and remained at the main village until corn was well established and the weeds were picked, usually by late June or early July. At that point, most of the people left for the summer bison hunt. The tribe typically returned to the village in early September, although the main harvest would not occur until early October. Small bands worked together trapping and hunting in the river bottoms in the late fall and early winter. Between late December and March, a winter bison hunt would take place and then the yearly cycle began again.<sup>58</sup>

By the 1790s, the Omahas were quite powerful. They controlled an important part of the Missouri River and its trade. Under the leadership of the powerful Blackbird, the Omahas were able to dictate terms of trade on the river by manipulating the British, Spanish, or Americans. Missouri Company boats had to make sure that the Omahas were satisfied or risk attack as happened in 1799. At the same time the Omahas were successful in warfare against their neighbors the Poncas and Pawnees they did face some defeats at the hands of the Cheyennes and Dakotas. Despite these losses, Blackbird was

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<sup>57</sup> O’Shea and Ludwickson, *Archaeology and Ethnohistory*, 1, 3, 23, 24; Boughter, *Betraying*, 11; Martha Royce Blaine, *The Ioway Indians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 60, 78.

<sup>58</sup> O’Shea and Ludwickson, *Archaeology and Ethnohistory*, 7; Boughter, *Betraying*, 13-16.

able to control the white traders and his people, while leading them to relatively great power in the region.<sup>59</sup>

By the time Lewis and Clark traveled through the region, hoping to meet these people, the Otoe-Missourias had dealt with three separate sets of white people, all claiming ascendancy in one way or another. The two tribes shared a common main village near where the Platte and Elkhorn rivers came together. The tribe's range was bigger, reaching into western Iowa, down to their old homes near the Nemaha River and west onto the plains for the annual bison hunts. Euro-Americans believed this land to be rich in possibilities for the fur trade. Evidence in support of this position may be drawn from the time period when the Otoe-Missourias began to act on their own behalf in this trade, and as middle-men for the Americans trading with the Pawnees.<sup>60</sup>

In 1800 and 1801 smallpox struck the Omahas. This was not the first time, nor was it the most severe case of the disease among the Omaha population. The loss of people was relatively minor. The bigger problem was the loss of one particular person who had succumbed to the disease – Blackbird. In the years after his death, the Omahas faced trouble and defeat at many turns. Warfare with more powerful Dakotas, raids from the Sauks and Foxes to the east and the loss of hunting grounds along the Platte River all combined to force the Omahas to move and live on the Elk Horn River where they remained between 1820 and 1834.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> O'Shea and Ludwickson, *Archaeology and Ethnohistory*, 26-30; Boughter, *Betraying*, 20-22.

<sup>60</sup> Edmunds, *Otoe-Missouria*, 30-35.

<sup>61</sup> O'Shea and Ludwickson, *Archaeology and Ethnohistory*, 30, 37, 292. For an in depth breakdown of Omaha demography, see pages 271-289; Boughter, *Betraying*, 23, 25; West, *Way to the West*, 90.



Although the Omahas returned to Big Village between 1834 and 1845, the people had become increasingly dependent on the American traders and government. This was especially true in terms of how the Omahas had come to view goods and money due to them from the fur trade as a necessity. Driven from traditional areas by the Dakotas, surrendering more traditional lands at the Treaty of Prairie du Chien in 1830, the tribe was becoming poor. A major break in their living pattern occurred in the 1840s as many natives in eastern Nebraska were struggling to survive. By 1845, the Omahas had all but given up attempts at regaining Big Village and had settled near Papillion Creek close to the white settlement at Bellevue. Unfortunately, the Omahas found that life on Papillion Creek was not the same as it had been in Big Village. What they did not know was that their life on Papillion Creek bore a striking resemblance to what would become their future existence on a reservation after 1854.<sup>62</sup>

By the late seventeenth-century and into the eighteenth-century, the influence of Europeans on the North American continent was being felt in the forms of disease, firearms and other trade goods, and horses.<sup>63</sup> The Pawnees and a few Otoes demonstrated resistance to at least one attempt at physical European interference in their lives as early as 1720 when the Spanish explorer Villasur led a doomed expedition against them for fear the Pawnees were allying with the French.<sup>64</sup> While the years between the explorations of Coronado and Lewis and Clark encompassed a period of

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<sup>62</sup> O'Shea and Ludwickson, *Archaeology and Ethnohistory*, 50-51; Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 85-88.

<sup>63</sup> Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 22, 28; for a detailed discussion of trade relations on the plains, see Carlson, *Plains Indians*, 121-141; for comments on traders' eventual roles in treaty making, see Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, volume 1 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 266-269.

<sup>64</sup> Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 28-30.

relative isolation, these two sets of explorers, arriving from two different directions, ultimately changed the lives of the native inhabitants immensely.<sup>65</sup>

In the eighteenth century after the failed Villasur expedition, French fur traders made their presence stronger in the region. Working up and out from St. Louis, these trappers established relationships with the native tribes through trading posts and intermarriage. Frenchmen on the frontier assured some degree of success in their efforts by supplying trade goods and creating important personal bonds. This was a practice that would be mirrored by some American traders, such as Joshua Pilcher, in the years prior to Nebraska's territorial status.<sup>66</sup>

For the most part, the white community that emerged in the region was a transient one centered along the Missouri River or in the Platte River valley. Largely unknown to the residents in this extreme frontier, and almost certainly of little importance to the native population, ownership of the land transferred hands several times between 1763 and its final transaction in 1803. While still a French territory, individual traders (French and otherwise) and the French government built good relations with the Omahas and Otoe-Missourias, particularly with the Omaha chief Blackbird. According to one tradition, a group of Omahas had journeyed down to New Orleans and then across the ocean to France. It was on this alleged journey that Laughing Buffalo inspired a French citizen, Michel de Baradat, to abandon Europe and travel to what was about to become

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<sup>65</sup> James W. Savage, *The Discovery of Nebraska*. Originally read before the Nebraska Historical Society, April 16, 1880 (Omaha: E. H. & M. Mortimer Printers, 1880?). Savage gives a somewhat fanciful account of Coronado's exploration of the region including his quest for Quivera. The story contains descriptions of the grasses, bison, and climate of the plains, and is apparently one of the first American pieces to use Spanish language sources.

<sup>66</sup> John E. Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher, Fur Trader and Indian Agent* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 107. Technically, Pilcher's marriage occurred at the time of his appointment to the federal Indian service.

part of the United States in pursuit of love. Baradat (later Barada) ultimately found Laughing Buffalo about the same time that Lewis and Clark set out to explore America's newest purchase. Baradat married her both among the Omahas and at St. Louis, merging together these two communities of Native America and Europe. About 1807, the couple had a child, Antoine, who would become one of the more controversial characters in building the new American community in Richardson County. It was Antoine Barada's half-sister who married Joshua Pilcher and their son John was an important figure in Burt County.<sup>67</sup>

Lewis and Clark passed through portions of later Nebraska territory in 1804. Their journals reveal several stops along the Missouri River. The party briefly touched ground on two of the future counties, Richardson and Burt. On July 11, 1804, the party set to on a sand island opposite the mouth of the Nemaha River which empties into the Missouri River in modern Richardson County. The river, either 35, 80, or 100 yards across depending on different accounts, was followed a bit by a party of hunters who brought several deer back to camp. Clark wrote, "I saw a horse on the Beech this horse as appears was left last winter by Some hunting party, probable the Othouez."<sup>68</sup> The following day, Clark and five men went up the Nemaha River (Richardson County)

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<sup>67</sup> Elements of this story come from different sources. The trip to France by the Omahas in the late eighteenth-century is certainly false. See: John Faris, ed. *Who's Who In Nebraska* (Lincoln: Nebraska Press Association, 1940), 941; Jean Dobson Sellers, "Antoine Barada" in Lance Foster, *Baxoje, the Ioway Nation: Resources on the Ioway or Iowa Indian Tribe*, (Ioway Cultural Institute: 1999, revised 2007) <http://ioway.nativeweb.org/genealogy/baradaantoine.htm> (accessed June 30 2007); Pilcher Family Tree, Record Group 1352, Box 1, Series 5, Folder 1, Nebraska State Historical Society; Bess E. Day, *The Barada Quest* (Boulder, CO: Talbot House Publication Services, 1989); Joel Brink, *The Barada Story: Pioneers in a New Land* (Seattle: Reischling Press, Inc., 2005); for a good discussion synthesizing multiple sources on the impact of these complicated families on the central plains, see West, *Way to the West*, 118-125.

<sup>68</sup> Gary E. Moulton, ed. *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition 2* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 366-367. I have left all of Clark's spelling and grammar in the original. Note that he does not always spell words the same even in the same sentence!

“about three miles, to an open leavel part of an emence prarie, at the Mouth of a Small Creek on the Lower Side. I...passed Several noles to the top of a high artificial Noal. from the top of this noal I had an emence, extensive & pleasing prospect of the Countrey around.” Clark’s view of what would become Richardson County encompassed “a meadow of 15 or 20000 acres of high bottom land covered with Grass about 4 ½ feet high...only a fiew Trees, and thickets of Plumbs Cheres &c are Seen.” Clark gathered grapes, saw plumbs and crab apples and marked his name, the day, and month on an object that he believed to have native artwork on it as well.<sup>69</sup>

As the party of explorers moved north, up the Missouri River, they periodically visited what would become Nebraska to hunt, to observe, and to try to contact the natives in the region, particularly the Otoes, Omahas, and Pawnees. Clark’s descriptions of the land reveal an element of how open and broad the environment must have seemed. On July 19, after a breakfast of ribs of deer and a little coffee, Clark was pursuing elk when he “Came Suddenly into an open and bound less Prarie. I say bound less because I could not See the extent of the plain in an Derection.” Additionally he noted that the prairie had grass between eighteen inches and two feet high and was so entertained by what he saw that he forgot about pursuing his elk.<sup>70</sup>

When the party passed the Platte River, Lewis noted that a different type of sediment appeared to come from the “flat” river. He saw fine particles of white sand as opposed to the dark rich loam of the Missouri. Clark believed that the Platte seemed to run more swiftly than the Missouri. Cruzatte, a half Omaha hireling, may have told Clark

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<sup>69</sup> Moulton, ed. *Lewis and Clark*, 368-370.

<sup>70</sup> Moulton, ed. *Lewis and Clark*, 394.

that he spent two winters on the Platte and noted that the river was quite wide in spots. The shallowness of the Platte was confirmed by a quick walk: “Capt Lewis & my Self went up Some Distance & Crossed found it Shallow. This river does not rise over 6 or 7 feet.”<sup>71</sup>

Now in late July and having not seen the natives with whom they planned on meeting and informing about “the Change of Government,” Clark sent messages and scouts to seek the “Otteaus” and “panis.” He believed that most would be hunting, but hoped that the Indians would be getting the green corn soon. Clark was obviously not familiar with the growing cycle of corn. The scouts returned saying they saw signs, but no actual “otteaz.” The men had passed through an open plain and saw “feiw Trees excepted on the water course.”<sup>72</sup>

Finally, at the end of July, Lewis and Clark were successful in getting the word out to various tribes that a meeting was desired. A Missouria came in and said his people (he lived among the Otoes) were hunting bison, but that he and his group were hunting elk across the river. The following day, Clark sent “la Liberty with the Indian to Otteaze Camp to invite the Indians to meet us on the river above.”<sup>73</sup> From where Lewis and Clark waited at the Council Bluff, the men could see open prairie with more plumbs, grape vine and grass about ten to twelve inches high. Generally the land seemed to be full of “butifull prospects.”<sup>74</sup> When the meeting took place on August 3, 1804, Lewis and Clark were clear in their aims. They prepared small presents including such items as

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<sup>71</sup> Moulton, ed. *Lewis and Clark*, 401.

<sup>72</sup> Moulton, ed. *Lewis and Clark*, 407-408, 415, 418-419; O’Shea and Ludwickson, *Archaeology and Ethnohistory*, 7. O’Shea and Ludwickson note that at least for the Omahas, the Green Corn harvesting that Clark was hoping for did not occur until early September.

<sup>73</sup> Moulton, ed. *Lewis and Clark*, 423-424, 426.

<sup>74</sup> Moulton, ed. *Lewis and Clark*, 428-430.

tobacco, powder and ball, and medals and took a measure of their guests. The two men explained about the change in government in the region, and made clear “the wishes of our government to Cultivate friendship & good understanding.”<sup>75</sup>

About eight days later, the explorers halted at Blackbird’s grave on the northern edge of what would become Burt County. The great (or feared and despised, depending whom you talk to) Omaha chief had died four years earlier in a smallpox outbreak. Clark observed that from the grave, one could see “the bends or meanderings of the river for 60 or 70 miles round & all the Country around that base of this high land is Soft Sand-Stone.” His sighting of a “great deel of Beaver” led Clark to suppose that the “Mahars” did not hunt much, a conclusion that rings false given Blackbird’s relationship with fur traders. Perhaps as a sign of respect and friendship, the party tied a flag “bound with red Blue & white” to a pole in the center of Blackbird’s burial mound.<sup>76</sup>

Following Lewis and Clark, additional exploration of what would become Nebraska took place under the aforementioned Zebulon Pike and Stephen Long.<sup>77</sup> Then various fur companies established trading posts along the Missouri, dealing primarily with the Ioways, Otoe-Missourias, and Pawnees. Joshua Pilcher, whose son John would represent one of the first citizens of Nebraska's Burt County, was a prominent trade representative for the Missouri Fur Company.<sup>78</sup> By the 1830s and 1840s, Bellevue had been established as a general depot for traders and trappers and eventually a missionary outpost. As early as 1808, a French trader, Francis Deroin, had established a post at that

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<sup>75</sup> Moulton, ed. *Lewis and Clark*, 438-443.

<sup>76</sup> Moulton, ed. *Lewis and Clark*. 467-471.

<sup>77</sup> Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 41, 45-46.

<sup>78</sup> Wishart, *The Fur Trader of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 48; Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 32-66.

location and others followed, including Peter Sarpy around 1824. Most of these early white settlers intermarried with Omahas, striking a similar pattern to French traders in the eighteenth-century.<sup>79</sup> In the 1840s, migrants chose to travel on the overland trail through what would become Nebraska, yet few remained as permanent residents. The Mormons, for example, wintered in the vicinity of Florence between 1845 and 1847, but soon moved on to reach Deseret in the valley of the great salt lake.<sup>80</sup>

Travelers moving through the region had various comments, but a typical remark was uttered by Harriet Talcott Buckingham in her description of the Council Bluffs area as the “outskirts of civilization.” Buckingham also talked about Omahas demanding tolls for passing. A slightly opposing view, at least of the land, was proffered by Amelia Hadley as she saw the bluffs as “surely romantic and beautiful.” She was less pleased with the Omahas calling them “the most filthy thevish [sic] set.” Hadley did note that “their cheif [sic] can talk verry [sic] good American.”<sup>81</sup> These migrants across what was mistakenly called the “Great American Desert” were a community of sorts for Nebraska, but a highly transient and temporary one. Even the Mormons, who might have liked to have stayed longer, were moved out after protests from the Omahas that while they were on their land with permission, they were hunting too much game and cutting too much timber.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> A.P. De Milt, *Story of an Old Town, with reminiscences of early Nebraska and biographies of pioneers*. (Omaha: Douglas Printing Co., 1902), 78-79.

<sup>80</sup> Alfred Sorenson. *The Story of Omaha From the Pioneers' Days to the Present Time*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Omaha: National Printing Company). Sorenson devotes a chapter to the Mormons pages 20-29. He points out that the Mormons made arrangements with the Omahas before constructing their dwellings a few miles above Omaha, 22-23.

<sup>81</sup> Kenneth L. Holmes, ed. *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters From the Western Trails*. volume 3 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 18-20; 57.

<sup>82</sup> De Milt, *Story of an Old Town*, 82; Sorenson, *Story of Omaha*, 23.

The communities that evolved on the trails and in temporary housing like the Mormons' Winter Quarters have long been understudied. In a new work, Michael Tate has examined the relations between natives and whites on westward trails. Tate sought to look at conflict as well as cooperation during this time of mass movement. Inspired by the late John D. Unruh, Jr.'s statistical analysis of relations, Tate has expanded what was a chapter in Unruh's study into a book-length investigation. Tate examines perceptions about relations as much as the actual relations themselves, looking at diaries, letters, and oral traditions among native peoples.<sup>83</sup> This fluid community of overlanders depended on one another, but they also could depend on unexpected sources of aid from the native peoples they were passing. Tate describes how both warnings of potential problems with natives (which were usually more about running off livestock than attacking with death in mind) and aid proffered at river crossings reveal a more complex portrait of the trail story than is commonly discussed. Ultimately, Tate sees the overland trail as more of a "cooperative meeting ground" than a "contested meeting ground."<sup>84</sup>

In the western part of pre-territorial Nebraska, Fort Kearney was established as an outpost where travelers could recuperate and refit. Due to its relative proximity to the Oregon Trail, the fort became a favored resting spot. By 1850, a military road connected Forts Leavenworth and Kearney. Yet the Great Plains remained an unorganized region, despite suggestions by Secretary of War William Wilkins as early as 1844 that the creation of Nebraska would serve to connect west and east with both military posts and

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<sup>83</sup> Michael Tate, *Indians and Emigrants, Encounters on the Overland Trails* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), x-xii.

<sup>84</sup> Tate, *Indians and Emigrants*, 26-29, 233.



settlements.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, as Michael Tate has observed, prior to organizing Kansas and Nebraska, the movement of whites into the region was severely restricted. Not unlike the British government's Proclamation Line of 1763, the United States government had created, through law and treaties, a situation that was designed to keep whites off native lands. Natives had been guaranteed use of certain lands and whites, given past history and misunderstandings, were discouraged from traveling or settling in these areas. Technically, any missionary or fur trader had to get permission from federal authority before crossing into "Indian Country." By the 1840s, the government had relented somewhat, assuming that travelers would not actually stop in what became Kansas and Nebraska for example. Once it became clear that whites were interested in the land which they were supposedly "passing through" the government began to find a way to solve the problem. Through a series of treaties signed in 1854, the Omahas and Otoe-Missourias ceded their land which, "not by accident...approximated the primary route of overlanders through the eastern sections of the future state" [Nebraska].<sup>86</sup>

In his efforts to organize these territories, Wendell Wilkins was aware that there were not enough people currently residing in Nebraska to guarantee territorial status. Regardless, he pushed for organization so as to provide for legal federal authority over emigrants on the Oregon Trail. It has been estimated that between 1827 and 1854, the number of Anglo-European residents of Nebraska did not exceed 200, but emigrants

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<sup>85</sup> A.T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska* volume 1 (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1882), 39-55.

<sup>86</sup> Tate, *Indians and Emigrants*, 20-21, 34; Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 101-108.

traveling through the region ranged in the tens of thousands.<sup>87</sup> Once it became clear that the idea of a more permanent “Indian frontier” was unworkable, the representatives and senators of the United States Congress began to debate openly about organizing the vast western lands and opening them to white settlement. Key issues in the debate included general disagreements about the nature of expanding the borders of the United States, concerns about what to do with the native population, the use of national funds for internal improvements (specifically a railroad), and the continued simmering national discontent concerning the slave issue.<sup>88</sup> The issue of native displacement was at the forefront of some people’s minds. Henry Howe wrote on the subject in *The Great West* published in 1857. Howe suggested that white America will not long “restrain its powerful grasp from seizing this final memorial of the race whom we have supplanted,” especially if it is to be “conjectured from our past policy.”<sup>89</sup> Of more concern to most Americans however, were the location of a transcontinental railroad and the question of whether the new territories would allow for slavery. These two issues were paramount in shaping the legalization of Nebraska Territory.

At the same time as one of the earliest proposals to organize Nebraska Territory, a first step was taken in the proposal to build a railroad to the Pacific Ocean. All manner of memorials and surveys and arguments were introduced to Congress about which route to take. Starting in the 1840s, various cities from St. Louis to Chicago to Milwaukee to

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<sup>87</sup> Lloyd Bernard Sellin, “The Settlement Of Nebraska to 1880,” (M.A. thesis, History, University of Southern California, 1940), 110, 131.

<sup>88</sup> Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 67-68.

<sup>89</sup> Henry Howe, *The Great West: Containing Narratives of the Most Important and Interesting Events in Western History – Remarkable Individual Adventures – Sketches of Frontier Life – Descriptions of Natural Curiosities* (New York: Geo. F. Tuttle, 1857), 501.

Detroit were arguing in favor of being the eastern terminus for such a rail line. Then a member of the House of Representatives, Stephen Douglas took the stance that eastern railroads should meet in Chicago and then head west to San Francisco Bay. Douglas proposed, though not immediately, to organize the entire area from the Missouri River to the Rockies as Nebraska Territory, and then create the territory of Oregon reaching from the Rockies to the Pacific.<sup>90</sup> Victory in the Mexican War and the Gadsden Purchase of 1853 changed the complexion of the railroad construction debate. The land gained through the war and the purchase made a southern route possible, and engineers were dispatched to survey options. The route ultimately chosen, i.e., along the Platte River valley, was not included in these early observations.<sup>91</sup>

Between 1844 and 1854, four separate bills were introduced into Congress calling for the establishment of Nebraska Territory. After a few false starts in which the boundaries of the territory were debated, economic questions were broached, Native American rights were defended or ignored, and most importantly the slavery issue was “resolved,” a final proposal was announced in December 1853. The final bill had evolved since an early proposal from senators August Dodge and George Jones in 1850. Iowans encouraged the organization of Nebraska Territory not only as a logical extension of the farming frontier but also because they supported the idea of a railroad that would run through their own state. Similar debate and concerns were expressed in Missouri as Thomas Hart Benton made the extension of a Pacific railroad an important part of his

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<sup>90</sup> Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 68; Frank Heywood Hodder, “The Railroad Background of the Kansas-Nebraska Act,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 12 no. 1 (June 1925): 5-6.

<sup>91</sup> Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 70; Hodder, “Railroad Background,” 8-10.

attempts to maintain political authority as one of Missouri's senators.<sup>92</sup> Within what would become the Nebraska Territory residents made their concerns known as well.

Traders and ferry operators as well as natives living in the region expressed their opinions and concerns about railroad extension as well as the coming tide of white migrants.<sup>93</sup>

In early February 1853, William Richardson, for whom Richardson County was named, introduced a bill to organize the Nebraska Territory. Although the bill passed through the House of Representatives, it was defeated in the Senate, despite the support of Stephen Douglas. Nine months of gestation later, a new bill was born on December 14, 1853. Iowan Senator Augustus Dodge introduced a bill proposing that all territory between Iowa and Missouri and the Rockies would be organized. Like its predecessor, it made no explicit mention of slavery, but the assumption was that the Missouri Compromise would apply and slavery would be illegal. Stephen Douglas supported the act, which in January 1854 came out of committee having undergone a "mystifying change."<sup>94</sup> By late January, through various compromises Dodge's proposal had become the Nebraska-Kansas Bill, indicating the creation of two territories rather than one. The boundaries of the territories were to include parts of the present-day states of Wyoming, North and South Dakota, Montana, Colorado, Nebraska, and Kansas. More important, the Missouri Compromise had been set aside and popular sovereignty introduced. In early March, the Senate passed the bill despite spirited opposition from the likes of William H. Seward and Charles Sumner. The discussion moved to the House, where on

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<sup>92</sup> Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 73; James Byron Potts, "Nebraska Territory, 1854-1867: A Study of Frontier Politics" (Ph.D. dissertation, History, University of Nebraska, 1973), 41-44.

<sup>93</sup> Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 74; Potts, "Nebraska Territory," 46-55.

<sup>94</sup> Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 75-76; Potts, "Nebraska Territory," 57-58; James A. Rawley, *Race & Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1969), 33.

May 21, 1854 it passed following lively debate. By the end of the month, President Pierce signed the bill into law.<sup>95</sup>

In the interim, the government made provisions to gain control of the land prior to the opening of the territory for white settlement. Going back to the Treaty of Prairie du Chien in 1830, what would become Nebraska Territory had been part of a complicated series of treaties and arrangements designed to house eastern natives who had been removed from their homelands and keep whites out. The Otoe-Missourias, Pawnees, and Omahas had made certain concessions in the years leading up to the debates over the Nebraska bill in Congress. At Prairie du Chien in 1830 and in separate agreements reached in 1833, the Pawnees, Otoe-Missourias, and Omahas had established a “Half-Breed Tract,” ceded Omaha lands east of the Missouri River, and ceded a swathe of Pawnee territory south of the Platte River.<sup>96</sup> The Treaty at Prairie du Chien which precipitated these arrangements had been conceived by American officials as a method of creating peace among the Ioways, Otoe-Missourias, Omahas, and Sauks and Foxes. The latter two tribes had been pushed west by encroaching white settlement and were seen as trespassers on Otoe-Missouria land. The decision was reached to purchase the land so that hunting might occur in the area without tribal warfare. The Otoe-Missouria leaders gave up their rights to western Iowa and in relation to Article X of the treaty, would

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<sup>95</sup> Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 75-77; Rawley, *Race & Politics*, 53-57. For a more detailed discussion over the establishment of the Nebraska territory, driven by contemporary sources, see James C. Malin, *The Nebraska Question, 1852-1854* (Lawrence, Kansas: privately printed, 1953). Also, for a clear synthesis and analysis of the politics of creating Nebraska, see Potts, "Nebraska Territory," especially 27-67, and Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 67-77.

<sup>96</sup> Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 59-61; Prucha describes Prairie du Chien as an attempt at creating a buffer zone between native tribes as well, Prucha, *Great Father*, 262.

surrender a small tract of land to be assigned to “their half-breeds.”<sup>97</sup> This land, part of which lay in the future Richardson County, comprised about 138,000 acres, and would be available to “Half-Breeds” from the Otoe-Missourias, Ioways, Omahas, and Dakotas. Because the land had originally belonged to the Otoe-Missourias, that tribe was to be given \$300 per year for ten years and would be paid out of annuities owed to the Ioways, Omahas, and Dakotas due to the Prairie du Chien treaty.<sup>98</sup>

One of the major problems facing the federal government in the Trans-Mississippi West at the time would take hold in the years between the signing of Prairie du Chien and the creation of the Nebraska Territory in 1854. The government recognized that native communities represented a difficult and complicated challenge. The existence of a “Half-Breed” population complicated matters even further. On the one hand, the government sought to keep the peace among the various tribes in order to create a more stable environment. On the other hand, government policy in general created more instability through the plan of “Indian Removal” from the eastern states. Whether it was the Cherokees of the southeast or the Kickapoos and Potawatomis of the Old Northwest, the plan was generally the same. Remove the native population to lands further in the west and keep barriers between white and native people. As was mentioned earlier, this idea was also seen as acceptable as long as impressions of the region as useless for agricultural development continued. Laying aside the obvious moral hypocrisy of

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<sup>97</sup> Charles J. Kappler, ed. *Indian Affairs: Laws, and Treaties* volume 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 307.

<sup>98</sup> Edmunds, *Otoe-Missouria*, 41-42; Blaine, *Ioways*, 161; Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 59-61; Berlin Basil Chapman, *The Otoes and Missourias; a Study of Indian Removal and the Legal Aftermath* (Oklahoma City: Times Journal Publishing Co., 1965), 15-16, 51-83; Kappler, ed. *Indian Affairs*, 2, 307-308.

placing people in regions that do not support human life for a moment, the theory was that out of reach of white settlement, natives could live.

This theory proved impractical almost immediately as Kickapoos and Potawatomis were hunting along the Nemaha River on Otoe-Missouria land as early as 1833. The potential for a clash and the undoing of the federal government's "peace" policy was distinct.<sup>99</sup> The issue must have seemed like an astonishing mathematical equation to government agents. If tribe "A" cannot live near white settlement "B" then remove them and place them near tribe "C," at least as long as there is not tribe "D" nearby and the "X" factor of competition for land and food resources is not considered. In 1833, a scant three years after Prairie du Chien, the equation was threatening to become vastly imbalanced. Indian Commissioner Henry Ellsworth journeyed to the Otoe-Missourias to negotiate the purchase of the land west of the "Half-Breed Tract" set aside in 1830. In September, the Otoe-Missourias ceded about one million acres of land for annuities and trade goods valued at about \$40,000. This treaty "set the general pattern for the following treaty with the Pawnee and for subsequent treaties with all the Indians of Eastern Nebraska in the 1850s."<sup>100</sup>

The Otoe-Missouria, Pawnee, and Omaha communities were gradually coming undone as a result of the treaties, lack of access to hunting grounds, internecine quarrels, and increased access to alcohol. The passage of a bill in Congress organizing the Nebraska Territory was only bound to make things worse. This "stable" environment sought by federal authorities was in serious danger of collapsing. Some attempts at

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<sup>99</sup> Edmunds, *Otoe-Missouria*, 44.

<sup>100</sup> Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 62; see also Edmunds, *Otoe-Missouria*, 44-48 and Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 60-63, in particular the map on page 60.

missions among tribes had met with some degree of success, but there was resistance and conflict. This conflict was sometimes between natives (e.g. Otoe-Missourias versus Pawnees in 1845 and 1847) and also between the natives and the Americans. Whether it was the poor quality of annuity goods, shrinking access to hunting lands and the animals themselves, disease, or war, by 1850 “the Indians of eastern Nebraska were worse off than ever before.”<sup>101</sup>

In mid-March 1854, the final blow struck for two of the tribes as the Otoe-Missourias ceded to the United States all lands west of the Missouri except one small strip near Big Blue River. A separate treaty signed by the Omahas the next day dealt away lands in northeastern Nebraska.<sup>102</sup> By 1855, the Omahas and Otoe-Missourias were beginning to move to their reservations, the former near their old homelands close to Blackbird’s grave and the latter near the Big Blue River on the Kansas and Nebraska border. The lands in question were generally of good quality, but the fertility of the soil and access to timber attracted the attention of white settlers. As will be discussed in a later section, the relationship between native communities, “half-breeds,” and whites became more complicated as the number of whites arriving in the new territory steadily increased. To the west, some of the Pawnees’ land had been sold by the Omahas in 1854. In addition, settlers’ increasing numbers, and challenges from rival tribes like the Lakotas and Dakotas forced the Pawnees to take action. Ultimately, the Pawnees ceded land in September of 1857, ultimately settling near the Loup River just west of Columbus, Platte

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<sup>101</sup> Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 69, 62-69; Edmunds, *Otoe-Missouria*, 50-52).

<sup>102</sup> For a detailed account of these and other treaties with Nebraska natives, see Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 101-111; for the treaties themselves examine Kappler, ed. *Indian Affairs*, 603-614, 764-767, 772-775; for general comments on then Indian Commissioner Manypenny, see Prucha, *Great Father*, volume 1, 326, 327, 331, 333, 334.



County. Their relationship with their immediate white neighbors and certain prominent residents of Platte County is to be considered in the development of the Platte community.<sup>103</sup>

Up to this point, fur traders and a few ferry operators had governed the future of the region for Euro-Americans. Everywhere along the Missouri River, new communities declared that they would be next gateway to the West. Nebraska had already existed as a gateway of sorts. The region had been a go-between area as a pathway to Oregon, California, and the Mormon settlements in Utah. As many as 65,000 people walked or rode through Nebraska in 1850. Most travelers in those days were families moving on to a new beginning, but for some, the journey was their last. Estimates vary, but it is believed that as many as 20,000 people died during these crossings between 1842 and 1859, although not all in Nebraska itself.<sup>104</sup>

By the summer and fall of 1854, Nebraska's newest permanent residents were filtering into various communities, chiefly along the Missouri River. While some areas, particularly Bellevue, represented fairly well established communities by this period, most were merely paper towns. By November 1854, however, a rudimentary census was taken which divided Nebraska into six precincts, the precursors to county governments. Over time, as will be seen later, the residents of "cities" like Decatur in Burt County, Rulo in Richardson County, and Columbus in Platte County were extolling their virtues to prospective settlers.

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<sup>103</sup> Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 111-132; for the Otoe-Missourias, see 111-117, for the Omahas, see 117-124; for the Pawnees, see 124-132; Prucha, *Great Father*, volume 1, 345-350.

<sup>104</sup> Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 60-64.

Richardson County, in the southeastern corner, was bordered by Kansas to its south and the Missouri River on the east. Almost twenty-five years before the creation of Nebraska Territory, a portion of the land that made up the county had been ceded to the United States by the Otoe-Missourias. In addition, a tract of about 125,000 acres was set aside as a result of the 1830 Treaty of Prairie du Chien for “half-breed Indians.” The county encompasses valleys, bluffs, and rolling hills, and includes much of the Big Nemaha River. The soil, mostly prairie and alluvium, was considered good for agricultural pursuits.<sup>105</sup>

In Richardson County, some settlement had preceded formal territorial status. For example, Antoine Barada, the son of a Michel de Baradat and Laughing Buffalo had lived in the area for some years. Barada left in 1849 to try his luck in California. He returned in 1855. Barada’s legacy includes many stories about his strength – in some estimates he was as important a frontier character as Mike Fink or Paul Bunyan. Barada later played an important role in early Richardson County politics.<sup>106</sup> Also already residing in Richardson County was Stephen Story, a native of Vermont, who lived in the northeastern corner in what would become St. Stephens. Story was born in 1810, moved with his parents to near Montreal, Canada, when only two years of age, and remained there until adulthood. He then started working as a lumber man; and, in a few years, moved to St. Joseph, Missouri, where he was employed by Joseph Roubidoux. After briefly living in what would become Richardson County in 1844, Story went off to the

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<sup>105</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*; Kathleen Fimple, “Historic Overview,” in *Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey: Reconnaissance Survey Final Report of Richardson County*, John Kay, et. al. (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office, 1993), 5-8.

<sup>106</sup> Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of Nebraska, *Nebraska: A Guide to the Cornhusker State* (New York: The Viking Press, 1939) 107, 275.

Mexican War between 1845 and 1847. Returning to Missouri after the war he caught the “forty-niner” fever and journeyed to the coast in search of gold. After working in the mines for about a year, Story moved back to St. Joseph in 1850, where he remained until 1851. In 1851, Story again came to Nebraska and took a farm at Arago. From here he went to the site of St. Stephens and started a ferry business. After running the ferry a short time, Story and B. F. Loan started laying out a town. Story was married to a member of the Ioways, Elizabeth Roubidoux. Although Story had been in and out of the county several times prior to 1854 (e.g. Mexican War, California gold rush, Missouri), he was successfully operating his ferry across the Missouri River by the time the “first” pioneers arrived.<sup>107</sup>

In addition to Antoine Barada and Stephen Story, Richardson County was home to Charles Rouleau, (for whom Rulo was named), Henry Shubert, James Stumbo, and John Burbank. In different ways, each contributed to the early history of the county, which had been named for Illinois Congressman William Richardson. These early years were somewhat turbulent. A portion of the land was always contested as being part of the “Half-Breed Tract,” land reserved for the use of individuals descended from early Frenchmen in the region and Native Americans. On the southern border, Richardson abutted Kansas and Missouri, where quarrels as to where the lines officially began and ended were constant. Falls City, eventually the county seat, was said to be a station on

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<sup>107</sup> Andreas *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1301.

the Underground Railroad, and the county may have been one of the few places in Nebraska to be home, however briefly, to slavery.<sup>108</sup>

What drew people to this community? In 1854, it would appear the availability of land held strong appeal. Early claims were made in Richardson County by John A. Singleton and William Roberts, both of whom took land on the south fork of the Nemaha River. This was the principal source of water in the interior of the county. A small number of adult white males settled in Richardson County in the fall of 1854 along with Singleton and Roberts. John Singleton's family remained in Missouri, while Singleton himself was chosen as a territorial representative in Nebraska. A man named Short took a claim near Salem, while a group of five additional settlers staked their claims on the north branch of the Nemaha River. Neither Short nor the other settlers remained permanent residents or made improvements on their lands until the spring of 1855.<sup>109</sup>

Several towns developed in Richardson County prior to 1860 including a small village near Stephen Story's ferry. St. Stephens, Salem, Rulo, Barada, Falls City, Arago, and Archer were a mixture of frontier settlements and land claimed by members of the Otoe-Missourias and Ioways. Rulo and Barada in particular, both founded in 1856, were examples of communities that emerged as a result of earlier government agreements with "half-breed Indians" and their relatives. Barada was based on a 320 acre tract of land granted to Antoine Barada, the son of Laughing Buffalo of the Omahas and the Frenchman Michel de Baradat. Rulo was based on land owned by the wives of Charles

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<sup>108</sup> Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, *Nebraska*, 276-277; James C. Olson, *J. Sterling Morton* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1942) 105.

<sup>109</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1300-1301.

Rouleau and Eli Bedard. Rouleau, born in Detroit, was a veteran of John Fremont's explorations and had married (probably) an Ioway woman. Bedard of Quebec had married her sister. These two towns and their inhabitants would become important components in the story of building the community of Richardson County.<sup>110</sup>

In the spring of 1855, individuals and families began moving to Richardson County. Men like Jesse Crook, William and James Goolsby, and Farragus Pollard began to establish farms. Although Nebraska was a territory, most of its land was not as yet surveyed. Men were staking claims and settling on the land largely under the assumption that they could gain ownership of the land using the Preemption Act of 1841. Settlers moved in, built up farmsteads, and waited for the surveyors, essentially claiming the land through occupation.<sup>111</sup> Such moves took place in what Malcolm Rohrbough has described as the "shortened" frontier process. Elsewhere in the United States, manufacturing had accelerated and in new regions a surplus of commodities that could lead to large-scale agricultural production might lead to a rise in industry. The residents of Richardson County surely attempted to push for the developments that Rohrbough describes, producing stores, sawmills, flour mills, and the like by 1855 and 1856.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1300-1301.

<sup>111</sup> For descriptions of moving ahead of the surveyor, see John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 43, 53; also, Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) 30-31; also, Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 88; discussion of traditions of preemption can be found in Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789-1837* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968; reprint, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1990) 84, 161-176.

<sup>112</sup> Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 341; for discussion of mills as community centers, see Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, 68-70; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1301.

As is often a point of focus in other parts of the United States, the early settlers of Richardson later described their bouts with severe weather.<sup>113</sup> The winter of 1855-56 was reportedly very cold and replete with deep snow. Settlers did not have much in the way of supplies or food, although deer were easy to hunt. Several incidents of people running short on food or going out and becoming lost were common. Tales of frostbite, limbs falling off, and worse were often told. William Goolsby, who had arrived in the territory in 1855 with Jesse Crook, hunted deer during this severe winter, thus supplying his neighbors with valuable food. For two years, Goolsby earned a living as a hunter before settling in as a farmer.<sup>114</sup>

Richardson County also experienced another common frontier challenge – disease. A “bloody flux,” said to resemble dysentery, afflicted the population in 1860. A new group of settlers who landed at Rulo in the summer of that year were blamed for bringing the illness. About sixteen people died at Salem as a result. It might be argued that due the low numbers of the population in the county, the disease ground to a halt by the fall.<sup>115</sup>

During the Civil War, all three counties in this study experienced a few problems, though they were minimal. There was a general fear throughout the territory that the Lakota uprising in 1862 might result in attacks. There were indeed a few attacks on

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<sup>113</sup> Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, 201, 222.

<sup>114</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1301-1302. Samuel Bright, a German, suffered the loss of his legs in late December 1855 as a result of exposure; he died on New Years' Day in 1856. John Lakin lost several toes off each foot the same winter while trying to travel to Missouri from Salem, Richardson County.

<sup>115</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1303. See also, *United States Bureau of the Census, Nebraska Territorial Census*, 1860 Record Group 513, Subgroup 1, Series 1, Roll 1, Mortality Schedule, Nebraska State Historical Society.

settlers by Native Americans along the northern stretches of the territory. Richardson County was subject to squabbling with Jayhawkers and other marauding groups during the war years. The Nebraskans organized volunteer brigades for both home defense and to serve in the Union army.<sup>116</sup> The Jayhawkers presented the largest difficulty facing the residents of Richardson County. Ostensibly supporting the Union cause, these men often had no consideration for allegiance other than their own interests. In one instance, a group of Jayhawkers were pursued into the Falls City area of Richardson County by Union cavalry stationed in Missouri. The residents reported that while no violence took place in the town, soldiers did make more than their fair share use of the food and other stores in the community.<sup>117</sup>

The town of Salem in Richardson County was founded in late January 1855. Salem was located to the west of Falls City by about ten miles. The town was laid out east to west. Its early settlers included J. C. Lincoln, Thomas Hare, and P. W. Birkhauser. D. A. Tisdell established a hotel in 1859. Tisdell also served as postmaster after March 1869. A public schoolhouse was not constructed until the summer of 1870 although there were teachers prior to that year.<sup>118</sup>

Rulo was laid out in 1857, along the Missouri River. The wife of Charles Rouleau owned the land on which the town was created. Land belonging to her sister was also incorporated into the town after 1859. The town's name became Rulo, a

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<sup>116</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 1, 294-296, volume 2, 1305; Robert Huhn Jones, *The Civil War in the Northwest – Nebraska, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960) especially 31, 33, 82, 188; Olson, *J. Sterling Morton*, 120-121. Jayhawkers were residents of Kansas who claimed to be fighting the extension of slavery and invaders from Missouri.

<sup>117</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1304.

<sup>118</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1329-1330.

phonetic version of the Rouleau family name. Brothers-in-law Charles Rouleau of Detroit, Michigan and Eli Bedard of Quebec, Canada had lived in the region prior to the existence of the town.<sup>119</sup> Abel D. Kirk, following an adventurous mishap, was another early settler in Rulo. Kirk, a lawyer from Kentucky, came up the Missouri River in September 1856. Like many people moving west at this time, Kirk chose a steamship for a portion of his travels. Riding on the steamship *Arabia*, Kirk planned on disembarking at St. Joseph, Missouri, from where he would head into Nebraska Territory. Kirk's journey was marked by an all too common event, the sinking of the steamship.

As Kirk related the story, he had just been married in Peoria, Illinois and was on his way to Nebraska with his bride. They got on the *Arabia* at St. Louis and had been aboard for about ten days at the time of the accident. Kirk described the boat as being "heavily loaded with freight" but that it "did not have a large number of passengers." While at dinner on the tenth day, the boat hit a snag, which was a common problem on the Missouri River. At once, the boat began to sink and a "wild scene" erupted on board. As the water came over the decks, the boat began to turn onto one side and chairs, stools, and many children tumbled about, the latter group nearly falling into the water. Men grabbed the lifeboats, and a process of getting women and children to shore fell into place. A small man being called for, Kirk fit into one of the first lifeboats and was assigned the task of helping women ashore at the riverbank which was "very steep." The accident took place somewhere in the vicinity of Parkville, MO (slightly north and east of Kansas City). Residents of Parkville came and took the passengers to a hotel while the trunks and valises and other items were stacked in the woods near the river.

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<sup>119</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1324-1325.



Unfortunately, valuables were stolen during the night. The next day the passengers were placed on the *James A. Lucas* and when aboard, they could only see the top of the pilot house of the *Arabia*.<sup>120</sup> Eventually, Kirk made it to Richardson County. Kirk was a census taker in 1860 for the federal government and edited the *Rulo Western Guide* from May 1858 to May 1859. He then purchased the paper, continuing its operation until 1861.

The Rulo community started fairly strong, counting a store, blacksmith shop, lumber business, and brewery in its earliest years. While early attempts at building churches came to naught in 1858, by 1860, there was some schooling. The next year, the town erected a public school, funding its construction through private donations. Six years later, the number of students was great enough to warrant an increase in its size.<sup>121</sup>

Falls City, destined to become the county seat, was relatively small at its outset. Even after the final decision to make Falls City the county seat, the town had just over thirty buildings and only six mercantile businesses. Falls City was incorporated in 1858 thanks to petitions submitted by John A. Burbank, Issac L. Hamsby, and J. Edward Burbank among others.<sup>122</sup> J. Edward Burbank's story and Falls City connection is of some interest. Born in Pennsylvania, Burbank's father was from Vermont, his mother from Maryland. He grew up in Indiana, was educated at Miami University of Ohio, and

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<sup>120</sup> Entrance exhibit at the museum of the *Arabia*, Kansas City, Missouri. The *Arabia* was dug up by a family from the region in the late 1980s. One can see items from the ship on display.

<sup>121</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1325-1326.

<sup>122</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1306.

worked in Baltimore in a wholesale mercantile house. Sensing an opportunity, he returned to Indiana in the 1850s to engage in real estate speculation.<sup>123</sup>

This hope of profit on newly opened land brought Burbank to Nebraska in 1857, where, as previously noted, he was instrumental in the founding of Falls City. Burbank published *The Broad Axe* beginning in the fall of 1858. This newspaper was based on one of the same name in Richmond, Indiana. Burbank and his editor, Sewall Jemison, had both moved from Indiana. Early on it would appear that Burbank's paper sought to elevate the status of Falls City, even at the cost of another community in the county (in this case Rulo). Burbank eventually became an absentee landlord. He worked for the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. until 1863 when he was made United States paymaster. Burbank continued to own property in Nebraska, although he later maintained his main residence in Kansas.<sup>124</sup>

David Dorrington was one of the first permanent residents in the community, initially moving to Richardson County with his wife and one of his sons. Dorrington was born in Hartfordshire, England in 1812. Trained in carpentry, Dorrington moved to the United States in 1842, three years after marrying Anna B. Wood. After some time in Whitesboro, New York, where he worked in contracting and construction, Dorrington

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<sup>123</sup> For comments on land speculation, see Susan E. Gray, "Local Speculator as Confidence Man: Mumford Eldred, Jr. and the Michigan Land Rush," *Journal of the Early Republic* 10 (Fall 1990): 383-406; Robert P. Swierenga, *Acres for Cents: Delinquent Tax Auctions in Frontier Iowa* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976); descriptions of buying and selling land for personal gain and "land mania" in Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business*, 28, 89-110; James W. Oberly, *Sixty Million Acres: American Veterans and the Public Lands Before the Civil War* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1990).

<sup>124</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1307, 1313; Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Nebraska State Historical Society. The description of this newspaper's origins is sandwiched in between court records of 1860. Included is an example of some of the negativity felt by Falls City towards Rulo and personal attacks towards Abel D. Kirk. Kirk was said to live in a "half-breed ward composed chiefly of French who had squaws for their wives." Kirk was further derided by complaints about his work with the government and by reports that he had "lost his testicles by an attack of the measles."

moved to Doniphan, Kansas about forty miles from Falls City. Dorrington settled in Falls City in September 1857. There, he engaged in contracting and building.

Dorrington served in several capacities during the first years of county development. He took mail contracts, was the mayor of Falls City, served as justice of the peace, acted as trustee for the school district in 1859, was a judge of election in 1860, and worked in the mercantile business. Fred Dorrington, one of David and Anna's six children, taught at the school in 1859-1860, perhaps as a result of his father's influence. Two of the Dorrington daughters, Annie and Kittie, went on to marry influential community members.<sup>125</sup>

While Nebraska was still a territory, Annie Dorrington married Isham Reavis, May 19, 1864. Reavis had been born in Cass County, Illinois in 1836 and read law under the supervision of Attorney Drummer at Beardstown, Illinois. Reavis passed the bar in 1857 and moved to Nebraska the next year. He practiced law in Falls City and in 1867 was appointed District Attorney. In 1868, Isham Reavis garnered 783 votes for state senator from the third district. In 1869, Reavis was appointed by President Grant as Associate Justice of the Supreme Court in the Arizona Territory. He and Annie returned to Falls City in 1873.<sup>126</sup>

David Dorrington's construction work may have played a role in the establishment of the first hotels in Falls City. The first hotel was constructed on the property of Jesse Crook in winter 1857. Around 1846, Crook, who was born in White

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<sup>125</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1306, 1310, 1313.

<sup>126</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1318; Election Records of Richardson County, Record Group 245, Series 6, Box 1, Volumes 1 and 2, NSHS.

County, Tennessee in 1826, married Louise Whiteacre of Jackson County, Tennessee.

The couple moved to Missouri in 1853. The following year, Crook, along with some other people, scouted locations for settlement in Nebraska by way of Kansas. He camped near what would become Salem before staking claims along the north fork of the Nemaha River. When he returned from Missouri in February 1855, Crook found his claim jumped and he took another, this one closer to Falls City. His family joined him in the spring of 1855. He put in crops and helped lay out the town of Archer. When it was discovered that Archer, including Crook's own lands, belonged to Native Americans, he moved to Falls City, where he operated the town's hotel for two years. Crook later sold the hotel to John Minnick, a native of Illinois. Minnick expanded the building, using a house that he moved from Doniphan County, Kansas. The hotel remained Minnick's even while he worked as a farmer and merchant. Minnick's hotel was the site of fierce debates and arguments over the location of the county seat a topic to be discussed in chapter six.<sup>127</sup>

Like David Dorrington, Jesse Crook had a child who married an important member of the community. August Schoenheit, an attorney and native of Saxe-Coburg, immigrated to the United States at the age of sixteen in 1838. He worked on a farm in Pennsylvania and then learned carriage-making. By the 1840s, he was earning a living in this trade in Ohio. Schoenheit tried his luck with gold in California in 1850, returned to Ohio in 1853 and picked up law. In 1856, he was admitted to the bar, and by 1860, he had landed in Falls City where he practiced his newest profession. In September 1864,

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<sup>127</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1310, 1313, 1316; for a detailed account of the problems of Archer, see Chapman, *Otoes and Missourias*, 51-83.

he made Sarah Crook his wife. Sarah and August had five children, and August served as mayor of Falls City and county prosecuting attorney.<sup>128</sup>

Burt County was explored by a small group of prospective settlers in early fall, 1854. Benjamin Folsom, H.C. Purple, and others crossed the Missouri River near Council Bluffs, Iowa and began looking for potential homes. Passing by the old Mormon quarters, Folsom wrote about the site. “Our party left the New City [Omaha] and encamped on an eminence about 8 miles northwest...and one mile from the late city of ‘Winter Quarters’ ....But there is not a vistage [sic] of that town left, not one stone, or timber remains upon another not a house save a log house that has been removed there + 2 small frame houses mark the spot which so recently was busy + active with thousands of human being.” Further, he commented on the paucity of timber in the region, as well as the beautiful rolling hills.<sup>129</sup>

In the area that would become Burt County, the travelers paused and examined the countryside more closely, noting possible quarries, settlement spots, and the like. Within a mile of the tableland next to the Missouri bottoms they began moving up a bluff. A few feet above the great bottom the group established “our claim in the name of our company which is the Nebraska Stock Company.” The claim extended four miles square from their stake flag near a native burial ground and a strip running up *our* (emphasis mine) creek, one mile wide, for six miles, within one half mile of either bank.<sup>130</sup> Burt County had begun.

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<sup>128</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1318.

<sup>129</sup> Folsom, 2 October 1854, Record Group 4300, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>130</sup> Folsom, 7 October 1854.

Platte County, in the eastern quarter of Nebraska, has the Platte River as a boundary and includes portions of the Loup River, sometimes referred to as the Loup Fork of the Platte River by early settlers. The lands of the county consist of fertile soils, particularly Chernozem, and are very rich for agriculture. The entire county encompasses bottom lands, hilly regions, and flat terrain. This county was originally inhabited by the Omahas, Poncas, and Pawnees. Named after the river that runs along its southern border, Platte County was exposed early on to traffic from the military, travelers moving west, and mail routes. The original borders of the county changed from 1855 to 1865 in order to consolidate management and later to create a new county. By the mid 1850s, settlement along the Platte River seemed like a profitable location given its proximity to a major migration route.<sup>131</sup>

In April 1856, Isaac Albertson and E.N. Toncray became two of the first white settlers to arrive in Platte County. The Columbus Town Company formed in Omaha and the settlers sought to establish a town on what would be the logical route of the transcontinental railroad. Vincent Kummer served as captain of this town company, named in honor of the fact that many of the settlers had lived in Columbus, Ohio.<sup>132</sup>

Columbus, Nebraska, destined to become the seat of Platte County, was located on the Loup fork of the Platte River. By the end of May 1856, outlines of the town had

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<sup>131</sup> Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 8, 32; Barbara M. Kooiman and Elizabeth A. Butterfield, *Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey Reconnaissance Survey Final Report of Platte County, Nebraska* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office, 1996), 13-15, 23-24; I.N. Taylor, *History of Platte County, Nebraska* (Columbus, NE: Columbus Republican Print, 1876), 1; Margaret Curry, *The History of Platte County, Nebraska* (Culver City, CA: Murray and Gee, 1950), 415.

<sup>132</sup> G.W. Phelps, supervising editor, *Past and Present of Platte County Nebraska A Record of Settlement, Organization, Progress, and Achievement* Volumes I and II (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1915), 46.

been made and by October, the Columbus Town Company found itself combined with another town headed by A. J. Smith and S. N. Fifield. The two groups agreed that the development of Platte County would be better served by not interfering with one another.<sup>133</sup> Jacob Louis, an early resident, recorded memories of those early moments.

We arrived here in the evening of May 29, 1856....There were thirteen in the party, including myself. The others were Frederick Gottschalk, Carl Reinke, Michael Smith, Jacob Guter, John Wolfel, Vincent Kummer, Henry Lusche, Charles Bremer, John Browner, J. P. Becker, Anthony Voll [and] John Held. Five of us – including Adam Denck – had been here the previous March, later returning to Omaha where the Company was organized....<sup>134</sup>

Stock options were offered to anyone who built a steam sawmill for the industrial development of the county. John Rickley agreed in August 1856 to take up the responsibility in return for 18 shares in the Columbus Town Company. Rickley joined John Becker and John Wolfel, among others, as one of the earlier residents of Columbus. His sawmill opened for business on August 1, 1857.<sup>135</sup>

Early on, Platte County residents found themselves in for a challenging life.

Jacob Louis wrote:

Nearly every member of the company had an ox team, and during the first summer we broke ground and put in a crop. The harvest that fall didn't amount to much. Grasshoppers [sic] came and saved us the trouble of harvesting....[luckily] we had plenty of fresh meat.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Phelps, *Past and Present of Platte County*, 48.

<sup>134</sup> Curry, *History of Platte County*, vi. The oldest settler was 41, the youngest 22.

<sup>135</sup> Phelps, *Past and Present of Platte County*, 46, 49. John Wolfel's wife, aged 18, arrived in Columbus 7 October 1856. Curry, *History of Platte County*, 29.

<sup>136</sup> Curry, *History of Platte County*, vi.

The winter of 1856/1857 was harsh as the plains were covered with three feet of snow. The drifts rose high above the earth, reaching between ten and thirty feet. The settlers built simple log or sod structures, but struggled with supplies, as the nearest large settlement was in Omaha. Trips to Omaha were fraught with danger as the travelers were forced to wear snowshoes while dragging supplies to Columbus. John Wolfel, a carpenter, Charles Bremer, and a Mr. Hashberger traveled 200 miles in 10 days with supplies by walking on the frozen Platte River.<sup>137</sup>

In 1856, Platte County served as home to only 35 settlers. By 1859, that number had increased to 782. The early “neighborhoods” looked like a mosaic of cultures, but were dominated by individuals of European descent. The English and Scots lived in the lower Platte Valley alongside a strong Mormon contingent. Germans, mostly Lutheran, lived in the lower Shell Creek Valley while the Irish resided in the upper Shell Creek and lower north shore of the Loup River. The Scandinavians lived on upper Looking Glass and Lost Creek, and the “Yankees” or northern Americans took up the northeast section of the county and Tracy Valley. While settlement grew steadily throughout the 1860s, it seems clear that when the construction crews of the Union Pacific railroad hit Columbus in late May 1866, the county as a whole underwent a new growth spurt, hitting approximately 1,899 residents by 1870.<sup>138</sup>

Despite these raw beginnings, it is important to note that the community building in Platte County certainly considered itself an important part of the American story. In

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<sup>137</sup> Phelps, *Past and Present of Platte County*, 49; Curry, *History of Platte County*, 29.

<sup>138</sup> Phelps, *Past and Present of Platte County*, 51, 52.



1857, Columbus residents celebrated the anniversary of the formation of the country on July 4. The Columbus Guards under the command of Lieutenant J. P. Becker marched and “displayed themselves” throughout the morning. Speeches of interest relating to the nation were offered as was a community dinner. The description of the July 4 celebration closes by extolling the virtues of Platte County more generally as a region known for “richness of soil and abundance of timber.” A brief history of the county and the location of the town of Columbus as well as its important attributes (two stores, mechanics of various sorts, a saw mill) are also proffered. In addition to showing how the community was already joining together, the letter’s purpose was clear: come to Platte County. You can obtain good land for crops and you will become successful.<sup>139</sup>

By 1860, a school had been erected with G. W. Stevens appointed teacher in December. In the early days of schooling, 46 males and 20 females attended. Stevens was paid \$1 per day, and by the late 1860s, served 154 students.<sup>140</sup> The fledgling community’s religious groups included Lutherans, Catholics, and Mormons. The latter group was part of the Reorganized Latter Day Saints, a break-away organization from Brigham Young’s leadership.<sup>141</sup>

Industrial concerns in early Platte County were limited to construction, the timber industry, and ferry operation. The ferry across the Loup fork was advertised as costing \$1 for passage in 1858. Immigrants increased industry dramatically, as men like Jacob

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<sup>139</sup> “Celebration of the Fourth of July at Columbus, N.T.,” *The Omaha Nebraskan*, 15 July 1857.

<sup>140</sup> Curry, *History of Platte County*, 26, 43.

<sup>141</sup> Curry, *History of Platte County*, 43.

Ernst, a blacksmith, arrived in the late 1850s and early 1860s.<sup>142</sup> At the same time in 1858, several stories touting Platte County's strength as a farming community appeared in the *Omaha Times*. "Men with money exist in the region," trumpeted one lead, "crops in area nearly safely housed...market value of crops is approximately \$46,000." "Good homes and farms abound," declared another article, "...good hotel [Grand American], large saw mill, top quality store."<sup>143</sup>

So what kinds of community did early Nebraska create? Taking examples from various counties, we see Nebraska as a place where a German could be a carriage maker and attorney, while marrying a woman from Tennessee to start a new life after his first wife dies. We see a county founded by successful businessmen from a place called Wyoming – Wyoming County, New York that is. We see another county develop largely in the hands of immigrants – many of whom were German speakers, some who were not.

What held these pieces together? As some of the biographical details inform us, sometimes it is as simple as marriage. As John Mack Faragher describes in *Sugar Creek*, the wedding itself could be viewed as a builder of community. The event was a community affair and a union of individuals might possibly serve as a symbol for the larger group. Sometimes, as we shall see, the bonds are challenged by the very diversity

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<sup>142</sup> *Omaha Times*, 23 September 1858; Henry Egge, Swiss, writes of his early years in Columbus construction. Curry, *History of Platte County*, 34, 68.

<sup>143</sup> *Omaha Times*, 21 October 1858; *Omaha Times*, 11 November 1858.

of the community. Sometimes strife, as Allan Bogue has argued, is perhaps not such a bad thing. A little stress can go a long way to build a community bond.<sup>144</sup>

In uncertain times, politicians who were not so certain they wanted to create the territory in the first place founded Nebraska! The communities of Nebraska, as exemplified by Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties, presented themselves as mixed bags. The residents were people with different political backgrounds, different ethnicities, and different regional backgrounds, yet they had to find a way to create community. In the ensuing chapters, I shall more closely examine the origins of territorial Nebraska's citizens, study their lives from agriculture to industry, attempt to understand the intricacies of county government, and draw conclusions about certain levels of democracy throughout the territory.

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<sup>144</sup> Allan Bogue, "Social Theory and the Pioneer," *Agricultural History* 34 (January 1960): 21-34. Bogue asks whether or not in proving Turner's connection between frontier and democracy, Stanley Elkins and Erick McKittrick may have paid too little attention to the politics of conflict and community power.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE PEOPLE OF RICHARDSON, BURT, AND PLATTE COUNTIES

In late October 1855, a young man of nineteen living on a farm at Chandlerville, Illinois decided he wanted to become a lawyer. Desiring to study law at a place larger than the nearest “big” town of Beardstown, Isham Reavis wrote to a lawyer known to his father asking to study at the lawyer’s office in Springfield. “I am from home too much of my time, for a young man to read law with me advantageously,” replied Abraham Lincoln. “Get the books, and read and study them till you understand them,” advised the future president, further suggesting that the size of the town mattered not. After advising that young Reavis borrow books from Henry Dummer who had been partner with Lincoln’s first partner John Stuart, Lincoln concluded his response with some sage advice. “Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed, is more important than any one thing.”<sup>1</sup> Twenty months later on July 30, 1857, Isham Reavis was admitted to the bar in Cass County, Illinois.

In 1858, Reavis left Beardstown and headed to the west. Arriving in St. Joseph, Missouri by steamboat, Reavis disembarked and used only his feet for the rest of his trip. He settled in Falls City, Richardson County as one of several lawyers in the future county seat. By 1860, Reavis had amassed \$2,500 in real estate in Richardson County. In addition, his personal estate value was recorded as \$1,000.<sup>2</sup> His future wife, Anna Dorrington (whose pet name was Annie), had family in the county; she was the daughter of English born carpenter David Dorrington. Although her older brothers and a younger

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham Lincoln to Isham Reavis, November 5, 1855, Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* volume 2 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 327. A facsimile of the original letter is available in Record Group 3301 Series 2, Folder 1, Miscellany, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860* Record Group 513, Nebraska State Historical Society.

sister were in Nebraska by 1860, Anna was probably still residing in her birth state, New York. In 1862 and 1863, Anna was receiving letters from Henry Rice, who was in the ambulance corps of the Union Army. Rice told Anna about seeing people known to them from New York while marching through Washington, D.C. and about his impressions of military leadership and how war was affecting Virginia.

Burnside (Ambrose) has “the inclination to use troops to fight with, rather than to excavate swamps,” wrote Rice. War has made the land “one immense waste” and it approaches the “nearest to a desert than anything else I can imagine,” continued Rice, pointing out that in certain places he could not even spy the vestige of fences on former farmyards whose surfaces now resembled well-packed brickyards with small square holes dug out of them.<sup>3</sup>

Almost a year later, Henry Rice observed “we are having a very dull time here yet – nothing being done in the way of ‘crushing the rebellion’ unless I might say that patiently waiting for an opportunity to do something might be called doing our part.” Another portion of this communication reveals something of Anna’s personal beliefs. “Annie, I believe you used to have a class in the colored Sabbath school in Elmira – you ought to see some of the colored schools that are in operation here.” Rice described among the black population in his vicinity (New Salem, North Carolina), nearly everyone under the age of twenty-five was attending day schools and that many teachers were young ladies like Anna from Massachusetts. Given Anna’s father’s alleged connections to the Underground Railroad network in Kansas and southeastern Nebraska, it is of little

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Rice to Anna Dorrington, December 1, 1862, Record Group 3301, Series 1, Folder 2 Annie from Henry Rice 1862-1863, Nebraska State Historical Society.

surprise to discover she would have volunteered to work in such a Sabbath school as described by Rice.<sup>4</sup>

In 1864, Isham Reavis married Anna Dorrington. A year later, their first child was born – her formal name was apparently Annie. Like Henry Rice, Reavis affectionately referred to his wife as Annie in various letters written to her when he was separated from home and family. Isham Reavis's career grew rapidly in the 1860s as he was elected Richardson County representative in the constitutional convention discussions as Nebraska became a state.

By 1870, only twelve years after he first hung out his shingle in Falls City, but in some ways a whole lifetime removed from the region's pioneer beginnings, Isham Reavis was appointed as associate federal justice in the territory of Arizona. Concerned about the frailty of dear Annie back home but also determined to make the most of his situation, Reavis wrote to Annie regularly. "Please send me measurements of your wrists – I want to fit something to them. Don't neglect your medicines and write me how you get along." He concluded his correspondence with an important clue as to his motivation for having separated from home, wife, and children. "I am becoming extremely acquainted on this coast, and I meant to profit by some of it. Keep a girl by all means, don't hesitate about the cost, you must have one all the time. I don't intend to put all the care of the children upon you and not provide you any help. Remember, July."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Rice to Anna Dorrington, October 16, 1863, Record Group 3301, Series 1, Folder 2 Annie from Henry Rice 1862-1863, Nebraska State Historical Society; Richardson County, unnumbered hanging folder, newspaper clipping from *Falls City Journal*, probably 1953 or 1954, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>5</sup> Isham Reavis to Annie Reavis, May 4, 1870, RG 3301, Series 1, Folder 1 Correspondence from Isham Reavis 1870-1890, Nebraska State Historical Society.

Writing from Los Angeles a few days later, Reavis asked whether “dear Annie” had attended church that morning in “our little home village.” He had not done so himself having just come off a steamer in Long Beach harbor and taken the train up to Los Angeles. Reavis advised that he felt solitary, but cheerful in the hope of seeing her very shortly. Without “dear Annie” present, Reavis noted he would read from the Bible she gave him. Probably revealing something of his own view of religious views, Reavis wrote “I might not do it if any body else had given it to me; but it is your Bible, your gift and I like to read on that account if for no other reason.” Again concerned about Annie’s health, Reavis noted “I would gladly sacrifice personal comfort and all else that you and the children might be well and happy. I shall not delay anytime after my commitments are ended. Send a telegraph if you need me.”<sup>6</sup>

In the early 1840s, an employee of Peter Sarpy, the American Fur Company’s Indian trader at Bellevue, made his home among the Omahas. He was described as possessing a long flowing brown beard with shoulder length hair and deep blue eyes. Stephen Decatur, as he called himself, dressed in buckskin and wore moccasins and could speak to Omahas, Poncas, Dakotas, and whites with equal facility. Decatur, originally from New Jersey, made himself a valuable asset in Sarpy’s business. Along with other Sarpy associates such as brothers Logan and Henry Fontenelle, Decatur was well-known and yet a bit of a mystery to the early residents of what would become Nebraska Territory. When Bellevue was incorporated in 1854, Sarpy named Decatur as one of the incorporating agents. A year later, Sarpy established a trading post and town up the

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<sup>6</sup> Isham Reavis to Annie Reavis, May 8, 1870, RG 3301, Series 1, Folder 1 Correspondence from Isham Reavis 1870-1890, Nebraska State Historical Society.

Missouri River in Burt County. Stephen Decatur was placed in charge of the company store, and the town was named Decatur.<sup>7</sup>

The Decatur Town and Ferry Company was organized in the fall of 1854, and Stephen Decatur along with Thomas Whitacre, George W. Mason, Herman Glass, and Truman Hart. Hineman were the primary investors in the future of this community. Early on, nearly \$2,000 was invested in what had started as a simple trading post in order to build up the town and construct a working ferry. Decatur had prior experience with ferries, having operated a ferry across the Loup Fork of the Platte River for Peter Sarpy during the California emigration period of the 1840s and early 1850s. In the year of incorporation, 1856, Decatur built a sod and frame house in the town that bore his name. That same year, Decatur married a widow. M. A. Thompson, born in New York already had three children Abbie, Waldo, and Lizzie, aged 14, 13, and 4 respectively, who were born in Michigan. Their father had been editor of *The Council Bluffs Bugle*. The instant family Decatur acquired through this union moved to the town of Decatur in 1857. In what was a decidedly small community, Stephen Decatur held strong influence. He owned a number of cattle, horses, wagons and other personal property, as well as a farm called Decatur Springs Place because of the available pure water.<sup>8</sup>

Stephen Decatur was generally well regarded by his neighbors, particularly due to his experience with the Omahas. After the treaties of 1854, the Omahas had been moved to their new reservation to the north of Burt County. Decatur was seen as someone who

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<sup>7</sup> Alfred Sorenson, *The Story of Omaha From the Pioneers' Days to the Present Time* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Omaha: National Printing company, 1923), 189, 190; A. P. De Milt, *Story of an Old Town, with Reminiscences of Early Nebraska and Biographies of Pioneers* (Omaha: Douglas Printing Company, 1902), 32.

<sup>8</sup> De Milt, *Story of an Old Town*, 24, 30, 32; United States Census 1860; Sorenson, *Story of Omaha*, 190, 191.



could placate differences between white and native neighbors. Even though Decatur made his share of money off of trading with the Omahas he also understood the need to maintain an honest relationship with the tribe. At times he was called upon to arbitrate differences between whites and natives or among natives. In 1858, while near Decatur, brothers-in-law Louis Neal and Tecumseh Fontenelle became embroiled in an old argument about some past dealings with ponies down near Richardson County in what was known as the Half-Breed Tract. The two men and Louis' wife Susan had traveled into Decatur, the men in search of a few drinks. Perhaps they stopped at New York native Matt Wilbur's "Turn Around Tavern", a rough-hewn shanty made of cottonwood slabs that also functioned as Sam Hollard's merchandise store before Hollard drank himself out of business. On their way back to the Omaha reservation, the old feud over the ponies began again and Tecumseh attacked Louis with a knife. Susan intervened and her husband drew his own knife, stabbing Tecumseh dealing him a mortal wound. Louis fled to the town and Stephen Decatur was called in to settle the issue between Tecumseh's friends and Louis Neal. Vigilantism was avoided as Decatur's courteous and convincing speech and the confidence of neighbors worked to send Louis Neal to Omaha to be tried for his crime. Neal was convicted and sent to prison in Iowa. Decatur, who regarded all law abiding men as worthy of respect and as equals had carried the day and preserved a sense of order in his new hometown.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Sorenson, *Story of Omaha*, 191, 192; De Milt, *Story of an Old Town*, 28, 33; Neal is also referred to as Lewis Neal and Louis Neals in various historical records. Son of a white American and a half-breed Omaha woman, his story is also intertwined with the Half-Breed Tract in Richardson County. Berlin Basil Chapman, *The Otoes and Missourias: A Study of Indian Removal and the Legal Aftermath*, (Oklahoma City: times Journal Publishing Co., 1965), 77-78.

Carl Reinke (sometimes identified as Charles Ranke or Charles Reinke) was an original settler in the Columbus area of Platte County. Born in 1828 in Prussia, Reinke had grown up far enough east in Prussia that he spoke both German and Polish as well as English after some time in America. His family in Europe had been desperately poor. His father was a shepherd and he never knew his mother who died in childbirth. As he grew older in Prussia, Carl's father had grimly joked that as Carl grew the father had wished he had been a lamb instead of a child. Desperately poor, Carl's father did not know quite what to do with a child, but a lamb he could have knocked on the head to make a meal. By the time Carl was in his early twenties, he was working as a shepherd. His father had passed away leaving no estate and Carl had to borrow money in order to bury him. Scrimping and saving where he could, Carl Reinke finally pulled together enough money to leave the old country, emigrated to the United States in 1854, and arrived in Nebraska in 1856.<sup>10</sup>

After living in Ohio and Illinois, Reinke joined the original group of settlers as they moved from Omaha to Columbus. Soon after his arrival, he and Henry Lusche a fellow German five years his senior from Oldenberg, walked around the prairie surrounding the Columbus area in search of a suitable spot for farming. Lusche and Reinke had taken several walks through the young county in search of a place to put down roots and on this particular day they went north toward Shell Creek. Carl believed the land to be truly wonderful with high quality grass and a good number of birds

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<sup>10</sup> A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2 (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1882), 1283; *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1856*; Emma Reinke Bradshaw, interview with Stanley Kula, September 15, 1941, WPA Record Group 515, Box 28, Subject 230, Folder 1, Nebraska State Historical Society, 8, 9.

bursting forth in song. Duly pleased, Reinke began to construct a shack so as to lay claim to the land.<sup>11</sup>

Reinke's location was well situated for a farmer starting out on his own. He had abundant water from Shell Creek and a relatively close neighbor as Henry Lusche settled nearby about half a mile up stream. In those early years, Reinke's biggest challenge was keeping supplies on hand. He had to go to the Missouri River for most provisions at Fort Calhoun or Omaha. Reinke's other closest neighbor, Irishman Pat Murray, proved a useful connection. He hired Carl from time to time and loaned him money (even if at 60% interest!) Perhaps more important, Carl's visits with the Murray household led him to meet his wife.<sup>12</sup>

On the way back from a visit to Pat Murray's around 1860, Reinke stopped at the Warner household and in the course of conversation, he mentioned that things were going fairly well for himself on the farm. Reinke believed he was at a point where he could support a wife. Mrs. Warner suggested she knew of someone and contacted the woman in question who was working at the house of the Pawnee Agent in Genoa, some miles to the west. At the Warner's house, Carl was introduced to Margaret Pilling who had been born in England. The two immigrants struck up a relationship and found things between them to be to their liking. Margaret Pilling was an interesting case. A divorced woman with a son, her parents had been converts to the Mormon faith who came to America and migrated to Utah.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Bradshaw interview with Kula, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Bradshaw interview with Kula, 10-12.

<sup>13</sup> Bradshaw interview with Kula, 11.

Margaret Pilling had remained in England after her parents immigrated to the United States. Margaret's father had been a butcher. As her marriage faltered, Margaret contacted her parents with the idea of moving to the United States with her son. After some problems in which drafts of money sent to Margaret by her parents were stolen, she received the necessary funds and headed to America. Around the time Carl was introduced to Margaret, he was recorded in the census as owning real estate worth about \$200, with personal estate of the same value. The two were married in December 1861.<sup>14</sup>

As the stories of these few residents demonstrate, there were several possible entry points leading to the territory of Nebraska after that region was officially opened to white settlement in 1854. In examining the ebb and flow of settlers' migration to Nebraska, one discovers that migrants generally followed two routes into the territory, entering either along the Missouri border or near Omaha. Upon arrival, these settlers revealed the various cultural backgrounds they carried with their personal possessions, making their own stamps on Nebraska's development in communities across the territory.

This chapter places the stories of these individuals into the context of the various censuses undertaken within Nebraska Territory. The intent is to introduce specific elements of population data from Burt, Richardson and Platte counties, from the first years of settlement through 1870. These three counties were all established by 1856. By 1860 each numbered among the most populous counties in the territory of Nebraska. Although their borders shifted slightly between 1854 and 1859, by 1860 these boundaries had stabilized into those used today. Especially in the earliest iterations, each of the three counties' populations represented

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<sup>14</sup> Bradshaw interview with Kula, 12; census; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1283.

majorities from different migration streams. This fact provides part of the rationale for having chosen to examine Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties. As individual regions, each county provides a piece of the settlement mosaic that created territorial Nebraska.

The numbers of questions on the United States census and their complexity have steadily increased since the first enumeration in 1790. In that year, the schedule asked for information about color, sex, and age of the population. Decade by decade, more questions were added, particularly after 1850. Article I, section 2 of the United States Constitution states that both representatives and direct taxes must be measured according to a count of the citizens. In its first years, the government intended to count only free people, excluding Indians who did not pay some form of tax, and would enumerate three-fifths of all other people, which to all practical purposes meant slaves. The census was therefore necessary in order to have the statistical data by which the national government could make an adequate assessment of representation. Because the original census was not truly meant to be an actual collection of much information beyond raw numbers, for many years the data collection was sparse.<sup>15</sup>

The marshals in charge of the operation were allowed to appoint as many assistants as they so chose. These officials were to have nine months to complete their task. Under penalty of steep fines, the marshals and their assistants headed out to record the name of the head of each family and the number of people in each household who fit into the categories of free white males sixteen years and older, free white males under

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<sup>15</sup> Carroll D. Wright and William C. Hunt, *The History and Growth of the United States Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1966), 7, 8, 12, 13; A. Ross Eckler, *The Bureau of the Census* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 4-6; Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 7-14.

sixteen, free white females, any other free people, and slaves. The marshals and their assistants were to receive compensation for their work, which varied from district to district. There was no real uniformity in the process of recording the information. Not until 1830 did census takers have a printed form to use when recording their information. So, in that first year, different sized papers were used and the columns were drawn in by hand. For the most part, the census continued in that manner until 1850.<sup>16</sup>

About six years prior to the creation of Nebraska Territory, Congress began to discuss changes to the process of taking the census. A census board was established in 1849 consisting of the Secretary of State, the Postmaster-General, and the Attorney-General. This board was to print the forms and schedules needed for the seventh census. Not only would the inhabitants be counted, but also information on mines, agriculture, commerce, manufacturing, education and so on would be added. That same day, an act of Congress established the Department of the Interior. Section seven of that act indicated that the Secretary of the Interior would be responsible for supervising the marshals of the census. The printed schedules were all the same size and asked for free inhabitants, including the dwelling houses and families visited, slave inhabitants, mortality (people who died during the year ending June 1, 1850), agricultural production, products of industry (including corporation names, types of machinery and so forth) and social statistics (including value of estate, were there libraries and schools in the district, etc.).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Wright and Hunt, *History and Growth*, 13-16; Eckler, *Bureau*, 40-41. This table indicates the continuity of certain questions posed by the census since its outset.

<sup>17</sup> Wright and Hunt, *History and Growth*, 39, 40, 44-46; Eckler, *Bureau*, 43; for a detailed discussion on the controversies surrounding changes to the census for 1850, see Anderson, *American Census*, 32-42.

Prior to the establishment of Nebraska Territory in 1854, the largest white community in the region was the transient one on the Oregon Trail. While between 1827 and 1854, the number of Anglo-European residents of Nebraska probably did not exceed 200, the emigrants' community ranged in the tens of thousands.<sup>18</sup> While the census takers did not travel the emigrant trails in an effort to keep count of everyone who moved, historians have reconstructed raw numbers of travelers to Oregon, California, and Utah between 1840 and 1860. Nearly all of these internal migrants would have passed through what became Nebraska Territory on their journey (see table 2.1 on the following page).

On October 21, 1854, Acting Territorial Governor Thomas B. Cuming signed a proclamation, declaring that the Nebraska Territorial Census was to be enumerated by mid-November. The marshals were instructed that in making the enumeration, they were to be careful that no names were enrolled except actual and permanent residents of the districts. If there were people living in the district who were not citizens, they were to report to Fenner Ferguson, the Chief Justice of Nebraska Territory, to declare their intentions to become Americans.<sup>19</sup> This territorial census was to be completed ahead of elections in early December so the various districts and soon to be counties could know how many representatives they would be sending to the territorial legislature.

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<sup>18</sup> Lloyd Bernard Sellin, "The Settlement of Nebraska to 1880," (M.A. thesis, History, University of Southern California, 1940), 110, 131.

<sup>19</sup> Nebraska, *Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials Passed at the Sessions of the Territorial and State Legislatures of Nebraska, Together with the Organic Law, and the Proclamations Issued in the Organization of the Territorial Government; the Enabling Act Admitting Nebraska to the Union; and the Revised Statutes of 1866* (Lincoln: Journal Company, State Printers, 1886-1887), 7.

**Table 2.1:** Overland emigration to Oregon, California, and Utah-numbers of emigrants: 1840-1860<sup>20</sup>

Year	Emigrants to:		
	Oregon	California	Utah
	Number	Number	Number
1840	13	0	0
1841	24	34	0
1842	125	0	0
1843	875	38	0
1844	1475	53	0
1845	2500	260	0
1846	1200	1500	0
1847	4000	450	2200
1848	1300	400	2400
1849	450	25000	1500
1850	6000	44000	2500
1851	3600	1100	1500
1852	10000	50000	10000
1853	7500	20000	8000
1854	6000	12000	3167
1855	500	1500	4684
1856	1000	8000	2400
1857	1500	4000	1300
1858	1500	6000	150
1859	2000	17000	1431
1860	1500	9000	1630
<b>Total</b>	<b>53062</b>	<b>200335</b>	<b>42862</b>
<b>Total emigrants</b>	<b>296259</b>		

<sup>20</sup> Carter, Susan B., and Richard Sutch, “Overland emigration to Oregon, California, and Utah – emigrants, travel time, and Indian–emigrant homicides: 1840–1860.” Table Df27-33 in *Historical Statistics of the United States, Earliest Times to the Present: Millennial Edition*, edited by Susan B. Carter, Scott Sigmund Gartner, Michael R. Haines, Alan L. Olmstead, Richard Sutch, and Gavin Wright. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/ISBN-9780511132971.Df1-18310.1017/ISBN-9780511132971.Df1-183> (accessed July 15, 2007).



In 1860, the eighth census was undertaken operating according to the act of May 23, 1850, the same that had guided the census of 1850. Joseph C. G. Kennedy was assigned as superintendent of the census for 1860. The same set of questions would be used as in 1850, with only a few changes. The most revealing change was to require that profession or occupation of free inhabitants, male or female, would be recorded for those over age fifteen. Also, there was a separate return for the value of real estate and personal estate as opposed to reporting only the value of real estate. A separate schedule was made for slave inhabitants that called for numbering slave houses. The quantity of beeswax and honey would be counted separately and a few other instructions were clarified so as to “avoid all misapprehension as to the intent of the inquiries.”<sup>21</sup>

Sixty-four marshals, a few special agents in unorganized territories, and over 4,400 assistants worked to gather the information. The first results of their work were sent to Congress in May 1862 and over 100,000 copies were printed by order of the House of Representatives. The final report contained a portrait of the United States on the verge of its great Civil War, including data on population, agriculture, manufacturing, mortality, and a series of miscellaneous statistics. Many pages of the final reports contained not just the information, but also analysis of the numbers.<sup>22</sup>

The 1870 census carried the added burden of being the first to be conducted in post Civil War America. A special committee met in Congress, under the leadership of James Garfield. The committee made a study of how the census works, as well as proposed the possibility of using the census to keep careful track as to enforcement of the

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<sup>21</sup> Wright and Hunt, *History and Growth*, 50-51; Anderson, *American Census*, 58-63; Eckler, *Bureau*, 230-232 contains a list of questions asked on the census between 1790 and 1870.

<sup>22</sup> Wright and Hunt, *History and Growth*, 51.

Fourteenth Amendment. Garfield's plan called for not only changing the way in which enumeration was undertaken and introducing new questions, but also required a reduction in representation if states did not allow the black population to vote. Largely because the need for punishing states on issues of black voting rights would be mitigated by the Fifteenth Amendment and because Garfield's reform of the enumeration process meant serious damage to Senatorial patronage regarding the appointment of census marshals, the bill was tabled in the Senate.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the census of 1870 was undertaken using the blueprint from 1850. The new superintendent, Francis Amasa Walker was under pressure. Not only was it demanded that he achieve accuracy in the enumeration, but Walker also faced regions of political and social instability, dealing with problems ranging from an increasingly mobile population in the large cities, to the Reconstruction era southern states, to the not entirely organized western territories and states, of which Nebraska was one. Despite these challenges, Walker completed his early report related to apportionment to Congress by December 1871, and the final task by early 1873.<sup>24</sup>

The ninth census was only a slightly different process than the two that had come immediately prior. The enumerators' pay increased and some of the inquiries were made either more specific or dropped altogether (e.g. the separate slave schedule). In counting the population, five additional questions made the responses more explicit. Residents were asked whether their father or mother were of foreign birth, what month a child arrived if born within the previous year, and a section to determine voting rights for males over the age of twenty-one. Additionally, marshals were to distinguish more

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<sup>23</sup> Anderson, *American Census*, 76-78; Wright and Hunt, *History and Growth*, 52, 53, 56, 57.

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, *American Census*, 78, 79; Wright and Hunt, *History and Growth*, 53.

clearly the question of “color” particularly in relation to the Chinese and Native American population, and the age limitation of fifteen was removed about occupation. Finally, the question of illiteracy was split into inability to read or inability to write and made to apply to those ten years of age and older. Some additional changes were made to the mortality, agriculture, industrial, and social statistics. The underlying purpose to most changes was to divide some information thereby making it more explicit and to abandon seemingly unimportant lines of inquiry (e.g. “number of days ill” on the mortality schedule).<sup>25</sup>

### **The Census in Nebraska – Richardson County**

The first census for Nebraska Territory (see Table 2.2) counted those white residents living outside of lands reserved for Native Americans or “Half-Breeds” and established a division between those dwelling north of the Platte River and those living in the south. A total of 2,732 residents were accounted for, along with some detailed information regarding each individual household. While the full name and birthplace is recorded only for the head of household, some early general patterns can be observed in the individual counties. District one, referred to as Richardson County, included the modern counties of Richardson and Pawnee, as well as portions of Nemaha, Johnson and Gage. Technically, the counties themselves were established after the census was taken by order of acting Territorial Governor Thomas B. Cuming. The first enumerator for district one was Joseph L. Sharp, originally from Tennessee. Sharp, born in 1809, had moved to Illinois in the late 1820s serving in the state legislature. In 1850 he moved to Glenwood, Iowa and again served in the state legislature. Despite being a resident of

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<sup>25</sup> Wright and Hunt, *History and Growth*, 54, 55.

Iowa, in December, Sharp was elected to the Nebraska territorial council as a representative from Richardson County.<sup>26</sup>

In this first district, or what would become Richardson County, Southern households predominated (see Table 2.3). Accounting for over 63% of all households (117 out of 185), these residents hailed exclusively from the Upper South (see Table 2.4). While Missourians were well represented with 38 households, it was Kentucky that held the highest number at 41.27 Nebraska, like Kansas, was to allow its populace to decide whether or not slavery would be legal in the territory. It was widely assumed that while Kansas had every possibility of becoming a slave state, Nebraska would remain free.<sup>28</sup> Despite this assumption, new migrants to Nebraska did bring slaves. There were a limited number to be sure, but they were present. James Foreman, a farmer from Virginia brought his wife, three children and one slave. Samuel Kuper of Missouri, also a farmer, came with one slave, four children and his wife. Finally another Missourian, Jacob Homer, came to farm Nebraska with his two slaves, wife, and son.

The early residents of Richardson County (see map 2.1) consisted of 236 white males over the age of 21, 26 white males between the ages of 16 and 21, 181 white males under the age of 16, 190 white females over the age of 16, 214 white females under the age of 16, and four slaves. Forty-one men or 22% of the populace lived alone, while 91 households (49.2%) held five or more residents each for a mean of 4.58 members per

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<sup>26</sup> J. Sterling Morton, Albert Watkins, and George L. Miller. *Illustrated History of Nebraska; a History of Nebraska from the Earliest Explorations of the Trans-Mississippi Region*, volume I (Lincoln: J. North Publishers, 1905-1913), 180, 195-196.

<sup>27</sup> *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1854* RG 513, Volume 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>28</sup> James R. Shortridge, *Peopling the Plains: Who Settled Where in Frontier Kansas*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995), 16-21.

**Table 2.2:** Nebraska Territorial Census, 1854<sup>29</sup>

<b>District No.</b>	<b>County Names</b>	<b>White males Over 21</b>	<b>White males 16-20</b>	<b>White males Under 16</b>	<b>White females Over 16</b>	<b>White females Under 16</b>	<b>Slaves</b>
1	Richardson	236	26	181	190	214	4
2	Pierce & Forney	185	24	138	127	131	9
3	Cass	95	16	101	44	97	0
4	Douglas	250	29	120	131	115	0
5	Dodge	74	1	8	13	10	0
6	Washington & Burt	89	7	12	28	27	0
<b>Totals</b>		<b>929</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>560</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>2732</b>						

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<sup>29</sup> Morton, Watkins, and Miller. *Illustrated History of Nebraska*; volume I, 180.

**Table 2.3:** Birthplace by Region 1, Richardson County (First District), 1854  
data for heads of household only<sup>30</sup>

<b>Region</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
North	13	7.0	7.0
South	117	63.2	70.3
Midwest	48	25.9	96.2
West	2	1.1	97.3
Immigrant	5	2.7	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Note – Region 1 was defined as follows:**

North = MA, CT, RI, VT, NH, ME, NY, NJ, PA, DE

South = MD, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, AL, MS, LA, AK, TN, KY, MO, Washington, DC

Midwest = OH, IN, IL, IA, MI, WS, MN

West = KS, NE, UT

Immigrant = born outside the United States

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<sup>30</sup> *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1854*, RG 513, Volume 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

**Table 2.4:** Birthplace by Region 2, Richardson County (First District), 1854 data for heads of household only<sup>31</sup>

<b>Region</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Neweng	1	0.5	0.5
Midatl	12	6.5	7.0
Upsouth	117	63.2	70.3
Midwest	34	18.4	88.6
Upmdwst	14	7.6	96.2
West	2	1.1	97.3
UK	3	1.6	98.9
Conteur	1	0.5	99.5
Canada	1	0.5	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Note – Region 2 was defined as follows:**

Neweng = MA, CT, RI, VT, NH, ME

Midatl = NY, NJ, PA, DE

Upsouth = MD, VA, NC, KY, TN, MO, Washington, DC

Losouth = SC, GA, FL, AL, MS, LA, AK

Midwest = OH, IN, IL, IA

Upmdwst = MI, WS, MN

West = KS, NE, UT

UK = England, Ireland, Wales, Scotland

Conteur = Nations and principalities of continental Europe

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<sup>31</sup> *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1854*, RG 513, Volume 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

dwelling. Finally, single adult males in Richardson County outnumbered single adult women at a ration of 1.45:1.<sup>32</sup>

However, it is important to note that this ratio changed somewhat dramatically depending on the settlement in the county in which one lived. In Belews, the ratio shot up to 2.86:1 and in Levels it was 1.82:1. William Level, for whom the last region was named, was known to have sold liquor illegally to local Native Americans, a fact that may have kept "respectable" women away. In Storys, the location of the post office, and therefore arguably the most "civilized" region of the county, single adult women outnumbered their male counterparts 2.6:1. Still, the county was better off than the territory-wide ratio that stood at just over 3:1.

By 1860, Richardson County, (see Tables 2.5 and 2.5a), had lost its majority of Southern residents, but it remained the largest of the three study counties in overall population. Largely due to an influx of residents from Illinois and Indiana, the Midwest became the highest represented region of origin, although the South maintained a very strong second. Immigrants, almost non-existent in Richardson County's earlier years, moved into third place, representing 14.5% of the county population. Most immigrants in Richardson County (7.8%) hailed from either the German states or Switzerland. This serves to explain the names of districts within Richardson County, such as Speiser.

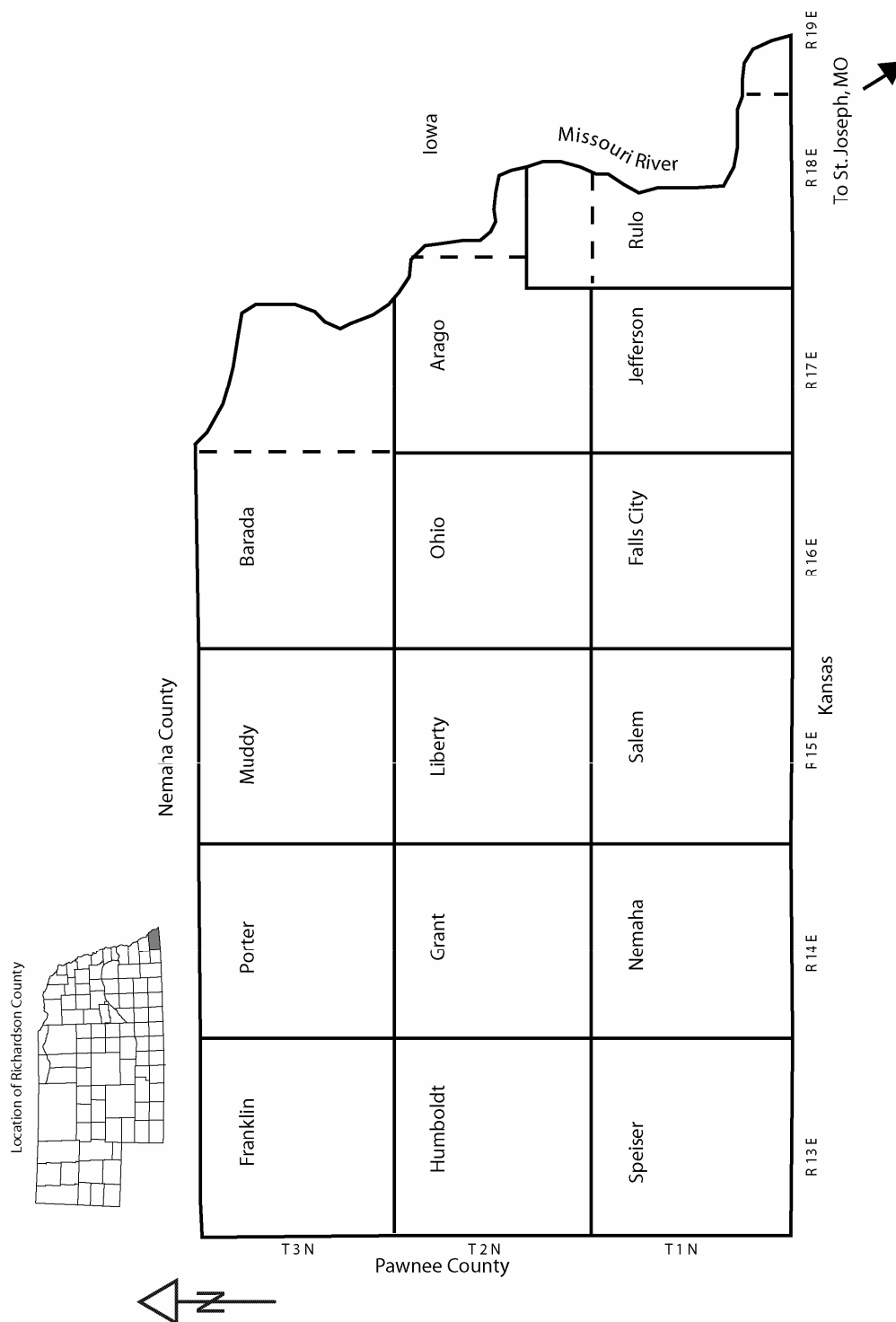
Kentucky and Missouri had been leading places of birth for Richardson County residents in 1854. By 1860 while Missouri remained firmly in the lead as the birthplace of 394 residents of the county's total of 2,828, Ohio was catching up with 318 residents

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<sup>32</sup>*Nebraska Territorial Census, 1854*, RG 513, Volume 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.



**Map 2.1:** Richardson County, Township and Range Identified<sup>33</sup>



<sup>33</sup> Map based on, Tri-Tabula, Inc., *Atlas of Richardson County* (Lake Elmo, MN: The Company, 1976) in University Archives and Special Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Table 2.5:** Birthplace by Region 1, Richardson County, 1860 data for individuals<sup>34</sup>

<b>Region</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Unknown	4	0.1	0.1
North	348	12.3	12.4
South	720	25.5	37.9
Midwest	976	34.5	72.4
West	371	13.1	85.5
Immigrant	409	14.5	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2828</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 2.5a:** Birthplace by Region 1, Richardson County, 1860, divided by precincts (see map 3.1)

<b>Precinct</b>	<b>Region 1</b>						<b>Total</b>
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>South</b>	<b>Midwest</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	
<b>Rulo City</b>	0	34	41	73	52	40	<b>240</b>
<b>Rulo</b>	2	12	35	75	42	33	<b>199</b>
<b>Falls City</b>	0	24	70	77	16	15	<b>202</b>
<b>FC Township</b>	1	35	54	117	40	20	<b>267</b>
<b>Archer</b>	0	9	18	40	9	6	<b>82</b>
<b>Salem Precinct</b>	0	38	107	117	44	26	<b>332</b>
<b>Salem</b>	1	43	124	128	52	13	<b>361</b>
<b>St. Stephen's</b>	0	35	87	72	46	46	<b>286</b>
<b>Arago</b>	0	36	31	16	9	101	<b>193</b>
<b>Franklin Precinct</b>	0	18	35	137	18	29	<b>237</b>
<b>Speiser Precinct</b>	0	64	118	124	43	80	<b>429</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>720</b>	<b>976</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>2828</b>

<sup>34</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860* Record Group 513, Subgroup 1, Series 1, Roll 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

hailing from the Buckeye state. These totals represented 13.9% and 11.2% of Richardson County's birthplaces respectively. Technically, Nebraska was number two as place of birth (349 residents or 12.3% of the population). However, with the average age of those born in Nebraska coming in at six years, five months, it is clear that the majority of these births represented minor children in the population. A closer examination of the Missouri population reveals that the average age of those born in the Show Me state was only twelve years, five months. Ohio's migrants were nearly twenty-four years of age and Indiana, representing the next largest group of settlers with 227 or 10.7% of the population, averaged about eighteen and a half years of age.

If one excludes the population below the age of sixteen in Richardson County, there are 1,538 cases to examine or 54.3% of the total population of the county. Ohio and Indiana emerge as the leading places of birth for Richardson County's adult residents (average age thirty and twenty-six respectively). The Upper South is still well represented as those born in Kentucky are only four behind those from Indiana. The Kentuckians were also slightly older than their Midwestern counterparts at thirty-one years, two months. Rounding out the top five places of birth for Richardson County residents sixteen years of age and older, Missouri had 119 and Pennsylvania 102. The former were just under twenty-five years of age on average, and the latter were roughly thirty-five and a half.

When compared against the population of the Nebraska Territory as a whole some interesting observations emerge. Counting all residents' birthplaces by state, regardless of age, the majority of Nebraskans in 1860 were born in Nebraska (about 13.3%). This compares favorably with Richardson County's Nebraska-born representing about 12.3%

of the population. The next highest place of birth, albeit barely, for Nebraskans as a whole was Indiana at 10.3% of the population. When not adjusting for age, Indianans in Richardson County were only about 8% of the populace, still fourth place overall. It would appear then that in comparison with the entire Nebraska territory, Richardson County slightly underrepresented the population of those born in Indiana and Nebraska, more so for the former than the latter. On the other extreme, Richardson County had about double the percentage of native Kentuckians and those from Illinois when stacked against the entire Nebraska Territory for 1860 (5% versus 2.2% and 7% versus 3.7% respectively).<sup>35</sup>

The arrival of larger numbers of southern immigrants in Richardson County was probably not all that unusual. The county's close proximity to Missouri meant that a large number of people from the Upper South crossed into Nebraska Territory at Richardson County. The county was seen as a good outlet for farmers in search of arable land. Farmers represented about 46.8% of the occupations listed in the 1860 census for Richardson County. When you combine independent farmers and farm laborers, this figure jumps to 64.2% of the listed occupations. Many of these individuals from the Upper South may have been trying to get away from lands farmed by slaves as well. Jesse Crook and his family for example, who will be explored more thoroughly in the following chapter, were from the mountains of eastern Tennessee. Their moves across the Upper South, into Missouri, and eventually Richardson County were calculated to get to land farmed by free labor.

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<sup>35</sup> These comparisons are based on a weighted 1% sample of the 1860 census from Steven Ruggles et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 3.0* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center, 2004) <http://ipums.org/usa> (accessed July 4, 2007).

The relatively rapid growth in Richardson County, from a little over 850 residents in 1854 to more than 2,800 in 1860 came at a time of new migration to the western states. It also came at the expense of the native population. This was particularly a problem in Richardson County where natives, “half-breeds,” and their families had been guaranteed land by the Treaty of Prairie du Chien in 1830. Some early Richardson County towns like Archer and a portion of Falls City turned out to be on the Half-Breed Tract itself, which led to a long complicated series of petitions and legal struggles.

The basic problem for Richardson County residents was that the Half-Breed Tract had not been correctly surveyed and the result was a great deal of uncertainty as to where the tract ended. By 1854, the tract had perhaps 150 or 200 people living in it, but this number was fluid. The federal government was not sure the exact numbers. Nor, frankly, were they sure what to do with this “progeny of French adventurers, soldiers, trappers, and traders” considered to be a “new element in the cosmopolitan west.”<sup>36</sup>

After Nebraska was declared a territory, it was recommended that the Half-Breed Tract be broken up and assigned to individual families. There would still be a reservation, but it would be tightened to about 15 miles square. The logic from the government was that while whites quarreled about what to do regarding Africans, they were united in doing wrong to the Indian. As a result, the government believed that if individual families were not given control of their own land, then tribe members would become abused by whites. On the other hand, if the “half-breeds” in question claimed their land allotments under the government’s plan only to sell the land, this would

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<sup>36</sup> Chapman, *Otoes and Missourias*, 51, 15.

interfere with the idea of a permanent Indian frontier separate from the white population. Another concern was determining who exactly was eligible for the land. The government believed the population must be studied and then backtracked to make sure as to who was designated a half-breed in 1830.<sup>37</sup> For Richardson County residents like Eli Bedard, Charles Rouleau, Louis Neal and their wives this was a fundamentally important question.

The problems with surveying the land and the “half-breed” population to make certain of the actual borders and the recipients of the land hit comedic lows in the years between 1854 and 1858. Some government officials wished to extinguish all claims of the “half-breeds” so that other “emigrating” tribes could be placed on the lands. Of course, these tribes were only moving because whites were pushing them out of some other region of the country and that ignored the fact that some of the “half-breeds” might already be present on the lands in question. New problems emerged after 1854 as more “half-breeds” like Louis Neal began to apply to the government for access to their land. Remembering that this land had been promised over twenty years earlier, it is somewhat shocking to see how the government’s constant inaction had created this crisis in Richardson County.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Chapman, *Otoes and Missourias*, 46-47, 52-54. The governmental hand-wringing on this issue is intriguing. On the one hand the government wanted to preserve separate spheres between native and white settlement areas. On the other hand, they did not wish to remove whites from land on which they were living, even if that land was reserved for natives and “half-breeds.” Underlying all of this was a professed concern that if no rules were established, the land would end up in the hands of white speculators so some people believed the land should never be given to the natives in question at all. This notion of protecting the natives from the possibility of unscrupulous land speculators by not handing over the land owed to them by treaty is at best paternalistic, but not really a surprise. Chapman, *Otoes and Missourias*, 52, 58.

<sup>38</sup> Chapman, *Otoes and Missourias*, 58-61, 77.

Just as things could not appear to become any more confusing, the new survey was approved. In theory, this survey, originally approved one month prior to the declaration of Nebraska Territory in late May 1854, would set to rest controversies over the extent to which the Half-Breed Tract reached. Unfortunately, between April 1854 and 1857, new issues emerged. The survey of the lands was allowed, but not the money with which to pay the surveyors. In the spring of 1856, Joseph Sharp, the same man who had taken the Nebraska Territorial census by order of Acting Governor Thomas B. Cuming in 1854, was assigned to ascertain and report the number and names of “half-breeds” living in the region. Sharp was asked to look at the applicant list, taking into account tribes, families, and single people. Whether he rejected or admitted an applicant, Sharp was to explain his reasoning. Other than filing a letter asking as to what types of “half-breeds” he should count, Sharp made no progress on this task until the following spring, 1857. Meanwhile, white settlers were angrily suggesting that the government’s true purpose was to prevent whites from settling on some of the best land in Nebraska.<sup>39</sup>

This circus played itself out in the media, in letters to the Indian Commissioner’s office, and in Richardson County’s quest for development and establishing a county seat for local government. The western boundary of the Half-Breed Tract was resurveyed several times between 1855 and 1858 and each time concerns emerged that Archer, the county seat and residence of Abel D. Kirk, Neil Sharp (Joseph Sharp’s son), Jesse Crook, Ambrose Shelly and others, would cease to exist. Forget the fact that Neil Sharp had

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<sup>39</sup> Chapman, *Otoes and Missourias*, 62-64.

secured the county seat for Archer – the town could not continue if found to be within the boundaries of the Half-Breed Tract.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, shortly after the census of 1860 was completed in Nebraska Territory, the patents for over 122,000 acres of land were distributed to “half-breeds” and their families. The surveys had been completed and the town of Archer was found to be within the borders. With Archer eliminated the Richardson County seat temporarily fell to Salem. The issue of the location of Richardson County’s seat would continue to haunt the community for years. There had been attempts by residents like Abel D. Kirk to convince the government that because the “half-breeds” only wanted to sell the land anyway, white residents should be allowed to secure their “property” at a fair price. Kirk even plaintively asked “whether we are to be driven from our ‘homes’ and our rights, our petition disregarded and our homes taken from us in spite of justice, in spite of reason and law.” The irony in such an argument when considering what had happened and would continue to happen to the native population is powerful.<sup>41</sup>

Louis Neal, fresh out of prison for the manslaughter of his brother-in-law Tecumseh Fontenelle, was the first Native American allottee of land given under a treaty designed to distribute land in severalty. On his allottee form, the then twenty-eight year old was referred to as Lewis Neal. Neal and his twenty-three year old wife Susan would share 307.2 acres in the southeast corner of what became Nemaha County. The Half-Breed Tract had straddled the border between Richardson and Nemaha counties. On that

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<sup>40</sup> “The Half-Breeds and Mixed-Bloods,” *Nebraska Advertiser*, August 16, 1856; Chapman, *Otoes and Missourias*, 64-66; Lewis C. Edwards, *History of Richardson County, Nebraska* (Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen and Co., Inc., 1917), 125-128, 578-579.

<sup>41</sup> Chapman, *Otoes and Missourias*, 66-77; Nebraska, *Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials*, 438; Kirk, quoted in Chapman, *Otoes and Missourias*, 69.



September day, 389 patents were issued and by February 1861, the last of the patents were delivered. While some of the recipients did indeed do as Richardson County's Abel D. Kirk suggested they would, selling the lands immediately, others like Antoine Barada or Charles Rulo's family kept hold of the land.<sup>42</sup>

### **Burt County (see map 2.2)**

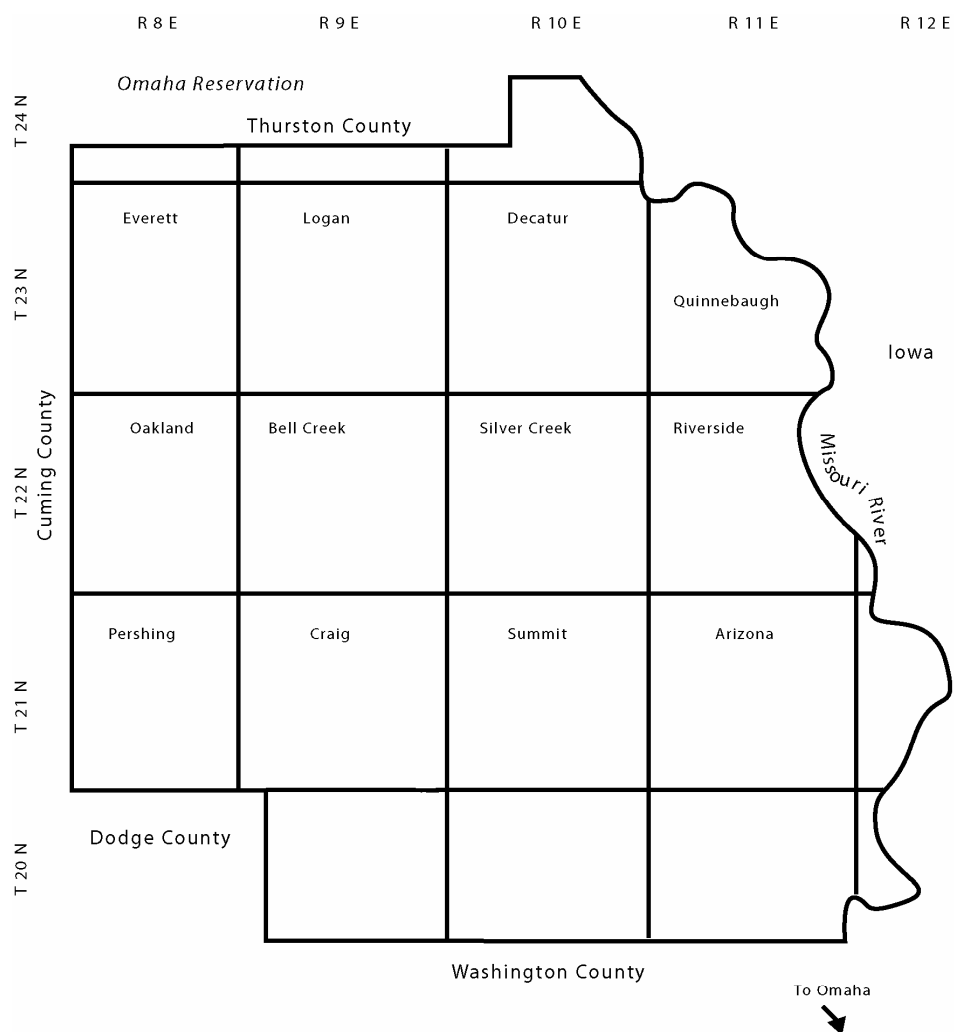
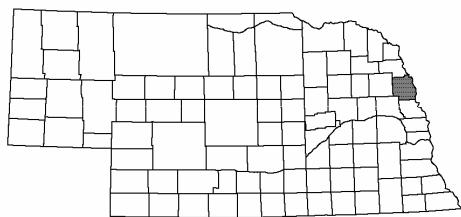
To the north, closer to Omaha and Council Bluffs, Iowa, a smaller community was established during the fall and spring of 1854 and 1855. Founded by an investment group mainly of New Yorkers, Burt County's earliest days were recorded by a prominent member of the community, Benjamin R. Folsom. Born in Vermont, he had formerly owned a general store in Attica, New York. Folsom, along with eight other men, traveled into Nebraska in early October 1854. After arriving at Council Bluffs, the party prepared to move across the river, stopping at the fledgling town of Omaha and touring the former home of Brigham Young at Winter Quarters. "We shouted hurra for Nebraska as we first touched its fertile soil & sniffed its balmy breezes," wrote Folsom in his journal. By October 9, their exploration had reached an end and after seeing "very little timber," "the fattest deer I ever saw," potentially fertile and "beautiful" [sic] land in great quantities, the group crossed the Missouri back to Council Bluffs.<sup>43</sup>

Folsom and his compatriots staked out claims during their brief foray into Nebraska and appear on the territorial census conducted in November 1854. Among the 66 households there were 76 adult males, 13 males below the age of 16, 29 female children, and 28 adult females. Forty-nine men lived alone and there were but ten single

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<sup>42</sup> Chapman, *Otoes and Missouri*, 77-81, 381-384; *Nebraska Advertiser*, August 16, 1856.

<sup>43</sup> Benjamin R. Folsom, Journal, Record Group 4300, Nebraska State Historical Society.

**Map 2.2: Burt County, Township and Range Identified<sup>44</sup>****Location of Burt County**

<sup>44</sup> Map based on Tri-Tabula, Inc., *Atlas of Burt County, Nebraska* (Lake Elmo, MN: Tri-Tabula Publishing, 1976) in University Archives and Special Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Table 2.6:** Birthplace by Region 1, Burt County (Sixth District), 1854 data for heads of household only <sup>45</sup>

<b>Region</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Unknown	10	15.2	15.2
North	32	48.5	63.7
South	2	3	66.7
Midwest	15	22.7	89.4
West	0	0	89.4
Immigrant	7	10.6	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

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<sup>45</sup>*Nebraska Territorial Census, 1854*, RG 513, Volume 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

**Table 2.7:** Birthplace by Region 2, Burt County (Sixth District), 1854 data for heads of household only<sup>46</sup>

<b>Region</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Neweng	13	19.7	19.7
Midatl	19	28.8	48.5
Upsouth	2	3.0	51.5
Midwest	12	18.2	69.7
Upmdwst	3	4.5	74.2
UK	5	7.6	81.8
Conteur	1	1.5	83.3
Canada	1	1.5	84.8
Unknown	10	15.2	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

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<sup>46</sup> *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1854*, RG 513, Volume 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

women in the entire community. In terms of their regional and cultural background, Burt County residents (see Tables 2.6 and 2.7) did not in any way resemble their counterparts to the south in Richardson County. In more ways than one, Burt County represented the polar opposite to Richardson.

By 1860, Burt County (see Tables 2.8 and 2.8a), was still smaller than Richardson or Platte counties. Of the two, Burt County, most resembled Platte County in its makeup, although Burt had a higher number of Northern settlers. The gender ratio for single men in Burt County by 1860 was at 2.15:1. Burt County maintained its majority of Northern residents between the origins of the Nebraska Territory and the first national government census. Largely due to an influx of residents from New York and Pennsylvania, the North kept its top position among regions of origin, although the Midwest maintained a very strong second. Immigrants, a healthy 10% of the population in 1854 nearly doubled by 1860 to 18.4%, the majority of whom hailed from German speaking states. Western births held fourth place in the county and the South brought up the rear with only 6.3% of the population born below the Mason Dixon line.

If one excludes the population below the age of sixteen in Burt County, there are 256 cases to examine or nearly 62% of the total population in the county. Unlike Richardson County, Burt County does not reveal much fluctuation in majority birthplaces when only the adult population is counted. If anything, the dominance of Northern states is affirmed all the more as Northern birthplaces were home to 45.3% of adults. New York and Pennsylvania remained the two leading places of birth for Burt County's adult residents, like Benjamin Folsom and his son Niles. These New Yorkers and Pennsylvanians averaged age thirty-two and thirty-three and a half respectively. When

adjusting for adult status, the immigrants' influence was increased as they took second place with 25.4% of the population. Most of the immigrants arrived from continental Europe. Similar to those from New York and Pennsylvania, these non native adults were a more mature thirty-one years of age. The average age of adults in Burt County by 1860 was only a few months higher than Richardson County at thirty-one years nine months to thirty-one years one month respectively. Of the 157 Burt County residents considered to be children, (those under sixteen years of age), 46% of them were born in either Nebraska or Iowa. The mean age for these children was just over six years in age. In Richardson Count, children's mean age was just slightly older at six years, four months.

When compared against the population of the Nebraska Territory as a whole some interesting observations emerge. Counting all residents' birthplaces by state, regardless of age, the majority of Nebraskans in 1860 were born in Nebraska (about 13.3%). Burt County's numbers of Nebraska-born were below the rate for the territory as a whole, representing only 10.7% of the population. The high number of Burt County residents born in New York is not surprising. Even when counting only those under sixteen, New York-born ranked third behind Nebraska and Iowa. At 14% of its population, New Yorkers were overrepresented in Burt County as compared to the rest of the territory (7.4%). Across Nebraska Indianans were 10.3% of the population but in Burt County they were barely over 5%. It would appear then that in comparison with the entire Nebraska territory, Burt County underrepresented the population of those born in Indiana and Nebraska, more so for the former than the latter. Burt County had a lower percentage of immigrants when stacked against the entire Nebraska Territory for 1860 (18.4% versus

**Table 2.8:** Birthplace by Region 1, Burt County, 1860 data for individuals<sup>47</sup>

<b>Region</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
North	143	34.6	34.6
South	26	6.3	40.9
Midwest	119	28.8	69.7
West	49	11.9	81.6
Immigrant	76	18.4	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2.8a:** Birthplace by Region 1, Burt County, 1860, divided by precincts or towns

<b>Precinct</b>	<b>Region 1</b>						<b>Total</b>
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>South</b>	<b>Midwest</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	
<b>Arizona</b>	0	31	8	33	18	10	<b>100</b>
<b>Decatur</b>	0	44	6	48	16	52	<b>166</b>
<b>Omaha Reserve</b>	0	17	0	2	5	1	<b>25</b>
<b>Tekamah</b>	0	51	12	36	10	13	<b>122</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>413</b>

<sup>47</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860* Record Group 513, Subgroup 1, Series 1, Roll 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

23.9% respectively).<sup>48</sup>

### **Platte County (see map 2.3)**

The smallest of the three counties (see Table 2.9) studied in its first year of existence is Platte. Established in 1856, Platte County's biggest growth was yet to come by the time of the 1856 census. In merely fifteen households, nine of which were inhabited by foreign born, the community grew up right alongside the sluggish Platte River. There were 30 males, 24 of whom were single adult males living in Platte County. Only five females, two of whom were adults, lived in the county. None of these adult women were single. This earliest accounting reveals two facts. Men far outnumbered women and there was very little chance that any of these single men would be marrying soon.

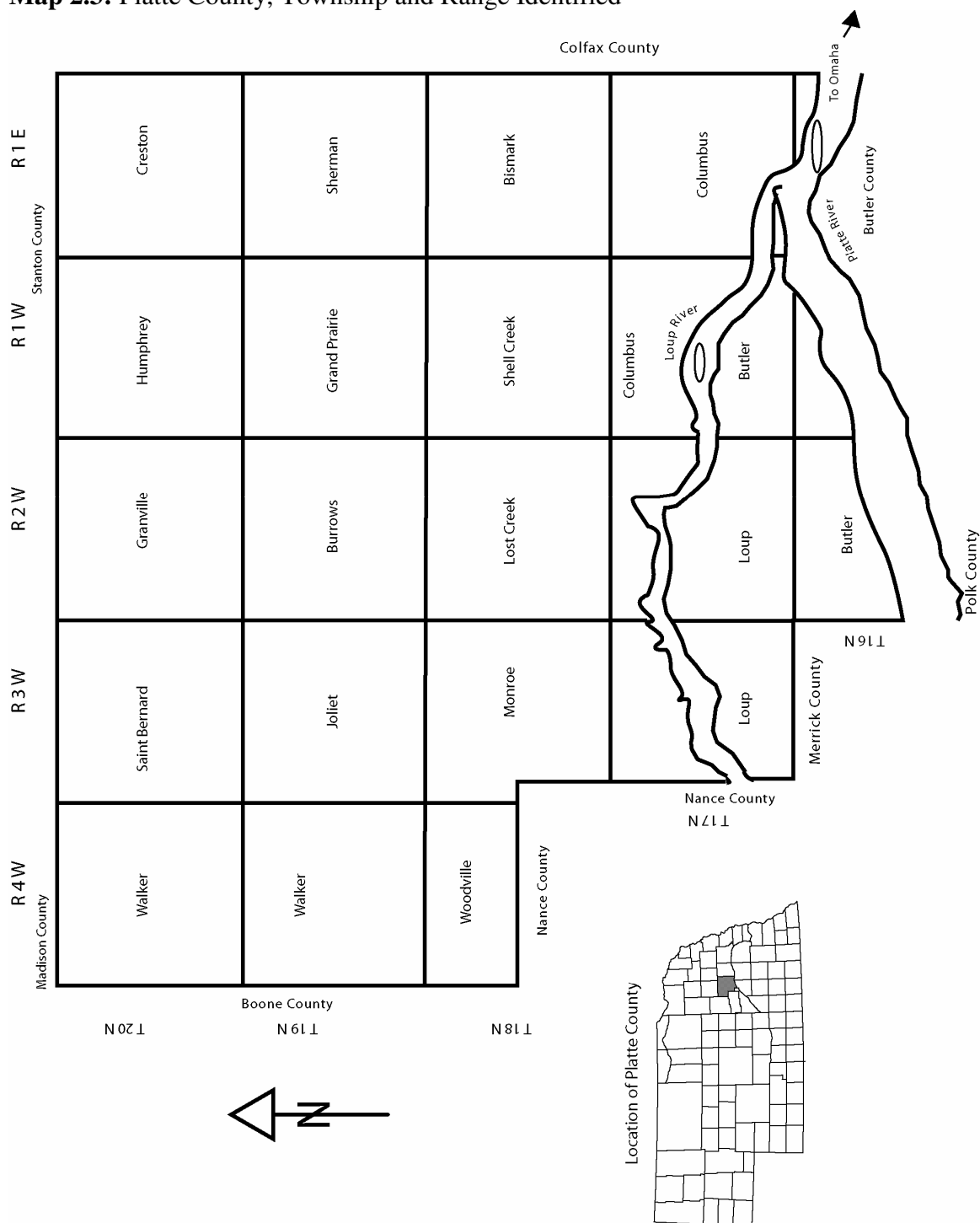
In 1856, these immigrants, mostly Germans, accounted for seventeen members of the settlement, while Americans made up the other eighteen in only four households. The inhabitants of Platte County lived 2.68 to a residence. By 1860 however, Platte's population had taken off, increasing to 778 denizens. Immigrants remained the single most important element of the population and the disparity seen in other earlier years between available men and women continued at 2.78:1.

In 1860, Platte County (see Tables 2.10 and 2.10a), was in between the population of Richardson and Burt counties. Of the two, Platte County, more resembled Burt County in its makeup, although Burt had a significantly higher number of Northern

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<sup>48</sup> These comparisons are based on a weighted 1% sample of the 1860 census from Steven Ruggles et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 3.0* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center, 2004) <http://ipums.org/usa> (accessed July 4, 2007).



**Map 2.3: Platte County, Township and Range Identified**<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Map based on, Title Atlas Company, *Atlas of Platte County Nebraska* (Minneapolis: The Company, 1976) in University Archives and Special Collection, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Table 2.9:** Birthplace by Region 1, Platte County (Sixth District), 1856 data for heads of household only<sup>50</sup>

<b>Region</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Immigrant	9	69.2	69.2
United States	4	30.8	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: The nine immigrants were all from continental Europe. The specific birthplace of the Americans was not identified in 1856. Looking at the 1860 census, it can be discovered that one resident was from Massachusetts and one from New York. The other two men do not reappear in the record.

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<sup>50</sup> *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1856*, RG 513, Volume 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

settlers. Platte County's immigrant population, the majority of its residents, was a robust 55.5% of the population or 432 residents. Largely due to an influx of residents from the United Kingdom, immigrants kept their top position among regions of origin, while the Midwest maintained a distant second place at 18.4%.

Among the immigrants, about 17% of the population in 1860 came from continental Europe. Of those seventy-five immigrants, all but four hailed from German speaking states. Two of those four immigrants were born in the Netherlands, and the other two were from Belgium and Sweden. Western births held fourth place in Platte County and as in Burt County, the South brought up the rear with only 3% of the population born below the Mason Dixon line.

Examining only the adult population in Platte County, there are 488 cases to examine or nearly 63% of the total population in the county. The number of adults to children in Platte and Burt counties as a percentage of total population is very similar. Unlike Richardson County, Platte County does not reveal much fluctuation in majority birthplaces when only the adult population is counted. Immigrants remained the highest number in the population representing 69.3% of adults. There were 272 adults from the United Kingdom, the bulk of whom were born in England like Margaret Reinke. Margaret's soon to be husband Carl was one of sixty-one Platte County adults from a German speaking country. These immigrants were about three years older than the rest of Platte County's adults with a mean age of thirty-three and a half. Carl Reinke was about two years younger than his fellow immigrants from continental Europe in 1860, whose mean age was thirty-four years, five months. Even combined, adults in Platte County born in the North, South, West, or Midwest regions did not reach half the total of

**Table 2.10:** Platte County, 1860 data for individuals<sup>51</sup>

<b>Region</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
North	98	12.6	12.6
South	23	3.0	15.6
Midwest	143	18.4	33.9
West	82	10.5	44.5
Immigrant	432	55.5	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>778</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2.10a:** Birthplace by Region 1, Platte County, 1860, divided by precincts or towns

<b>Precinct</b>	<b>Region 1</b>						<b>Total</b>
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>South</b>	<b>Midwest</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>Immigrant</b>	
<b>El Dorado</b>	0	26	4	53	10	43	<b>136</b>
<b>Columbus</b>	0	33	8	65	43	146	<b>295</b>
<b>Genoa</b>	0	36	11	19	28	215	<b>309</b>
<b>Monroe</b>	0	3	0	6	1	28	<b>38</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>778</b>

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<sup>51</sup>United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860* Record Group 513, Subgroup 1, Series 1, Roll 1, NSHS.

immigrants in residence. Platte County adults were the oldest of the three study counties. Given the majority of immigrants in the community, this makes sense.

Carl Reinke had to save for a number of years before being able to make the journey to America, not arriving until he was twenty-six. Still, the difference is only a slight one. Platte County adults were about six months older than their counterparts in Burt County and a full year older than those in Richardson County. When comparing the immigrant population ages of adults in all three counties, Richardson County and Platte County share a mean age of thirty-three, while Burt County immigrants were about two years younger. Of the 290 Platte County residents considered to be children, 32.4% were immigrants, and 28.6% of them were born in the United Kingdom. As might be expected a close second place region for birth of children at 27.2% was the West. Seventy-six of the seventy-nine children from the West were born in Nebraska. The remaining three, born to English parents who had converted to Mormonism, were born in Utah. The mean age for Platte County children was six years three months. On average then, in all three counties there were relatively new, younger families starting out. In terms of age, the children in all three counties were separated from each other on average by just four months in age at most. The wider gulf between the three counties' children, despite their common experience on the Nebraska frontier, was place of origin.

When compared against the population of the Nebraska Territory as a whole some interesting observations emerge. Counting all residents' birthplaces by state, regardless of age, the majority of Nebraskans in 1860 were born in Nebraska (about 13.3%). Like Burt County, Platte County's numbers of Nebraska-born were below the rate for the territory as a whole, representing about 10.2% of the population. These two counties

were very similar in this regard (Burt's figure being 10.7%). Platte County severely underrepresented the numbers of natives from Indiana when compared to the territory sample. Across Nebraska, there were approximately 2,806 residents who claimed Indiana as home; in Platte County however, there were but two. Platte County came a little closer with another Midwestern state. Overall, Ohioans were 10% of Nebraska's population in 1860. In Platte County the sixty-nine residents from Ohio represented 9% of the population. This is most likely due to the fact that Columbus, the county seat, was named in honor of Columbus, Ohio as that locale and state was the place of origin for a number of early residents. In terms of the immigrant population, Platte County stands out ahead of not only Burt and Richardson counties, but in comparison to the entire population of the territory. Platte County's 55.5% immigrant population in 1860 is more than double the number for Nebraska Territory as a whole (23.9%). So, while Platte County underrepresented certain segments of the native born population the region far overrepresented the immigrant population.<sup>52</sup>

On June 12, 1870, Isham Reavis wrote to "dear Annie" from his new position in Arizona Territory. It was a Sunday, and Reavis noted that he was particularly lonesome that day having been separated from Annie for nearly two months. The weather was hot and the "days almost endless, they appear longer than in any other place I have ever been." There was nothing but the "dry sun-scorched sand hills and barren country to look upon." Admittedly, Reavis wrote, the countryside was sometimes awe-inspiring and grand, but at the same time he wrote "how I would like to see it rain as I have seen it in

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<sup>52</sup> These comparisons are based on a weighted 1% sample of the 1860 census from Steven Ruggles et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 3.0* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center, 2004) <http://ipums.org/usa> (accessed July 4, 2007).

Nebraska, one of those good old pelting showers that infuses new life into the vegetable world and turns afresh the song of the birds.” Laying out his intentions, Reavis described the plans to come home with a travel route including a steamship to La Paz, clipper or steamer to San Francisco and then the train to Nebraska.<sup>53</sup>

At the time of the census taker’s visit in 1870, Annie was referred to as the head of the household, and listed as Anne Reavis. Her occupation was listed as “keeping house” the standard reference for wives who did not specify another profession in this particular year. There were two children and two unrelated adult males residing in the household as well. Annie, the older child, was now five years old and sharing her mother’s time with a younger brother David, aged three. David was surely named in honor of the adult Annie’s father. Mrs. Reavis was only twenty-four years old to Isham’s thirty-two. As the head of household, Annie was credited with \$3,000 in real estate in \$1,000 in personal estate. Her boarders were both thirty-year old immigrants. Jonathan Corkwell was an unskilled laborer from England with no countable assets to his name, other than his American citizenship. William Spurs was born in Canada, and was also an American citizen. Listed as a farmer by occupation, Spurs owned \$2,000 of real estate and \$500 of personal estate. Among farmers in Richardson County, this put the Reavis’ boarder slightly above the mean for real estate value of \$1,924.07 and a little over \$125 lower than the mean for personal estate.<sup>54</sup>

Soon reunited in Nebraska, the whole Reavis clan then took the reverse trip to reside in Arizona for Isham’s tenure as federal judge in the Arizona Territory. The

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<sup>53</sup> Isham Reavis to Annie Reavis, June 12, 1870, RG 3301, S1, F1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>54</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska State Census, 1870*

family's route back to the southwest, where they remained for the next three years, was somewhat different as they rode trains from Omaha to San Francisco and then from San Francisco to San Diego. The Reavis' then booked passage on a bumpy two-day stagecoach ride to Yuma. As Isham Reavis continued his work as an associate justice for the Arizona Territory, the Reavis clan was reportedly one of two American families that could be found in the town where "everyone else was Mexicans and Indians."<sup>55</sup>

By 1860, Stephen Decatur was listed in Nebraska's territorial census as a forty-one year old farmer with \$1,000 in real estate and \$580 in personal estate. He was still well-regarded, even playing off his alleged relation to the famous naval hero to gain the nickname "Commodore." His oldest stepchild Abbie was now eighteen. She would soon marry a Massachusetts-born land investor named Frank H. Stevens. Only twenty-five, Stevens was in business with another Bay Stater named Frank Welch. Stevens possessed \$450 in real estate and \$50 in personal estate. But Stephen Decatur was restless and by some accounts, had developed a growing dependency on liquor. An event in the late 1850s in Omaha had perhaps unnerved Decatur as well. A United States army officer approached him at Keith's saloon in Omaha and declared Decatur to be his brother and living under a false last name. The man demanded to see Decatur's left hand where a scar caused by the "brother" would be revealed. Decatur refused and threatened a fight if the officer did not agree that he was indeed Stephen Decatur.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Annie Reavis Gist, reminiscence, RG 3301, Series 2, Folder 1, Miscellany, Nebraska State Historical Society. Annie Gist was Isham and Annie's daughter and was eight years old by the time they returned to Falls City. This folder also contains a later letter to Annie Reavis (the mother) from her brother John Dorrington who left Falls City around the same time as his brother-in-law to make his way in the southwest. By 1890, John was the proprietor of *The Arizona Sentinel*.

<sup>56</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska State Census, 1870*; Sorenson, *Story of Omaha*, 192.



Sometime in the 1860s, Stephen Decatur left the town that bore his name, informing his wife he was going to recoup his financial losses and return to her. Hearing of gold discoveries in the mountains, Decatur struck out for Colorado and he lived in the mountains above Georgetown without having much success in the gold business. Decatur never returned to his wife, but apparently this may not have been the first time for that particular offense. In 1870, another gentleman claiming to be his brother sought him out while on a layover in Denver. William Bross was the editor of *The Chicago Tribune* and was headed to the Pacific coast in the company of other luminaries like Schuyler Colfax and Horace Greeley. Bross went up to Georgetown and called on Decatur, hoping like his other brother, to get Decatur to admit his relation. When he failed, the elder Bross speculated that it must have related to the fact that many years ago in Scranton, Pennsylvania Stephen Bross (now Decatur) had abandoned a family.<sup>57</sup>

In 1876, while living in Silver Cliff, Colorado, Stephen Decatur made one of his final appearances in the records. At the time fifty-six years of age, Decatur was appointed a centennial commissioner at the Philadelphia exposition. Decatur represented Colorado by displaying a collection of minerals from the state and was recognized by some old Nebraska pioneers celebrating the centennial. While exchanging stories and reminiscences was the order of the day, Decatur did not return to Nebraska, dying in Colorado. In 1909, Mrs. Decatur was living in San Diego with her daughter, Abbie Stevens.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Sorenson, *Story of Omaha*, 193,194; De Milt, *Story of an Old Town*, 32.

<sup>58</sup> Sorenson, *Story of Omaha*, 194; De Milt, *Story of an Old Town*, 33. If Decatur was indeed Stephen Bross, his career prior to moving west involved education at Williams College in Massachusetts and work as principal of a college preparatory institution for young men.

By 1870, Carl Reinke was a citizen of the United States worth \$1,680 in real estate and \$1,000 in personal estate. Three children had been born to the Carl and Margaret Reinke in Nebraska, all daughters. Mary, the youngest, was a mere five months old when the census taker rode into their farmstead. Annie was three and Emma was two. Three more children would come to the Reinke family in the 1870s, two more girls and one boy. The son died of scarlet fever when he was about three and one of the other girls was still-born. Two workers, both immigrants, lived with the Reinkes. John Silz a twenty-nine year old farm laborer from Wurtemberg helped Carl in the fields and with the livestock. Emma Reinke remembered that generally her father kept at least three hired men the year round. It could be that this practice of Carl's started later in the 1870s or simply that the other men were not present when the census taker arrived. In the house, another Margaret, also from England, labored alongside Mrs. Reinke caring for the children, the household, and other necessary chores involving food production and maintenance.<sup>59</sup>

For the most part, Carl grew hay and corn while also raising cattle and hogs. Hay and other grains grew well on his prairie farm, but there was no real market in which to sell the grain. As a result, Carl used the grains, hay, and corn to fatten his cattle and hogs. It was easier to fatten up the animals and drive them to Columbus for sale than find a place in which to sell the grains. After the summer of 1866, Carl's hogs and cattle could be driven to Columbus and put on the rails to be hauled to bigger markets in Omaha or Chicago. When Emma was probably three or four, around 1871, she recalled

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<sup>59</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska State Census, 1870*; Bradshaw interview with Kula, 13, 14.

that Carl found another market for some of his meat. Carl and his laborers slaughtered about forty head of hogs and cured the meat. The pork was loaded into a wagon pulled by a team of oxen and driven to Fort Kearny. In the past, Carl had also hauled grain to the fort to be used by these soldiers stationed on the plains.<sup>60</sup>

Isham and Annie Reavis, Stephen Decatur, and Carl and Margaret Reinke each represent a small glimpse into the developing communities of Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties. Each one of these households was a part of the larger whole that aided the growth of law, commerce, or farming in these towns and countryside of the counties. In the following chapter a deeper exploration of the farmers' world will be explored.

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<sup>60</sup> Bradshaw interview with Kula, 10, 12.

### CHAPTER THREE: WORKING THE LAND AND MAKING A LIVING

In 1855, when she was all of six years old, Sarah Crook arrived in Richardson County, Nebraska Territory. Sarah was born in the Cumberland Mountains in eastern Tennessee to Jesse and Eliza Crook in 1849. Although her paternal grandmother was a Lee (Mary E. Lee of Virginia), the Crooks were mostly descended from pioneer families of Anglo and Scots stock. Mountain farmers, the Crooks began their journey in search of tillable land in 1854.<sup>1</sup>

As she recalled, Sarah along with her parents and her two brothers, John C. and William H. had a wonderful trip. From a child's perspective, the overland journey, initially to Fillmore, Missouri, was full of excitement. Sarah remembered the family brought two wagons on the journey along with three yoke of oxen, two cows, and about twenty-five chickens. The wagons were full of bedding, clothing, and utensils, as well as Eliza's precious thirty gallon all-purpose kettle. Like other migrants, the Crooks traveled in a group of other families from Tennessee seeking a new life. Samuel Howard, Elias Mitchell, Pharagus Pollard, and John Crook all packed their families up and headed west as well. Along the way, Sarah observed that there were few roads and it was easy to cross fords. The men in the group of pioneers all carried guns and killed prairie chickens, quail, wild turkeys, squirrels, and deer to feed the party as they crossed Tennessee and Missouri. It was in Missouri that the only real "tragedy" struck this particular party of migrants. One of the Crook's wagons overturned. Neither the oxen nor the wagon were harmed, however the wagon broke Eliza's thirty-gallon kettle. Sarah remembered this event as a great sorrow. The kettle had been used to make hominy and soap as well as

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<sup>1</sup> *Illustrated Richardson County* supplement to *Falls City Journal* October 15, 1919 located in a manila folder in an unnumbered hanging folder, Nebraska State Historical Society, 6.

render lard. It was a sorrow for Eliza, but on a practical level, the loss of such a useful item was a great inconvenience as well.<sup>2</sup>

In August 1854, about two and a half months after Nebraska Territory was formerly declared, the Crooks arrived at Fillmore in northwestern Missouri. Sarah's father Jesse left the family for much of the fall in order to search for suitable land. Joining Jesse in the search for claims were William Goolsby, Pharagus Pollard, James Goolsby, and John Crook. When the men crossed the Missouri River each had a lot of work ahead of him. Jesse Crook's plan was to lay stakes to some land, build a cabin and try to prepare the land a little for next spring's planting. Crook intended to return to Fillmore for the winter and bring Eliza and the children to Nebraska in March or April of 1855. Jesse Crook and the other men found a few "settlers" already present, e.g., F. X. Dupuis, married to the widow of the Ioway leader White Cloud, and Charles Martin, also married to a native woman. Martin, a trapper and hunter cut a commanding figure. He had recently returned from the Salt Lake region and wanted to help develop permanent settlements in the region. Stephen Story lived in the area already as well, operating the ferry that Jesse Crook and others used to cross into Nebraska.<sup>3</sup>

Sarah and her brothers crossed the Missouri River April 16, 1855. Sarah remembered meeting ferryman Stephen Story's step-daughter. Levinia Van Valkenberg and Sarah Crook were the same age and Sarah recalled that Levinia was barefoot on their meeting. There is no record as to the status of Sarah's feet, but given her mountain Tennessee background, it is possible that Sarah and Levinia had more in common than

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<sup>2</sup> *Illustrated Richardson County*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Illustrated Richardson County*, 6, 1.

their age. As the Crooks moved on to the cabin Jesse had built the previous fall, Sarah was struck by the great beauty she saw in the prairies, creeks, and hills between the Missouri River and their new home. The Crook cabin was a one room affair, built with a puncheon floor, clapboard roof, and a chimney at one end made of sticks and clay. The families of Ambrose Shelly, Benjamin Leachman, and John Burbank lived nearby along Muddy Creek. Mrs. Leachman gave birth to a son, Benjamin Franklin Leachman, that August. There were no other immediate neighbors for about 15 miles around, although Sarah remembered meeting natives from time to time. Perhaps unknown to Sarah were the families moving in north of the Crook cabin to lay their claim to lands in the Half-Breed Tract. William Kenceleur, E. H. Johnson, Charles Rouleau, Eli Bedard, and Eli Plant all had wives due half sections of land as a result of the Treaty of Prairie du Chien. As has been discussed in chapter three, their rights to the land and actual access to it were sometimes different stories.<sup>4</sup>

That summer, Sarah's father Jesse broke forty-two acres for crops. He planted forty acres of corn and two acres of pumpkins, squashes, onions, and vegetables. Eliza and Sarah probably worked the vegetable acreage as well as gathered crab apples, plums, grapes, walnuts and hazel nuts for the family table. Honey was gathered from the hives of wild bees. The boys William and John fished and offered some assistance to Jesse in the field. Jesse and nearby friend William Goolsby hunted game as well to add variety to the meals. The family ate cornbread every day except on Sundays when Eliza would make biscuits. Sarah remembered that almost everything the Crooks ate they either grew themselves or hunted. Cracklin' corn bread with mush and milk was one item that Sarah

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<sup>4</sup> *Illustrated Richardson County*, 6, 7, 1.

recalled had an additional ingredient. Eliza Crook added brown sugar of the New Orleans type that was brought up river in hogsheads and sold at the trading centers near the Missouri River. That first fall, one of the guests at the Crook table was Reverend Hart, a Methodist circuit rider. As Reverend Hart rode through the region spreading the Gospel, he often stopped at the Crook's cabin for supper.<sup>5</sup>

Sarah remembered the winter of 1855 and 1856, the family's first in Nebraska, as particularly severe. The family had raised a significant amount of food that first summer. To augment what they had, Jesse Crook took a trip to Fillmore, Missouri to purchase hogs. He took fellow Tennessean Samuel Howard along with him and the two men bought six hogs, butchering them before they headed back to Nebraska. They crossed the Missouri and a severe snowstorm fell upon them. Jesse, walking slightly ahead of the wagon to break the road, was lost from sight and Howard decided to unhitch the oxen and take the animals and himself to some kind of shelter. Howard stumbled into an encampment of natives, probably Otoe-Missourias or Ioways. The natives tended to the man's badly frostbitten feet. Jesse had found shelter elsewhere and the two men were reunited the next day after the snow cleared. When they returned to the wagon, the slaughtered hogs were frozen solid, but otherwise unharmed. Jesse had no formal storage place or smokehouse constructed at the Crook home, so he stood the pieces of meat up against the side of the cabin covered with linsey-woolsey. Sarah recalled the meat remained there all winter and the family would cut chunks off when necessary. The Crooks had hominy, corn bread and pork to spare, so nobody went hungry that winter.

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<sup>5</sup> *Illustrated Richardson County*, 7.

When March arrived and the meat began to thaw, the family fried what remained before it spoiled.<sup>6</sup>

Sarah described the neighbors in her community as friends. Everyone visited with each other despite the distances between cabins. People borrowed items or traded goods and experiences. Sarah believed that everyone was bound together by friendship but also by the good or bad luck of the region. In times of good weather, the neighbors would gather together in outdoor camp meetings for religious instruction or debate or perhaps a spelling bee. Sarah remembered the children having taffy pulls or corn shelling meetings as well as playing social games like “Sister Phoebe.” Another reason the community came together though was for the union of two of its members.<sup>7</sup>

Sarah Crook was about six years old when she attended the first wedding on record in Richardson County. The marriage was between Wilson Maddox and Margaret Miller. Wilson Maddox became an important member of the Richardson County law and order world, serving for a number of years as sheriff. In addition he was very successful in business pursuits. In November 1859, when Sarah was ten, the wedding of Matilda Taylor and John P. Welty was a neighborhood event. At the time, Sarah had a hoop skirt four feet across at the bottom. Sarah lent the hoop to Matilda for the wedding so Taylor could augment her dress. Everyone living within about fifteen miles came to the wedding. After the ceremony, families rode back to the couple’s new home for what Sarah recalled was an “infair” or house warming. The bride and groom rode in an oxen-drawn wagon along with close friends. Sarah remembered that the girls wore blanket

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<sup>6</sup> *Illustrated Richardson County*, 7,8.

<sup>7</sup> *Illustrated Richardson County*, 7.



shawls, calico dresses, and sun bonnets. Sooner than she might have guessed, and perhaps sooner than Eliza Crook might have liked, it would be Sarah's turn to have her own wedding.<sup>8</sup>

Benjamin Folsom was born in Vermont in 1809. His New England native parents moved to New York's Wyoming county when Folsom was a young child. By the late 1840s, Folsom was married with two children and residing in Attica, New York, the seat of Wyoming County. Folsom operated a store in the community. Probably on September 16, 1854, Benjamin Folsom sold the inventory of his Attica store to Henry Gardner. The total value of goods was marked at \$468.99. On September 18, 1854, Folsom, his wife Mary Rathbun Folsom, sons Niles and Benjamin and two year old Helen left Attica and arrived at Council Bluffs, Iowa on September 29. On October 2, 1854 Folsom took a party of men including his brother Jeremiah Folsom, Haskell C. Purple, W. W. Maynard, John Young, William N. Byers, S. P. White, William T. Raymond, and J. W. Patterson on a steam ferry across water Folsom described as "a boiling cauldron of water and ashes."<sup>9</sup>

This party of well-armed men intended to explore Nebraska Territory north of Omaha and locate a settlement. Benjamin Folsom described the old Mormon Quarters as "one of the most beautiful spots for a Town" with bluffs that surrounded the abandoned community in "gradual slopes...the plateau on which the main part of the town stood." On Thursday, October 5, the party came across a nice site, but there were several claims

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<sup>8</sup> *Illustrated Richardson County*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ott Brothers, *Noteworthy Men of Tekamah and Vicinity: A Series of Sketches of Representative Men Who Have Contributed to the Upbuilding of Burt County* (Tekamah, NE: Ott Brothers, 1903), 4, 43; United States Census Bureau, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*; Diary, B. R. Folsom, RG4300, Folsom Family, Nebraska State Historical Society.

marked already by the Quincy Company, a group of new Nebraskans originally from Quincy, Illinois. Two days later, Folsom recorded that the men had found a suitable location, named themselves the Nebraska Stock Company, and staked and flagged land for their future ownership. The men entered options into a hat and drew lots to determine the actual name of the future town. Folsom's entry of Attica was not the winner. The name "Tekamah" was drawn and William Byers surveyed the land. By the time Benjamin Folsom crossed the Missouri River to return to Council Bluffs, his new hometown existed on paper, if nowhere else.<sup>10</sup>

In November and December 1854, in time for the first territorial census and election, Folsom traveled back to Tekamah. Just before the election, Folsom loaded up a wagon full of potential Burt County residents. The wagon left Omaha in the morning of the election so the vote could take place in Burt County. The men swore oaths that they intended to make Burt County their homes, their votes were recorded, and they returned to Omaha that evening. Folsom was elected to the Territorial Council and Haskell C. Purple was sent to the Territorial House.<sup>11</sup>

Although a contract was put out to build eleven buildings in Tekamah during the winter of 1854/1855, it was not fulfilled due to lack of materials and concerns about a work party being so exposed to potential trouble from the neighboring Omaha tribe. In April 1855, Benjamin Folsom's brother and son Niles went to Tekamah in order to cut timber for two houses. Remembering that event over fifty years later, Niles Folsom

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<sup>10</sup> Dee Valder, Mrs. Elmer Olinger, Frederic Hemphill, eds. *Tekamah, 1854-1954* (Tekamah, NE: Tekamah Chamber of Commerce, 1954), 9; Ott Brothers, *Noteworthy Men*, 7; Diary, B. R. Folsom.

<sup>11</sup> Ott Brothers, *Noteworthy Men*, 7, 8.

recalled that William Goodwill from Ohio felled the trees while his uncle and newly arrived German immigrant Fred Lange used a whip saw to make the timber into three inch planks. The lumber was placed on a frame and dovetailed and doweled together. A roof of bark was placed over small willow poles. About that time fellow New Yorker Major Olney Harrington arrived with his family. Harrington brought a set of tinner's tools with him and was able to fashion a stove pipe and other equipment for the two houses standing in Tekamah.<sup>12</sup>

In July 1855, Logan Fontenelle, a signatory on the Omaha treaty of 1854 was killed in an attack from Dakotas. The Omahas had moved to land north of Tekamah and this placed them in even more direct conflict with the Dakotas for natural resources. The men of Tekamah including newly arrived George M. Peterson, an immigrant from Norway, began to construct a blockhouse for fear of continued violence. Benjamin Folsom requisitioned the governor for arms and ammunition. Acting Governor Thomas B. Cuming organized a volunteer company of which Folsom was elected captain. The eighteen men enrolled, including William Beck, William Bates, and Benjamin's son Niles were to become part of the territorial militia. The men drilled in the morning and the evening, while logs were cut and brought up from the river to build the blockhouse. When the expected attack did not materialize, people returned to their daily lives, building houses and shelter for livestock so that the families could get out of camps and tents by the time fall arrived.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ott Brothers, *Noteworthy Men*, 8; letters from Niles R. Folsom to J. R. Sutherland 18 August 1910 and August 1915, reprinted in Valder, et al., eds. *Tekamah*, 14, 15.

<sup>13</sup> Valder, et al., eds. *Tekamah*, 15, 16; Ott brothers, *Noteworthy Men*, 11.

Unlike the Crooks in Richardson County, Benjamin Folsom's family did not experience a major snowstorm in the winter of 1855/1856. Although it was quite cold, the light amount of snow allowed Tekamah residents like Folsom to winter their stock in heavy timber by the river bottoms. The animals gorged on rush beds, willow, and the wild beans that grew in the region. After a relatively dry spell throughout 1856, the skies opened up in early December. The snow continued for six days and nights and drifts were measured at five to fifteen feet. The cattle had survived quite well the previous year in the river bottoms, but this winter the animals reportedly died by the hundreds. Communication with Omaha or Council Bluffs was non-existent and a fear of starvation emerged in the community. After the snow stopped, a freezing rain came and crusted the surface of the snow preventing easy travel. The settlers in Tekamah and Decatur depended on deer, antelope, and elk that were easy targets in the deep snow. When the spring melt finally came, the ground was saturated and every stream overflowed while the Missouri River rose above all previously known high water marks. Benjamin Folsom and other residents used coffee mills to grind what corn they had left into meal. Folsom did not have the grim choice faced by German roommates Fred Lange and Ernest Sandig. The two men were living in a shanty near Gillick's bend and the Missouri River flood cut them off from either Iowa or Nebraska. Lange and Sandig had some corn and ham and a dog. Sandig declared he would rather try drowning rather than eating a dog and the two men successfully swam to the Nebraska shore.<sup>14</sup>

By 1857, Benjamin Folsom was the only one of the original members of the Nebraska Stock Company that founded Tekamah still living in the town. The

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<sup>14</sup> Ott brothers, *Noteworthy Men*, 15, 16; Valder, et al., eds. *Tekamah*, 16.

government surveyors finally completed their work throughout Burt County in October 1857 and the town almost perfectly fit into Section nineteen of Township twenty-one north, Range eleven east. The Nebraska Stock Company sold lots in Tekamah, but the title for those lots needed to be purchased from the government first. No formal purchases of the land were filed until Benjamin Folsom bought Section nineteen at the land office in Omaha on July 7, 1859. Folsom paid \$1.25 per acre for the 640 acres of land. The total cost was \$800 and Folsom was in control of all acreage within the Tekamah townsite. Folsom recognized the earlier surveys completed by William Byers in 1854 and Chauncey Wiltse in 1856, especially given that residents of the community were living on their land based on those survey lines already. In a “kindly” but decidedly entrepreneurial manner, Folsom conveyed title to the land on which occupants were living for a “small consideration.” By the time the census taker came to Benjamin Folsom’s house in 1860, the New Yorker had proven up (gained full title) on his section purchase and had real estate holdings worth \$20,000 with a personal estate worth \$2,000.<sup>15</sup>

Benjamin Folsom was more than a businessman and farmer in Burt County. He was also somebody the community could count on to take care of supply runs. Perhaps it was on one such trip when Folsom officially purchased his section of land. Although not complete by any means, Folsom kept a record of some of his trips. On August 24, 1859, Folsom headed to Omaha with one such list. Merchant George Chilcott’s wife wanted some coffee and sugar. The Olingers needed two pairs of no. 6 shoes – one for thirteen

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<sup>15</sup> Valder, et al., eds. *Tekamah*, 9; United States Census Bureau, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*.

year old Margaret, the other for eleven year old Elizabeth. Electra Bates wanted a belt – perhaps it was for her husband William the fifty year old Massachusetts born preacher who like Folsom, had served as probate judge for Burt County. Bates himself wanted \$2 worth of sugar, \$2 worth of coffee, a tin wash basin similar to the one owned by Folsom, a hat, and, for his son Ed, a pair of cloth pants like Corbin's. The last request probably referred to Pennsylvania farmer Alex Corbin who lived nearby – his brother Aman lived a bit farther away from Tekamah. James Owens of Rhode Island who boarded with George Close and his wife Adelia, wanted a compass, some nails and some irons. It is unclear as to whether Owens wanted a drafting or a directional compass. A woman, perhaps Helen Thomas George's Scottish wife, wanted one and a quarter yards of green calico, although she amended her request, suggesting it could be all green or all red. She also needed candles, some nails and a bag of shot. Norwegian George Erickson wanted a plug of tobacco and some coffee, as well as a long comb for his wife Ann. Hannah Douglas, who by the following year was listed by the census taker as the head of her household with two small children, needed salt and cornmeal. Sarah Burpee needed rattan hoops. Folsom stopped off in DeSoto and Calhoun on his way to Omaha in order to take orders from some other new Nebraskans. Mrs. Tew in Calhoun needed a number of items including a pair of thin calf or morocco style boots, but she also asked that 25 tt. of salt be placed in Hannah Douglas' sack. It is unclear whether she had previously borrowed the salt or was asking because it would be easier for Folsom to buy a larger amount of salt which he could share out on the return trip. Finally, Folsom was not doing these errands completely out of community spirit. For himself, he purchased a blanket, \$1 each of coffee and white sugar, scotch ale, liquor, lime, whisky, one jack from

molasses, some butter, envelopes, gunpowder, and 100 musket caps. The former store owner of Attica, New York was working as a virtual store conveyor in his new home of Nebraska.<sup>16</sup>

In the spring of 1856 Jacob Louis along with twelve additional of immigrants traveled on foot from Des Moines, Iowa first to Omaha, and then to a point on the Loup Fork of the Platte River about eighty miles from Omaha. Many of the men had been living in Columbus, Ohio and chose to name their new business venture and townsite Columbus in honor of that location. Louis, along with nine of his fellow colonists, was German. Of the three remaining immigrants in the party, two were Swiss, and one Irish. On the first leg of their trip towards the Nebraska Territory, Jacob Louis and others often had to stay at homes of Iowa farmers. In one such instance, after having been directed to try at other farms for several nights running, Louis and his compatriots simply refused to move on to another locale. They explained they were going to stay, would be happy to sleep on the floor, and would pay the farmer for the lodging. The five men partook of a small dinner and fell asleep almost immediately thereafter. The men were awakened by the smell of breakfast and found that the farmer's wife, who had hid herself in fear the previous evening, was up and cooking. As Louis told the story to his son, the farmer came to realize that the men posed no threat, and they were welcomed to stay at any other time.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Valder, et al., eds. *Tekamah*, 16, 87, 135; United States Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*; B. R. Folsom, diary.

<sup>17</sup> Martha M. Turner, *Our Own History, Columbus, Nebraska, 1541-1860* (Columbus, NE: by author with cooperation of Platte County Historical Society, 1936), 59-60; Karl J. Louis. interview by Stanley A. Kula, 19 November 1941, WPA, RG 515, Box 28, Series 230, Folder 2, Nebraska State Historical Society, 1-2.

Jacob Louis was born in Wurtemberg, Germany in 1832. While still a young man, he came to the United States and lived near Cincinnati, working as a hired hand on a farm. Moving to Des Moines sometime in the mid 1850s, Louis became associated with the future settlers at Columbus. When Louis and the other “scouts” arrived at what would become Columbus, Platte County, it marked the end of the group’s quest for a new home. The men marked off the land they intended to claim and quickly returned to Omaha. The entire group organized the Columbus Town Company and moved west to the location by the end of May 1856. Carl Reinke was also in this first group, along with Louis, Frederick Gottschalk, George Rousch, Vincent Kummer, Charles Turner, John Wolfel, Jacob Guter, Henry Lusche, Michael Smith, Adam Denk, and John Held. As Louis told it, the men were rugged fellows, strong and determined to make a community out of their part of Nebraska.<sup>18</sup>

Louis and the other men laid the outlines for a town and built a rough log cabin. Roofed with split shingles, the cabin was to serve multiple purposes for the small group of settlers. Called the “Old Company House”, the cabin initially functioned as a dwelling, storage facility, and defensive structure, should there be such need. In 1860, this building briefly became the town school. By mid-summer, Columbus consisted of eighteen houses in addition to the original cabin. In early November, Jacob Louis and the others were joined briefly by thirteen additional residents, including John Wolfel’s wife who worked as a cook in return for stock worth ten lots in Columbus. Mrs. Wolfel was

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<sup>18</sup> Karl J. Louis. interview with Eilert Mohlman, 12 January 1939, WPA RG 515, Box 28, Series 230, Folder 2, Nebraska State Historical Society, 1; Turner, *Our Own History*, 59; Louis interview with Kula, 2.



the only woman in the community. A slightly smaller group decided to remain in Columbus for the winter.<sup>19</sup>

By all reports, the nascent community in Platte County experienced a difficult first winter in 1856 and 1857. Snowstorms that dropped close to three feet of precipitation on level ground were augmented by cold temperatures and drifting snow that reached between ten and thirty feet on the low ground. Another settlement of Germans to the west of Columbus reported similar conditions, losing men in a hunting party as early as November 1856 and with snow to the rooftops as late as April 1857. The log houses constructed in Columbus were not effective protection from the snow and the winds. While snow blew in through the chinks in the log houses, Louis and others saw hundreds of deer near Columbus cut down by packs of wolves and the community quickly used up nearby wood supplies.<sup>20</sup>

Both Columbus and the Germans to their west at Grand Island experienced an additional challenge that winter in getting access to food and other provisions, which had to come from Omaha. On his first trip, Jacob Louis ran into difficulties on the way back. As Louis and the others approached the Elkhorn River, they found snow banked so high that their oxen could travel no further. Knowing the importance of the supplies, the men constructed snow shoes as best they could and loaded some of the food onto a hand-drawn sled, pulling it for about seventy-five miles. On a second trip, Louis and the others were able to travel on the Platte River itself because it was frozen solid. That particular

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<sup>19</sup> Louis interview with Mohlman, 1; Heinrich Egge, "Tagebuche fuer Heinrich Egge angefangen den 1 Mai 1855 auf dem Schiffe Nord-Amerika," June 26, 1856, RG 630, Nebraska State Historical Society; Turner, *Our Own History*, 62.

<sup>20</sup> Egge, "Tagebuche," November 6, 1855, November 7, 1855, April 10, 1857; Louis interview with Mohlman, 2, 3.

journey took the men ten days. On the last trip undertaken by Louis that particular winter, the party traveled with a full ox team and were faced with constant delays at fords as the rivers were seen as too high and wild for safe crossing. During the trip back from Omaha, one of their ferrymen over the Elkhorn River fell in and had to swim to shore as Jacob Louis was afraid the man would tip over the whole boat if he tried to get back in midstream.<sup>21</sup>

Jacob Louis worked hard on his land for five years, later telling his son that it was difficult not only physically but fiscally as well. In an economy where Louis remembered rarely seeing even a single dollar in currency for six months at a time, Louis paid \$1.25 per acre for 160 acres. The first house Louis put up was built of cottonwood. He constructed three buildings on his property prior to 1861. When in need of provisions in those early years, Louis and others in Columbus still had to journey to Omaha or Bellevue using carts drawn by oxen. Typically they would make these trips just twice per year. In 1861, Louis briefly left Platte County and traveled to Ohio, where he chose a wife. The couple returned to the farm to find two of the three buildings Louis built destroyed by fire. The cabin Louis had intended as the main home was unharmed however, so Louis had a decent home for Katherine and their future family.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Louis interview with Mohlman, 3-4; Louis interview with Kula, 4-5; Turner, *Our Own History*, 63. At Grand Island, Heinrich Egge kept careful track of the status of supplies throughout that same winter in Grand Island. The Germany settlement there constantly had to try to get to Columbus where their supplies were usually stuck due to the Loup Fork or Platte River being inaccessible. Egge, "Tagebuche," early November 1855 through January 25, 1856.

<sup>22</sup> Louis interview with Kula, 4, 6; Louis interview with Mohlman, 3.

## Agriculture

Farmers like Jacob Louis and Sarah Crook's father Jesse faced powerful challenges in the early years of settlement in Nebraska. The farther anyone traveled from timber supplies, the more difficult home construction became. Jacob Louis happened to be near cottonwood, but other residents in Burt and Richardson counties or north of Louis in Platte County were often forced to build sod houses. With the roots of prairie grasses so tightly bound, the dirt in sod would hold together so the frame and walls of a house might be built out of the pieces laid flat upon one another. "Soddie" builders used a breaking plow to turn furrows and pulled out the sod bricks with a spade. Three bricks would be placed side by side the longer side, usually about three feet, parallel with the planned wall. Dirt or clay would be pressed into the crevices after several groups of three bricks had been laid out. The joints on the second tier would be staggered to try to minimize washing away. On the third layer, the sod bricks would be laid cross-wise in order to give the structure more stability. Spaces were left for doors and windows and the sequence of two layers length-wise against the wall and the third cross-wise was repeated until reaching a sufficient height. The surfaces inside and out would be smoothed and a roof would be placed. Sometimes this was done by using a center pole, uprights, and matting of branches and so on to hold up a roof, which was typically sod. Some settlers added wooden flooring, but most left the earth as the bottom. Other folks like Ole Larson and Chris Christensen in Burt County had to build dugouts. In this case, Larson and Christensen dug a hole in the side of a hill, placed a top of grass and sod held up by poles and made it home. The two Danes built their dugout in between their tracts

of land in July 1867 and each slept on their own land in the evenings, though they shared the entire dugout.<sup>23</sup>

Almost all of these farmers worked hard initially to clear the land and then had to work equally hard to harvest their crops. Jacob Louis told his son about the difficulties in raising crops. Louis remembered that when early settlers planted their fields, there was very little chance of making any cash. The crops grown or livestock raised in the Columbus area were too far from a market to aid the farmers in earning much of a profit. As Carl Reinke pointed out, even the closest market of providing food for the U.S. Army at Fort Kearny was no guarantee. When harvesting, Louis recalled working in what were called “prairie boots.” These were boots with an extension on the sole. The reaper would cut the grain but a worker had to bind the sheaves by hand, so these boots were useful in shoving the grain together. This was an especially useful technique when the grain was a bit damp either with dew as in the morning or after a small rain shower. The “binder” could use that extension to push the grain up towards the hand containing the straw-band necessary for attaching the bundle. An unfortunate possibility was moving a rattlesnake into the sheaves with those extension soles, but as Louis remembered, the rattlesnakes generally let you know they were there and that you should perhaps drop the grain you were carrying.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Louis interview with Kula, 6; WPA writers, History of Nebraska, RG 515, Box 13, Series 1, Folder 1, Nebraska State Historical Society, 38-40; Northeastern Nebraska Genealogical Society, *Lyons Heritage* (Lyons, NE: The Society, 1983), 79, 181.

<sup>24</sup> Louis interview with Kula, 4; Emma Reinke Bradshaw, interview with Stanley Kula, September 15, 1941, WPA RG 515, Box 28, Subject 230, Folder 1, Nebraska State Historical Society, 10, 12; Louis interview with Mohlman, 3; Louis interview with Kula, 9.

Early Nebraska farmers were often hampered by a lack of machinery a problem that did not quite correct itself until the 1860s. Methods of farming with plows, planting and harvesting were often not up to the task of breaking the strong sod of Nebraska. As a result, many farmers ended up planting on much less acreage than they owned and for the long hours they put in, were largely working at a subsistence level. This was not unusual for the antebellum period when most western farmers were limited in their access to a commercial venture. These farmers built a relationship with nearby villages where they could obtain professional services like blacksmiths, miller, lawyers, land agents, schools for their children and rural merchants who might buy or trade for some of the sweat of their brows. Farmers looked to merchants as someone through whom they might connect with the outside world. After all, so much of their early work was focused on the fields and their homes, that the farmers often experienced infrequent contact with others, even in their own communities.<sup>25</sup>

The most common tools that early Nebraska farmers made use of included items like old shovel plows of the early part of the nineteenth century and then newer more powerful plows like the Wisconsin breaker of the Michigan double plow. McCormick's reaper, perfected in 1834, did not attain wide popularity on the Nebraska frontier as most people continued to use a cradle – a scythe with multiple blades and a frame designed to catch the grain – in their work to cut crops like wheat and oats. The steam thresher of the 1860s, like the reaper, was largely not in use partially out of distrust of steam engines and partially out of concerns for supplying these machines with the necessary fuel to operate.

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<sup>25</sup> WPA writers, *History of Nebraska*, 56-57; R. Douglas Hurt, *American Agriculture, A Brief History* revised edition (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2002), 150-152.

Most Nebraska farmers then used horse and human power in separating the wheat from the chaff. Men like Jacob Louis or Jesse Crook could reap and thresh perhaps twenty or thirty acres each season on his own – for communities of farmers largely operating on the subsistence level, this was adequate for their immediate needs. To the east, these newer pieces of equipment were becoming increasingly popular, especially as shortages of labor on farms caused a need for devices to reap, mow, and thresh grains or hay. During and after the 1870s, Nebraska farmers and others on the Great Plains increasingly used access to banking and credit as well as the nearly free access to land in order to invest more in machinery.<sup>26</sup>

How commercial and agricultural success was measured in the three counties was a difficult task. There were certainly personal triumphs – marriage, children, providing for one's family. Tracking success in the fields of agriculture or industry in early Nebraska however, was often a word of mouth experience. Once the federal government became involved, one saw more careful reporting. This might be explained partly as an effort to draw settlers to the new region and partly to inflate the value of one's land.<sup>27</sup>

In the early years of land transfer, the locations of individual plots of land were often marked by Byzantine systems involving paces from a brook near a stand of willows and a couple of rods from Smith's wall, or something to that effect. As the U.S. Land

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<sup>26</sup> R. Douglas Hurt, *American Farm Tools: From Hand-Power to Steam-Power* (Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 1982), 10-14, 41, 42-44; WPA writers, *History of Nebraska*, 57; Hurt, *American Agriculture*, 163, 164, 187-188.

<sup>27</sup> In places like Nebraska, until the 1860s, men and women on their farms were committed to more subsistence level farming. Nearby towns might include or exclude farmers in the marketplace as transportation availability and the size of these towns determined the success of commercialized farming. That said, there is little question that the rural countryside in the United States was undergoing a transformation. Hurt, *American Agriculture*, 155; Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds. "Introduction" in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 3-7, 12.

Surveyors moved through the territory, each county took on the recognizable grid pattern established by the Northwest Land Ordinance in 1785. That grid, argues Andro Linklater, is more than just a survey. “It was where the most potent idea in economic history – that land might be owned like a horse or a house – was first released into the western wilderness.”<sup>28</sup> Measuring the land provided a value in size and number, further enabling ownership. Nebraska, like many lands in the United States, was largely a place where people chose their land first, *then* surveyed. Although attempts at early organization were dogged by weather, swamps, woods, and not having standard measurement, increased accuracy came under the leadership of Jared Mansfield following the Louisiana Purchase. Mansfield established a very clear regularity about the system, carefully creating a north-south baseline and east-west baseline crossing at right angles. From Mansfield’s organization, the townships and ranges of Nebraska territory and other federal property came into being. In places like Nebraska, the surveyors’ right angles became the dominant feature of the land.<sup>29</sup>

Early land claims in Nebraska were largely based on taking a preemption claim or a land warrant. The land laws of the United States held that land in the territories, surveyed or not, were federal property. Settling on this land without proper documentation was, in effect, trespassing on government land. Various laws developed over time to deal with these challenges.

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<sup>28</sup> Andro Linklater, *Measuring America – How an Untamed Wilderness Shaped the United States and Fulfilled the Promise of Democracy* (New York: Walker and Company, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> Linklater, *Measuring America*, 4-5, 29-35, 159-161, 224.

The federal government knew that settlers were almost always ahead of the survey to some extent. After all, the United States consisted of some 2.3 billion acres of land, 1.8 billion of which was public land. Expansion to the west was often “piecemeal and irregular,” sometimes spurred more by speculation than individual desire for improvement. Small groups of settlers or fur trappers, as the case may be in Nebraska, might be ahead of the survey, creating tension between Native Americans and settlers, and other troubles.<sup>30</sup> Citizens took advantage of laws providing for military bounties, preemption, etc., to live legally on these public lands. The government wanted to get some money for the land whenever possible. In the context of land value, prices were relatively low. Typically \$1.25 per acre was the price paid for public land. Citizens ahead of the surveyor would go to the land offices once these offices had opened to file claims. “Public land sale,” states Malcolm Rohrbough was “among the most significant events in the life of any frontier family.” Payment might be made at that time, but for many, a portion of their total claim would register as “balance due.” Some citizens might borrow money from speculators to pay off their claims, but this could prove financially devastating.<sup>31</sup>

Until the Homestead Act was approved in 1862, Nebraska settlers were forced to find other ways to pay for their land. Military bounty land warrants were a possibility as veterans of the Mexican War sought opportunity in the new territory. The Preemption

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<sup>30</sup> Linklater, *Measuring America*, 167, 174, 215. The movement of the surveyors was slow and deliberate. After marking the baselines, surveyors moved westward marking posts at every half mile and mile, as well as every six miles for township corners. The number of section, township, and range would be placed at corners. Maps on the scale of four inches to the mile were drawn. Finally, detailed notes were kept in field books with distance covered and principal natural features observed.

<sup>31</sup> Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789-1837*, 62-63.



Act of 1841 legalized settlement on public lands, allowing settlers to purchase land upon which they had lived or made improvements for a minimal cost. That point having been noted, both before and after 1862 there were difficulties in holding onto the land. Certainly speculators or “land hunters” existed whose aim was to control large swathes of land. In earlier permutations of westward movement, five new states had been created in a five-year time span as a “land mania” gripped portions of the United States. Prior to the Preemption Act of 1841, there were constant complaints about fraud under general preemption laws of 1830, 1832, and 1834.<sup>32</sup> In addition to fighting dishonest government employees or usurious speculators, citizens faced the possibility of having their claims “jumped.”

In the earliest land claims taken in Richardson County, 1,925 sales were recorded and 378 represented Homestead Act files, amounting to only 19.6% of the total. In Burt and Platte counties, these numbers were quite different. Burt County land sales amounted to 2,486 of which 785 were Homestead claims. This was 31.58% of the total. In Platte County, the greatest differential to Richardson County appeared and it was in this county that the Homestead claims were closer to other regions. Of the 2,931 land sales, 1,873 or 63.9% were taken as a result of the Homestead Act. Given the pattern of movement into the three counties, the numbers make sense. Platte County was settled later than the other two and the bulk of residents arrived after January 1863 when the Homestead Act went

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<sup>32</sup> Rohrbough, *Land Office Business*, 84, 89-110, 161-176, 184-185.

into effect. Platte County's Homestead claims put it in sharp contrast to Gage County, studied by Yasuo Okada.<sup>33</sup>

In 1867, Richardson County went through a few incidents of "claim jumping." Certainly nothing, new, this practice resulted as many citizens owned their land but did not necessarily live on that land immediately. Someone might return to his claim to find new structures developed or materials borrowed.<sup>34</sup> One of the key problems in dealing with claim jumpers is illustrated in this tale from Richardson County. A Mr. Berry and his son had laid in claims, built up a few structures, and returned to Kansas to move the entire family. Upon their arrival in Richardson County, the younger Berry found his building in ruins. At the elder Berry's house, a young married couple had taken up residence. Having no papers to prove they owned the land, the Berrys had to "encourage" the residents to depart with some help from the elder Berry's Civil War veteran's rifle. Shortly afterwards, the younger Berry discovered another jumper building a house on his property!<sup>35</sup> Challenges such as these however, were almost nothing compared with the attempts at succeeding as farmers in this occasionally unforgiving and harsh environment.

Typically, Nebraskans grew grains and kept some livestock. Agricultural reports indicate that many different types of crops were grown or harvested, including such

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<sup>33</sup> United States General Land Office Tract Books, Record Group 509, Nebraska State Historical Society; Yasuo Okada, *Public Lands and Pioneer Farmers: Gage County, Nebraska, 1850-1900* (Tokyo: Keio Economic Society, 1971), 42. Only 15.4% of land in Gage County was claimed via the Homestead Act.

<sup>34</sup> Hamlin Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1917). Garland describes coming to his claim in South Dakota in the 1880s and discovering coal and boards missing from his shack. This would not have been so much of a problem if there had not been a blizzard at the time.

<sup>35</sup> A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska* volume II (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1882), 1303.

varied items as corn, tobacco, hemp, and honey. Choosing individual farmers and measuring their successes and failures can be accomplished through the use of biographical information and the Agricultural Schedules attached to the 1860 census reports.

### **Richardson County**

Of the three counties, Richardson County was by far the most developed by the year 1860. By that year, the county, consisting of 352,000 acres or 550 square miles, had five distinct precincts and over 800 men on the polling lists. The county was watered on the east by the Missouri River and throughout by streams and creeks such as the Great Nemaha, Muddy, Rattlesnake, and others. The alluvium and prairie soil was able to support very strong crops.<sup>36</sup>

J.M. Harris was born in Kentucky in 1809. Married, he and his wife Sarah had two sons and three daughters, all born in Kentucky. The family resided on their modest holding of forty acres. The family improved all of this land, giving it a value of \$1,000. Harris and his sons, twenty-year old William, and eighteen-year old Thomas, produced 800 bushels of corn, 40 bushels of Irish potatoes, and 70 bushels of buckwheat. In addition, they cut one and one half tons of hay and produced 140 gallons of molasses. The Harris's three milch cows, along with the work of Sarah and their three daughters, who ranged in age from eleven to sixteen, helped produce 150 pounds of butter.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume II, 1300; Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 8.

<sup>37</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*; United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census*, Schedule 4.

The Harris's were probably aware of their successful neighbor Justus C.

Lincoln. Lincoln had been one of the founders of the Salem community. Born in Missouri in 1828, he worked as a merchant in Iowa during the late 1840s before moving to California to engage in the same business. In 1853, Lincoln returned to Missouri, marrying Eliza J. Roberts in July of that year. By 1855, they were in Nebraska, and Lincoln was running a store and serving as postmaster for Salem. The Lincoln's first daughter, Alice, had just been born and a second, Ruth, would be born in 1857.

In addition to the store property, Lincoln held 480 acres, 50 of which had been improved. Although farming was not his primary occupation, Lincoln's land produced 400 bushels of corn and was home to livestock worth \$400. As a public servant, Lincoln served the community as county clerk, notary, and State representative.<sup>38</sup>

By 1860, Richardson County residents improved 11,584 acres or 20.3% of claimed land. Just over 16% of available land had been claimed throughout the county. The more populated Richardson County had made improvements on 3.3% of the land, placing that county firmly in the lead for advancement. The rich soil produced 191,925 bushels of corn for a yield of 16.5 bushels per developed acre. Richardson County was strong in its livestock as well. Farmers owned 8,835 animals for a total value of \$104,375. The slaughtering for the previous year brought in \$13,904.

Richardson County also demonstrated a somewhat broader attempt at varied farming. It was the only one of the three counties to undertake rye and rice farming,

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<sup>38</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume II, 1329-1331.

producing 113 bushels and 1,000 pounds respectively. Some residents also attempted tobacco and hemp farming on a limited scale.<sup>39</sup>

L.M. Honck, a twenty-eight year old from Pennsylvania was one such experimental farmer. Honck's wife Julia was from Ohio, and their four-year old daughter Alice had been born in Pennsylvania, so they were relatively recent arrivals in 1860. When census taker Abel D. Kirk came to the Honck household in July of 1860, they reported ownership of 160 acres, 30 of which were improved. Honck set the value of his land at \$1,800 and his farming equipment at \$100. Like most farmers in the county, Honck's biggest success was corn – his 30 improved acres had produced 500 bushels. Honck also harvested 200 pounds of tobacco, a trait he shared with only two other farmers reporting to the census.<sup>40</sup>

David Spizer and John Rothenberger, from Baden and France respectively, produced tobacco as well. Rothenberger, the oldest of the three tobacco farmers in the county, was fifty-three. His wife, Wilhelmina from Hanover, was fifty. Their five children had all been born in Missouri. The oldest was eighteen-year old Catherine, the youngest, five-year old Mary. Also in the house was twenty-two year old Joseph Matten, who may have been a nephew.<sup>41</sup> Rothenberger owned 320 acres and had developed 50. His farm produced a few unusual items for the time. He owned 21 sheep that gave him

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<sup>39</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 4.

<sup>40</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 4.

<sup>41</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*. The Rothenberger's immediate neighbors were a family headed by Bernhard Matten from Hanover. Bernhard had a daughter named Wilhelmina, perhaps for his younger sister. Because an older boy, David Matten, had been born in Hanover, and the younger Joseph Matten in Missouri, we might speculate that the Mattens came to the United States around 1838. This would place Wilhelmina Matten Rothenberger's arrival at about age twenty-eight. Her first surviving child was born when she was thirty-two, so we could surmise that she met her husband in Missouri.

50 pounds of wool. He was one of the few to grow rye, producing twenty bushels or 17.6% of the county's total. He managed to get 150 pounds of tobacco and 100 bushels of barley. To add to his unusual farming, Rothenberger grew one bushel of grass seeds and produced 40 hogsheads of cane sugar.<sup>42</sup>

David Spizer, age thirty-one, was from Baden, as was his twenty-nine year old wife Bettie. Their oldest child, seven-year old Bettie had also been born in Baden. Three-year old David, however, had been born in Missouri in 1857. Spizer had the smallest amount of land among the tobacco farmers – 120 acres. He had improved 15.8% of his land (nineteen acres) and grown 200 pounds of tobacco, or 36.3% of the county total. Spizer's four milch cows helped the family, producing 300 pounds of cheese and 200 pounds of butter.<sup>43</sup>

### **Burt County**

Burt County, in the northeastern part of Nebraska, lies against the Missouri River along its eastern border. The county contains about 512 square miles or 327,000 acres, a sizable amount of which is bottom lands along the Missouri and Logan Creek. Much of the county however, consisted of valley land with undulating hills. The land, on average, stood about 100 feet above the bottoms.

Several creeks and small streams watered the county. A flour mill, put up in 1864, made use of Logan Creek as its power source. The soil was mostly alluvium, prairie, and Chernozem. The county had prairie grasses and was able to produce pasture

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<sup>42</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 4. Rothenberger's tobacco represented 27.2% of the county's total and his barley was 72% of the total. All additional cane sugar in Richardson County was produced in the immediate neighborhood.

<sup>43</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 4.

and hay readily. As for trees, Benjamin Folsom had noted there were but few. What Folsom did see was mostly cottonwood, elm, walnut, box elder, and ash. A sawmill was erected in the county in 1857.<sup>44</sup>

Into this rich soil and well-watered county came people seeking their future in farming and land speculation. It was said a farmer could raise as much as ninety bushels of corn per acre with some industry. An examination of agricultural production records bears this statement out to some degree.

In the Decatur Precinct, Stephen Decatur owned a 160-acre farm, valued at \$1,080. The Decatur family had improved thirteen acres of their land. He owned \$220 worth of farm machinery and implements, two horses, seven milch cows, and twelve other cattle. Decatur's eighteen swine brought the value of his living animals up to \$520. In the year 1859, Decatur had slaughtered \$100 worth of livestock. Also in the previous year, Decatur had produced no corn to speak of, 50 bushels of Irish potatoes, 300 pounds of butter, and 40 tons of hay. The latter may have come from some of his "unimproved" lands.

Fred Lange owned 300 acres in the county and had improved twenty of this amount. With farming equipment valued at \$500, Lange produced 400 bushels of Indian corn, ten bushels of wheat, and twenty bushels of oats. Lange added 150 bushels of Irish potatoes, 40 tons of hay, and 150 pounds of butter. This native of Saxony owned three horses, four milch cows, eleven cattle, and eight swine for a total value of \$350. His slaughtered stock for the previous year was only worth \$12. The former carpenter and

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<sup>44</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume I, 400; James C. Olson and Ronald Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 6-8.

carriage maker had transformed himself into a passable farmer after arriving in Burt County in May 1855.<sup>45</sup>

In 1860, the Decatur Precinct contained 5,166 acres of owned land. Of these, 4,449 acres were unimproved; this meant that just over 8½% of the claimed land had been developed. The value of the precinct was set at \$16,645. Livestock, including 25 horses, 55 milch cows, 52 oxen, 80 cattle, and 122 swine was valued at \$6,039. Slaughtered animals in the precinct brought in \$682. In the year prior to the census, Decatur Precinct produced 280 bushels of wheat, 30 bushels of buckwheat, 5,875 bushels of corn, and 125 bushels of oats. Rounding out the precinct's agricultural produce were 42 bushels of peas and beans, 1,505 bushels of Irish potatoes, 2,405 pounds of butter, 405 tons of hay, 100 gallons of molasses, and twenty pounds of honey.

Benjamin Folsom resided in Tekamah Precinct. He owned a good portion of this land with 690 unimproved acres. Folsom's thirty developed acres were set at a value of \$2,500. Folsom became more of a government figure later in his career and so his records of produce are a bit sketchy. With only one pig recorded among his livestock, Folsom was more focused on corn and potato production, getting 300 bushels of the former and 120 of the latter. Folsom had been a merchant in New York prior to the move, so that could explain his relatively low investment (\$25 for machinery) in farming. In Tekamah, Folsom made most of his earnings through land investment.

As a whole, this section of the county was similar to Decatur. Over 15.6% of the claimed land had been improved, and its total value stood at \$14,100. Behind Decatur in

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<sup>45</sup> All agricultural data comes from United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 4; Andreas, *History of the State Nebraska*, volume I, 409.



value by \$2,545, Tekamah had nonetheless put 27 more acres under the plow.

Livestock, including thirteen horses, two mules, four milch cows, 30 oxen, 83 cattle, 29 sheep, and 87 swine was valued at \$4,615. Slaughtered livestock brought in \$590.

Tekamah had produced 350 bushels of wheat, 5,165 bushels of corn, and 1,195 bushels of oats. Three new products were added to the list in this precinct – 90 pounds of wool, 300 pounds of cheese, and 50 gallons wine. Tekamah grew 33 bushels of peas and beans, and 1,095 bushels of Irish potatoes. Finally, residents made 2,910 pounds of butter, 343 tons of hay, and 84 gallons of molasses.<sup>46</sup>

In the Arizona precinct, 2,765 acres of land was claimed. Of this amount, 490 acres or 17.7% of the land was improved. The value of the land was \$10,775 and farmers in the region had \$815 invested in farming implements or machinery. Kentuckian John M. Simpson first settled this community in August 1855.<sup>47</sup>

By 1860, Simpson owned 146 acres, worth \$1,200. Simpson had developed fifteen of those acres and owned one milch cow, two cattle, and eight swine worth \$60. His slaughtered livestock brought him \$40. Simpson's lands produced 200 bushels of corn, 40 bushels of Irish potatoes, 50 pounds of butter, and five tons hay. Compared to his precinct, Simpson was both below and above average in terms of his production.

All told, Burt County could show 1,409 acres of developed land and 9,309 acres of unimproved. The residents of the county had built up about 13.1% of the claimed land. Only 3.2% however, of Burt County's total possible land had been claimed. This

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<sup>46</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 4.

<sup>47</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume I, 406.

figure is even more striking when you consider that only .04% of the county's entire land had been turned into farmland or grazing areas. Despite some setbacks with certain crops, the potential for growth in the county seemed positive with 19,145 bushels of corn produced on those improved acres for a yield of 13.58 bushels per developed acre. While a bit removed from the 90 acres of corn per acre some people believed were possible, that kind of production on only .04% of the land held some hope for the future.<sup>48</sup>

### **Platte County**

Platte County, rich with alluvium and Chernozem soils, reported higher development in the 1860 census than did Burt County. Located along the Platte River on twenty miles of its southern border, the county amounted to 684 square miles or 437,760 acres of land. The valley was quite good as stock raising land and was watered by Shell Creek, Looking Glass Creek, and portions of the Loup and Platte Rivers. Citizens believed that about 400,000 acres of the country could be brought under the plow.<sup>49</sup>

Patrick Murray, born in Kings County, Ireland in 1826, came to the United States at age 18. Upon arrival with his three sisters, he worked on a farm in Chester County in Pennsylvania. Murray remained there until 1856, the same year he was married. Murray took a claim of 160 acres for the purpose of raising livestock and farming. By 1860, the industrious Murray had improved 120 acres to bring his holdings to a value of \$1,000. He owned \$100 worth of farm machinery and implements. Murray had two horses, three

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<sup>48</sup> Burt County reported being short on buckwheat in 1859. The stated reason was a late sowing which resulted in a frost in the fall killing the grain prior to cutting. United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedules 4 and 6.

<sup>49</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume II, 1263.

mules, four milch cows, one ox, 29 cattle, and two swine, all worth \$500. The value of his slaughtered livestock was \$25.

In produce, Murray had been relatively successful, garnering 35 bushels of wheat, 200 bushels of corn, one bushel of peas and beans, 200 bushels of Irish potatoes (of course), and 25 bushels of buckwheat. Murray's cows and the hard labor of his wife produced 150 pounds of butter. Murray gathered 30 tons of hay. Over time, his farm holdings grew to over 1,800 acres. By 1865, Murray had succeeded in getting a government contract, supplying the military with hay.<sup>50</sup>

One of Murray's sisters, Margaret, married a neighbor named Adam Smith. Smith, like the Murrays, was an immigrant, although he was from a province in Germany. Smith's older brother Michael had been one of the original settlers at Columbus, the county seat. By 1860, Adam Smith had improved forty of his 160 acres and had \$75 worth of farming machinery, placing him ahead of his older brother. Smith had two horses, five milch cows, four oxen, fourteen cattle, and five swine. His slaughtered animals for the previous year were worth the small sum of \$14. Smith's grain production focused on corn with 125 bushels of corn. He also made two bushels of peas and beans and 200 bushels of Irish potatoes (influence from his wife?). The cows and Margaret's labor put forth 180 pounds of butter and some of the land yielded 25 tons of hay.

Adam Smith helped his brother-in-law with hay production and it was in this endeavor that he met his untimely end. On August 17, 1864, while camped in a meadow

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<sup>50</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume II, 1278; United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 4; Curry, *History of Platte County*, 828.

near Looking Glass Creek, Adam Smith and others were attacked by a group of Lakotas. In an attempt to protect the livestock, Smith was felled by eight arrows. Five arrows struck Bridget Murray, Patrick's wife, though she survived. Adam Smith left his wife Margaret with three sons, one of whom had been born the previous February. Margaret remarried shortly after the tragic incident, which perhaps illustrated the fear of being alone some citizens on the remote edges of the nation felt.<sup>51</sup>

All together, Platte County developed 2,876 acres, or 14.4% of the claimed land. A bit ahead of the smaller Burt County, Platte's residents had claimed about 4.5% of available land. Only .06% of the land had been developed – boosters would put the number closer to .07%, but it was still a small number. The earth had yielded 17,970 bushels of corn, or roughly 6.25 bushels per developed acre. The livestock was worth \$22,121, spread out over 1,010 beasts of various sorts. Land value was a shade above its standard purchase cost of \$1.25 per acre at \$1.31 per acre.<sup>52</sup>

## Comparisons

So what does this reveal to us about farming in territorial Nebraska? If we take the statistics for these three counties and place them against numbers for the entire territory, we may make some very basic comparisons. The three counties' production statistics may be used further to extrapolate some information about the territory as a whole. In 1860, 3,000 farms were reported in the territory. Richardson County had 11%

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<sup>51</sup> Curry, *History of Platte County*, 899; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume II, 1266, 1267.

<sup>52</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 4. The .07% figure of the boosters is found by dividing the 2,876 developed acres by the 400,000 acres believed to be arable.

of the total, with 331 farms, Platte County 3.7% with 111, and Burt County nearly 2.2% with 65. All three counties represent 16.9% or 507 farms in the Nebraska Territory, a statistically significant sample. Comparing each of the counties against the territorial statistics may provide more information. The average size and value of farms territory-wide was 226.3 acres and \$1,293 respectively. Land was worth about \$5.82 per acre. In Richardson County, farms were, on average, slightly smaller than the territorial statistics at 172.2 acres. As a result their value was a bit lower as well - \$1,039.77 per farm. Land values per acre however, were slightly higher, as claimed land came in at \$6.04 per acre.

In smaller Burt County, farms were about 164.9 acres on average. Their corresponding value was significantly smaller than the territorial average at \$638.76 per farm. Land prices in Burt County were fairly low at \$3.87 per acre, a difference from the territorial average of \$1.95.

In Platte County, the 111 farms averaged 179.8 acres in size. Each farmstead was worth about \$236.57, a dramatic drop off from the territorial average of \$1,056.43. Land value in Platte County barely topped preemption rates, at \$1.31 per acre.<sup>53</sup>

We might anticipate lower values in Platte and Burt counties. Burt's population was far below that of Richardson or Platte, and Platte County was the last of the three to be settled. Further, Platte lay deeper to the west of the initial thrust of settlement. These three counties show a good range of what made the territorial-wide averages – high production and value in Richardson, middle in Burt, and low in Platte. That said I believe that the three counties do provide some way to measure success throughout the

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<sup>53</sup> Olson and Naugle, *Nebraska*, 407; United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 4.

territory. Certainly the reported production levels give some idea as to the performance of the entire territory.

From an early point on, most counties kept records of the branding or marks used by various farmers on their livestock. Richardson County however, has the best surviving documentation of their marks. Justus Lincoln, the Salem merchant used a half crop off the underpart of each ear for his livestock. Lincoln had this particular mark recorded in the county records June 30, 1857. English born William Abbey, also of Salem, registered the letter "A" on the left hip of his cattle on March 1, 1869. Isham Reavis' brother Daniel placed a crop off the right ear, an underbit in the left.

All of these marks were recorded with county officials. The book, in the early years kept by William Mann, recorded whether the mark was given to someone else later and why. It also noted carefully if the original recipient left the county or passed away, thereby making these marks assignable to new livestock keepers. These kinds of records were important in a growing community so as to easily lay to rest questions of ownership of livestock should they wander off. The other community control in place here was a way to identify the owner of livestock should property or crops be damaged by loose cattle or hogs in particular. The recordings allowed people to check with the county offices when assigning blame for a trampled field of corn or a broken fence.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Mark and Brand notices, RG 245, Series 4, Volume 1, Nebraska State Historical Society; Hurt, *American Agriculture*, 174-177. Hurt briefly discusses branding in relation to cattle on the Great Plains and offers examples of brands from two Texas counties.

## Industry

Each county in Nebraska Territory had limited industry whether it was a sawmill or something more complicated. Richardson County, having some of the best streams in the territory, had a fair amount of water and good potential for milling. There were at least eight mills in the county by 1860, while Burt and Platte counties had smaller, but still somewhat successful mills. By 1870, Richardson County certainly had the highest level of capital invested in items such as water wheels and steam engines at \$91,160 to Platte and Burt counties' \$13,800 and \$17,660 respectively.<sup>55</sup>

### Richardson County

As with agriculture, Richardson County saw the highest level of industrial growth with seven mills of various types operating by June 1860. All seven mills produced wood and two of the mills were outfitted to grind grains as well. A total of \$18,850 was invested in real and personal estate for an average of close to \$2,693 per mill. Four of the seven mills utilized steam, while two used water, and one used only horses to operate. Twenty-seven men found employment at these mills, and on average were paid nearly \$30 per month for their efforts. While two of the mills did not report annual products, the remaining five had made 1,150,000 feet of lumber for an average of 230,000 feet per mill. The value of lumber production was set at \$20,650, or \$4,130 per mill.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 5; United States Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census*, General Statistics of Manufactures, 542, 543.

<sup>56</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 5.

**Table 3.1:** Occupation and birthplace, Region1, Richardson County, 1860<sup>57</sup>

Occupation	Region						Total
	Unknwn	North	South	Midwest	West	Immigrant	
farmer	1	90	113	130	9	109	<b>452</b>
farm labor	0	18	43	65	3	39	<b>168</b>
mining	0	1	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
building	0	2	0	2	0	5	<b>9</b>
manufacturing	0	3	1	3	0	1	<b>8</b>
transport	0	2	3	1	0	2	<b>8</b>
commerce	0	3	9	9	0	4	<b>25</b>
professional	0	9	15	9	0	4	<b>37</b>
non-profserv	0	2	3	4	1	2	<b>12</b>
unskilledlabor	0	15	16	28	4	27	<b>90</b>
publicserv	0	2	2	0	0	1	<b>5</b>
skilled	0	26	11	17	0	42	<b>96</b>
nnprdc/unknwn	0	5	17	13	7	9	<b>51</b>
religious	0	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>965</b>

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<sup>57</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*.



**Table 3.2:** Occupation and birthplace, Region1, Burt County, 1860<sup>58</sup>

Occupation	Region					Total
	North	South	Midwest	West	Immigrant	
farmer	37	4	11	2	27	81
farm labor	5	0	2	0	3	10
building	2	0	1	0	2	5
manufacturing	0	0	1	0	1	2
transport	0	1	3	0	0	4
commerce	4	1	3	0	1	9
professional	8	1	3	0	0	12
unskilledlabor	2	1	4	0	4	11
public	1	0	1	0	0	2
skilled	8	1	3	0	0	12
nnprdc/unknwn	1	0	0	0	0	1
religious	2	0	0	0	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>152</b>

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<sup>58</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*.

**Table 3.3:** Occupation and birthplace, Region1, Platte County, 1860<sup>59</sup>

Occupation	Region					Total
	North	South	Midwest	West	Immigrant	
hunter	0	0	0	2	0	2
farmer	23	1	18	0	88	130
farm labor	6	0	8	0	14	28
mining	0	0	0	0	4	4
lumber	0	0	0	0	2	2
building	1	0	1	0	7	9
manufacturing	3	0	0	0	6	9
transport	3	0	3	0	3	9
commerce	3	3	2	0	5	13
professional	3	1	0	0	2	6
non-profserv	2	0	0	0	5	7
unskilledlabor	5	0	6	0	36	47
publicserv	2	0	0	0	0	2
skilled	7	0	0	0	28	35
nnprdc/unkwn	0	2	0	0	8	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>313</b>

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<sup>59</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*.

Jonathan R. Hare ran the largest and most financially successful of these mills.

Hare was among the first citizens of Salem, arriving in January 1855. In 1860, Pennsylvania-born Hare was twenty-eight years old. Hare's wife Susan was older and had been born in Indiana. Also in the household was Nancy, their eight-year old daughter, Elijah Courtright a twenty-eight year old laborer from Illinois, and an eight-year old girl named Mary Honnewell whose connection to the household is unexplained. Living in the same neighborhood, but not in the house, was Jonathan's younger brother James. James was a farm laborer whose work had helped him amass a personal estate worth \$100.<sup>60</sup>

Jonathan Hare's mill was equipped to cut board as well as grind grain. He was dependent on water-power, probably from the north fork of the Great Nemaha River (Salem lay between the north and south forks). Hare had \$3,500 invested in his milling business, along with \$300 of real estate not connected to the business. At the time of the census, the mill had 1,500 logs, twenty-five bushels of wheat, and 12,000 bushels of corn in stock. The raw materials were valued at \$4,225. Although only one laborer is listed as living in Hare's house, he apparently employed three people, paying an average of nearly \$42 per month.

The mill produced 300,000 feet of lumber worth \$6,000 in 1859-1860. In addition, 1,000 pounds of wheat flour worth \$40 was ground. Finally, 12,000 pounds of corn meal was produced, valued at \$3,600. Hare's entire milling operation had finished products worth \$9,640. It would appear then that Hare had done quite well for himself.

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<sup>60</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*; Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, volume II, 1329, 1330.

This conclusion leads us to point out that it has been reported that industrial numbers in the census records must be taken with a grain of salt.<sup>61</sup>

### **Burt County**

In Burt County, J.C. Jones had a sawmill in the Decatur Precinct. In real and personal estate invested, Jones had \$4,000. Jones had a ten-horsepower mill with two saws, although the mill did not report any activity to the census for the year 1859-1860. At the northern edge of the county, near the Omaha Reserve, a combination saw and grist mill worth \$4,400 was operating. This mill had four male employees who were paid a total of \$220 per month and 400 logs valued at \$900. The mill had produced 100,000 feet of sawed lumber, valued at \$2,000. In Central City, W. W. Hill had one employee who was paid \$9 per month. Hill's sawmill, worth \$3,000, was operating only one month during the previous year. Hill had two saws and the six-horsepower mill helped him produce 30,000 feet of sawed lumber worth \$450.<sup>62</sup>

### **Platte County**

In Platte County, two saw mills were in operation. John Rickly employed seven men, paying an average of about \$46 per worker, or \$328 in wages per month. John Rickly's mill, which went into operation on August 1, 1857, produced 400,000 feet of lumber worth \$7,500. The Rickly mill's creation had been negotiated by the Columbus

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<sup>61</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 5; Kenneth J. Winkle, "The United States Census and Community History," *The History Teacher* 28 (November 1994): 93; Margaret Walsh, "The Census as an Accurate Source of Information: The Value of Mid-Nineteenth Century Manufacturing Returns," *History Methods Newsletter* 3 (September 1970): 3-13; Walsh, "The Value of Mid-Nineteenth Century Manufacturing Returns: The Printed Census and the Manuscript Census Compilations Compared," *Historical Methods Newsletter* 4 (March 1971): 43-51.

<sup>62</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 5.

Town Company, of which Rickly was a part. When Rickly arrived in Platte County in July 1856, he helped lay out what would become the town of Columbus. That August, it was agreed that Rickly, an immigrant from Switzerland, would erect a sawmill and shingle mill.<sup>63</sup>

Rickly's story is somewhat typical of many Platte County residents. He came to the United States in 1834, landing in New York City. His trade was butchering, an occupation he took up in somewhat remote Lewis County, New York, just west of the Adirondacks. Rickly also started a brickyard, abandoning this career after one season. He returned to butchering briefly in Albany, New York. After knocking around upstate New York for about four years, Rickly headed to Ohio in 1838. He was married in February 1838 and then moved to Columbus, Ohio. In Columbus, Rickly and his wife, (Catherine Benningus, a native of Wurtemberg, Germany), raised four children together, until she died in 1849.

Rickly remarried later the same year to Caroline Bauer, also of Wurtemberg. Over the next fifteen years, Caroline gave birth to seven children. In 1856, Rickly came to Nebraska. His wife and then eight children followed a year later. At least one son, William Tell Rickly, born in Columbus, Ohio, worked with his father at the mill.<sup>64</sup> Initially, Rickly had operated a steam mill which could work both in sawing lumber and grinding corn into meal. In February 1860, a sudden rise in the water from the Loup Fork

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<sup>63</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 5; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume II, 1263, 1264.

<sup>64</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume II, 1280; United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*, Schedule 5; Curry, *History of Platte County*, 869-870. Rickly's only competition was Shackleton and Company, a much smaller outfit. Shackleton and Company produced 150,000 board feet and had two employees who were paid \$25 per month.

where the mill was situated swept away Rickly's lumber and dangerously cut under the earth on which the mill stood. Rickly was just returning to town having picked up some machinery in Omaha. He rushed out in an attempt to gather the lumber that had swept away. Somewhat successful, Rickly returned to town only to be told that the mill was now on fire. Much of it burnt to the ground and the machinery for the grist portion of the operation was totally destroyed. While Rickly was able to successfully restart the saw mill portion of his business this was a setback for Platte County industry.<sup>65</sup>

### **Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties as developing frontiers**

In his contribution to the Trans-Appalachian Frontier series, Andrew R.L. Cayton described three overlapping frontiers of Indiana. These overlapping developments of frontier are described as the French and native frontier stretching from roughly 1700 to the mid-1760s, the British and native frontier of the 1760s through a portion of the Revolutionary War, and the American and native frontier after 1778. Indiana, argued Cayton, is a zone of ongoing intercultural contact and conflict. The Indiana frontier was a series of worlds. The Nebraska frontier has some relationship to the world described by Cayton. While there was a significantly smaller French and native presence, it did exist – vestiges of that type of community revealed themselves in Richardson County, particularly in Rulo and the Half-Breed Tract. The Nebraska frontier, indeed the Great Plains more generally, afford a glimpse of a series of worlds engaged in ongoing intercultural contact and conflict on their way to some form of consensus community structuring.

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<sup>65</sup> Andrea, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume II, 1280.

Cayton used people's lives to reveal the frontier experience more fully. This aids in putting a human face on the struggle for power and community within Indiana. In territorial Nebraska, the experiences of Benjamin Folsom, Sarah Crook, and Jacob Louis offer insight into elements of the worlds created here and offer a sense of what might have taken place in similar communities across the Great Plains. The examination of economic relationships, political power, and social rules contested among natives, French, British, and Americans reveals a complex society evolving in frontier Indiana. In the Great Plains, elements of this complexity are repeated. In Nebraska specifically, summative comments on demographic information and household structure help flesh out the peoples' stories.

In the *Frontier Republic*, Cayton focused on Ohio's frontier, noting that it passed very quickly (1780-1825).<sup>66</sup> In some ways, the Nebraska and Great Plains frontiers were similarly short-lived. Depending on the definition of frontier and where one draws its boundaries, the answer to the question as to whether the frontier in Nebraska was short-lived seems to be in the affirmative. Roughly speaking, Nebraska can be seen as a frontier from the mid 1840s through 1900. If that is a slightly longer period of time than described by Cayton regarding Ohio, it is most likely due to two factors. First, Nebraska initially served more as a conduit for people pushing farther west to Oregon, rather than a permanent area of settlement. Even the Mormons stayed only briefly in the territory some ten years before Benjamin Folsom's arrival. While they were pushing on to Deseret, it is interesting that despite wintering in what would become Burt County, this

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<sup>66</sup> Andrew R.L. Cayton, *Frontier Republic: Ohio the Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1780-1825*. (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1986), ix.

group of refugees from communities that had soundly rejected their beliefs did not wish to start a new life in a relatively “clean” territory. Secondly, the Civil War to a degree disrupted new land claims and migrant patterns into Nebraska and the Great Plains.

So, while Richardson County experienced a frontier of development similar to parts of Wisconsin, Indiana, and Illinois, (French, natives, a métis population), it was the interior county, Platte, which ended up as more of an “open” frontier of sorts. If that is the case, then how long does Nebraska’s frontier period range? It has been suggested that the “frontier” endured for about sixty years, but what other contentions on this particular point emerge? Does the period extend through to statehood? Does the frontier extend beyond that date to the end of the nineteenth-century? Is there a significant difference between what Nebraska and neighboring Great Plains states experience related to this question? While the three counties in this study, Burt, Richardson, and Platte, experienced a relatively “short” frontier (perhaps 1840s to 1870), as a whole, the Nebraska frontier and arguably that of the Great Plains in general extended on into the late nineteenth century. The length of time defining the frontier period greatly depends on, again, defining frontier, and the level to which one focuses on purely Anglo or other immigrant presence in these counties. In a larger study than the one undertaken here, the experience of the native peoples of Nebraska would be more fully integrated into the understanding of the frontier. It is essential to understand that on the Great Plains more broadly, that conflict, interaction and community building that does occur between natives and their white neighbors can be vastly different.<sup>67</sup> In examining the Indiana

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<sup>67</sup> David J. Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness: The Dispossession of the Nebraska Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994). This work covers the Nebraska frontier in terms of the



frontier, Cayton included the experience of the Miamis, Piankashaws, and Weas among others. The competition for control of Indiana is a rich story including natives, French, British, and finally Americans and each group's efforts to control others. Further, Cayton pointed out that early native-European interactions revealed a group of people who did not completely trust one another, and who occupied neighboring but separate worlds.<sup>68</sup> In Nebraska, there was little question that the native population had authority early on, but by 1854 and the first territorial census, the state to be has changed. As previously noted, in Richardson County there was some degree of interactivity (Barada, Rouleau, etc.) but this was not true as soon as certain tribes were removed from the conversation of government and organizing (e.g. Otoe-Missouri, Sac-Fox). As in Cayton's Indiana, the native communities of Nebraska and the Great Plains faced increasingly fewer choices. An additional key issue to understand about the shift in control is the role played by the federal government. Going back to 1811 in Indiana the federal government's presence was very important in dealing with conquest, settlement, and development. In Nebraska and the Great Plains, while the story does not reach quite so far back the importance of the federal government in transitioning the region from native lands to white frontier to territories to states cannot be understated.

Early residents in frontiers faced a complex relationship with their native neighbors. In Indiana, voyageurs and settlers and natives all had an understanding of one

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dispossession of the native people. However, an examination of other Great Plains states reveals that it is difficult to draw a single generalization (beyond the obvious one of land dispossession) about how the native-white frontier played itself out. Oklahoma is an outstanding example of an odd scenario due to the presence of a longer "native" frontier as the result of government action.

<sup>68</sup> Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 54.

another.<sup>69</sup> The advantages may have been similar for the early residents of Nebraska located along the Missouri River in Richardson County. In addition to firming up social ties, economic connections were built that were of great importance. Certainly in Richardson County, unlike Burt or Platte counties, this experience took place and as will be discussed, it had an impact on issues such as voting and the struggle for the county seat. Arguments erupted in Richardson County, and in other Great Plains regions, as to the nature of citizenship. Did the children of these French and native parents count as white? Should their votes therefore be counted at all? The nature of a frontier society in which race defines a person but the definition itself is not always clear is interesting to consider. What about Charles Rouleau or Antoine Barada? Were these men playing up their European heritage in an effort to bridge East and West or build community in the new territory? Or perhaps, they saw the writing on the wall and were trying to maintain a hold on influence in the territory. Certainly in some ways this makes Nebraska a bit more like Oklahoma where the native population of removed peoples called for certain rights based on their interconnection with European blood or traditions.

Richardson County mirrored the situation that Cayton found in *Frontier Indiana*, i.e., most natives who lived at least a partially “acculturated” life were of mixed-blood. In Richardson County, the most prominent was probably Antoine Barada, a descendant, at least partially, of French traders. Barada had connections with the native population as well as with whites who came through the region prior to formal territorial status had been conferred. Once Richardson County was founded, Barada needed to work to secure land for him and his family, but he also needed to concern himself with political power.

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<sup>69</sup> Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 7-8.

Hence his connections to the county seat battles as Barada and others were embroiled in scandal regarding the choice of Falls City. Barada's story will be more fully explored in Chapter Six. Clearly, white residents of Richardson County were not going to look out for his interests, yet, as will be discussed later, they recognized that Barada had a degree of influence in this frontier and needed to be courted appropriately.

Once the question regarding native land ownership and other rights (or lack thereof) was resolved, did this lead to a decline in presence of the federal authority in Nebraska counties and territory? In these three counties, there were no outposts built and abandoned as took place in other parts of the frontier across the Great Plains.<sup>70</sup>

What sustained population growth in Nebraska? In Indiana, Cayton found that growth was maintained largely through natural reproduction. Cayton pointed out that only 9,080 immigrants settled in the state in the 1840s. Nebraska, by contrast, had higher numbers of immigrants, and in examining Richardson, Platte, and Burt counties, one finds significant numbers of immigrants, particularly by 1870.

Indiana was a place of "crossroads" because people were using the state as a point of embarkation.<sup>71</sup> The same could be said for Nebraska, especially in the years prior to territorial confirmation, as the region was largely viewed as a way station on highways

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<sup>70</sup> Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 264-266; Cayton points out that certain levels of federal authority seemed to disappear from the Indiana frontier once native questions were resolved. Still, there remained powerful aspects of the federal government interacting with these largely "independent-minded" settlers. The land agent was a powerful representative of national authority. While Nebraska's frontier land offices were different from those farther back to the east, residents of both frontiers certainly had similar experiences: an officer of the government had to sell register claims and receive payment, a credit system of some sort aided the purchasing process, minimum numbers of acres to purchase were established and policies were set for dealing with squatters. For more on the importance of the land office and its role in keeping a strong federal presence in territories see, Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789-1837*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

<sup>71</sup> Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 266-270.

stretching west. Still, people were not always willing to move for a variety of reasons – after all there were human considerations to many people, not just political or economic. Cayton discussed the case of Peter var Arsdale as an excellent example of this point. Migration, argues Cayton, “seems a much more ambiguous, murky business than it does at the level of statistics.”<sup>72</sup> Marriage, family ties, religion, and land availability all play a role in determining social and geographic mobility.

In some ways, Indiana resembles Richardson County in Nebraska. Indiana was far more southern than its immediate neighbors Ohio and Illinois. Indeed, Richardson County was primarily southern due to its proximity to Missouri, as Indiana’s southern border is close to Kentucky. These southern influences therefore are not necessarily unique to Nebraska or other regions of the Great Plains. That said, Richardson County, at least initially, attracted lower numbers of immigrants from the Northeast and Europe – a parallel with frontier Indiana when that state is compared to Ohio and Illinois. By 1860, Richardson County, like Indiana in 1850, had comparatively small numbers of “Yankee-born” settlers of the three counties in this study. Richardson County’s lower numbers of “Yankee-born” make it a bit of an outlier for the territory as a whole.<sup>73</sup>

Cayton argues that on the frontier, people often chose some regions to settle less with an idea for market, commercial development, or transportation links, than with the notion of “familiar territory.” Continuity in lifestyle therefore may have been important in determining settlement patterns and the same can be observed in Richardson County.

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<sup>72</sup> Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 270.

<sup>73</sup> Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 271-272; Cayton establishes that Indiana’s “Yankee-born” represented 8.8% of the population, as compared to Illinois 17.4%, Michigan 45.2%, Ohio 18.9%, Wisconsin 35%, and the entirety of the old Northwest 19.8%.

Evidence for this fact reveals itself in particular as crops like tobacco and hemp show up, even in small numbers, particularly as a result of the southern population. That said, market and commercial development are still important attributes to consider. What web of market relationships for the counties and Nebraska can be described? What level of isolation or modicum of self-sufficiency existed?<sup>74</sup>

The growth of towns and the future of counties often held in the balance of being able to convince a wider audience as to the opportunities presented by the existence of one's community. Every small town in Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties and throughout Nebraska and the Great Plains had some hope of becoming the next big commercial or governmental center, and cheerleading was a strategy employed in attempts to ensure success. Those communities along the Missouri river like Decatur in Burt County or Rulo in Richardson County had reason to believe in the future of their "ascension" to greater powers and influence. The census and county histories reveal stories of construction and buildings that all were intended to contribute to the future success of these communities – examples extolling the virtues of saw mills, grist mills, the arrival of skilled craftsmen, etc. abound. In frontier Indiana, as can be seen in Richardson County or other communities in Nebraska and throughout the Great Plains, as the future of towns hung in the balance, arguments emerged over locations of county seats. Also, the role of the press corps (e.g. Abel D. Kirk in Richardson County) was important in "advertising" their communities as possible landing spots for new migrants. In frontier towns across the United States in general and in Nebraska in particular, places such as Tekamah, Falls City, Rulo, or Columbus, people's main concern was an interest

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<sup>74</sup> Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 272-273.

in “specialization, exchange, and communication with distant places.”<sup>75</sup> This hoped for connection was seen as the key to local success and transformation from territory to state. Across the Great Plains each small community mirrored activities sustained in Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties. Constant questions were asked – how can we take our community to another level of development, how can we gain access to the prosperity of others and make more of a connection to grow our economy, how can each community grow within itself and yet make a contribution to the greater whole? These kinds of questions and the associated desire to grow a community often resulted in the “paper town” of the frontier. Fears of such chicanery are addressed in the Richardson County community of Rulo in 1858. An anonymous writer asserts to the readers that residents of Rulo have “never used the columns of the *Nebraskian* to puff paper Towns in this Territory, or such as did not possess the elements of future promise and importance.”<sup>76</sup> The author goes on to emphasize that for all pride in a community, misleading honest people who wished to move to Nebraska was an offense. The remainder of the column extolled the virtues of Rulo, suggesting that it had perfect access to river ways (the Nemaha River and the Missouri River), that business in Richardson County would develop within Rulo, and that there existed already a “numerous and enterprising population in the counties...back of Rulo who feel a deep interest in its growth and prosperity.”<sup>77</sup> The importance of capital is discussed as is early building construction of both dwellings and places of business. Perhaps most important, there is a lengthy discussion of land title and relations to the native population. The author clearly explains

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<sup>75</sup> Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 275.

<sup>76</sup> “Rulo,” *The Omaha Nebraskian*, 3 March 1858, column D, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> “Rulo,” *The Omaha Nebraskian*, 3 March 1858.

that the natives in the region have the right to convey land and that there will not be difficulties in legally acquiring land (a constant challenge and fear in the frontier and across Nebraska and the Great Plains). Ultimately, the author believes that Rulo will become the “leading town of Southern Nebraska.”<sup>78</sup> As will be demonstrated, these hopes are not quite realized, so one might question the original assertions that no paper town puffery is taking place.

In nineteenth century frontier Indiana, none of the many little towns became a big metropolis. Until the railroad arrived across Nebraska, the same could be argued. Excepting Omaha and Lincoln, none of the “cities” exceeded even 2,000 citizens by the late 1860s, so while a Falls City or Tekamah or Columbus might have local economic and cultural hegemony, they ended up in control of a very small area. This development is repeated across Nebraska and the Great Plains – the key difference between the Old Northwest frontier and the Great Plains being the influence of the railroad on development.

How was Nebraska and the Great Plains integrated into national and international economic structures? Were Nebraska and the Great Plains part of a fragile or thriving chain of commerce or somewhere in between? What was the principal market/port for crops and produce for Nebraskans? Does this change after the railroad comes through Platte County? How important was livestock, corn, wheat, etc.? What towns emerged as processing centers? Eventually Omaha in Douglas County is key – Cayton uses

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<sup>78</sup> “Rulo,” *The Omaha Nebraskan*, 3 March 1858.

Madison, IN as a local example. One wonders about Salem, Falls City, Tekamah, or Columbus.<sup>79</sup>

Salem was one of the towns in Richardson County founded in the earliest days of the territory (1854). While ultimately developing into a less important community than Falls City in Richardson County, Salem still demonstrates the need for highly localized markets in agricultural communities in Nebraska and on the Great Plains more generally. The town was (and remains) a small collection of homes alongside a small water source (though not one that worked for transportation needs). Despite its small population and lack of river transport, Salem became a commercial center for that portion of Richardson County. Salem had a tavern, the Tisdell hotel, and several general or hardware stores, one of which was run by Justus C. Lincoln. The target customers of Salem and presumably other small towns like it in the territory and across the Great Plains were passers by as well as individuals farming in the immediate vicinity.<sup>80</sup> Salem also had the services of artisans, e.g. a carriage maker, a blacksmith, ten carpenters, and even a daguerreotype artist. However, probably it was the hotelier, tavern owner, or general store owner who was most continually employed. By 1870 Salem was still small, yet Falls City had become a very important commercial center for Richardson County. Like its smaller counterpart, Falls City, the county seat, was not on a body of water that served as a transportation route. Its population however was about double that of Salem at over 600 residents and three general stores, a tavern, a couple of general grocers, and a successful hotel, originally built by Jesse Crook. Falls City attracted more people than Salem

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<sup>79</sup> Questions developed from Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 276-278.

<sup>80</sup> John C. Hudson, *Plains Country Towns*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 6-10; also pages 21-38 discusses in detail the development of "inland" towns on the Great Plains.



ultimately, perhaps due to its combination grain and saw mill about one mile south of town, a former blacksmith turned carriage maker (L. C. Gore), two grain elevators, the county jail, and courthouse.<sup>81</sup> Both Salem and Falls City therefore made themselves more permanent between 1854 and 1870 despite the fact that in the county anyway, it was Rulo that was located along the best water “highway,” the Missouri River.

North, in Burt County, Decatur faced similar challenges to Rulo, never reaching the same heights as county seat Tekamah. Tekamah, like Falls City or the smaller Salem, managed to grow into a successful commercial center, which had been the original vision of founder Benjamin Folsom. Folsom’s Tekamah shared another characteristic with Falls City and Salem, i.e., no major watercourse. Decatur could or perhaps should have been the bigger community but founder Folsom’s purchase of the 640 acres that became Tekamah virtually guaranteed that community’s future growth. Tekamah had one hotel, a general store, and concentrated on the nearby population as its main consumers. The town was not on a major transit route, a fact made particularly evident when the railroad crossed the Missouri River at Omaha and journeyed west through our “luckiest” county, Platte. In the early days, Tekamah had services for Burt County residents including one blacksmith, a physician, two land agents (one of whom was Benjamin Folsom’s son Niles), two carpenters, and a couple of attorneys. Tekamah and Falls City, like other “land-locked” Nebraskan towns and similar communities on the Great Plains, were really

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<sup>81</sup> United States Census Bureau, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*; United States Census Bureau, *Ninth Census, 1870*.

local commercial centers, building their community up in relation to the immediate environs.<sup>82</sup>

Platte County generally, and Columbus specifically, was a bit different initially because of Columbus' location along the Platte River. While difficult, it was technically possible to enlist this shallow river's aid in building commerce. However, Columbus' biggest opportunity emerged when, in May of 1866, the Union Pacific Railroad Company laid track through town, connecting Columbus with Omaha (the major regional commercial center) and with Chicago (the premier national commercial center). Smaller towns in Platte County such as Monroe or Humphrey could indirectly share with Columbus' success and connections, thereby emerging stronger in their own right as local commercial centers. The differences between a Salem or Humboldt in Richardson County and Monroe might be fairly significant – probably due to that important railroad connection.

Columbus, by 1870, had emerged as an important town in this region of the new state. In 1856, the town had consisted of eighteen small wooden cabins and was a very small community. Even by 1860, Columbus had grown to include a small brewery, taverns, one hotel, one mill, and one bridge across the Platte River. By 1870, the town boasted three blacksmiths, a photographer, over sixteen carpenters (one of whom had an apprenticeship program), three dressmakers and two tailors, numerous attorneys, and even two insurance agents. With the arrival of the railroad in 1866, there was the hope for an increase in the aforementioned commercial ventures and amenities for the

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<sup>82</sup> United States Census Bureau, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*; Hudson, *Plains Country Towns*, 6-7.

community. The railroad also provided new occupations for the town as various rail clerks, station managers, and telegraph operators entered the rolls.<sup>83</sup> Two new mills were constructed in the late 1860s along with a grain elevator for the railroad. The hotels, taverns, and other businesses, as well as the farmers outside of Columbus at least stabilized and the population of the county maintained itself and grew.

Columbus was, in many ways, a great example of how a Great Plains community can be made or broken by the arrival of major industry or technology. In this case it was specifically transportation technology that helped build Platte County. Nebraska, and the Great Plains in general have a history of small towns that never got much bigger because the railroad never arrived, and the reverse is also true (see Minot, ND the so-called “Magic City” because the arrival of the Burlington Northern caused the town to emerge as if by magic overnight).<sup>84</sup> Eventually in southern Richardson County, a rail line was constructed as was a small line in Burt County, but these lines emerged outside the scope of this study.<sup>85</sup> So, the general thesis remains that the larger the access to the outside world, the livelier or larger type of commercial center was likely to develop. Whether a small territorial town or a larger center, such as Tekamah, Salem, Columbus, Falls City etc, these were places where farmers could congregate, bringing their corn, wheat, and livestock to market. There they could sell their produce locally, if not on a national level.

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<sup>83</sup> United States Census Bureau, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*; United States Census Bureau, *Ninth Census, 1870*.

<sup>84</sup> Hudson, *Plains Country Towns*, 28, 33, 80.

<sup>85</sup> Ludi Brothers, *A History of Burt County Nebraska From 1803 to 1929* reprint edition (Wahoo, NE: The Ludi Printing Company, 1929, reprinted by Plaindealer Publishing Company, 1988 and 1996), 48-50, 282; Lewis C. Edwards, *History of Richardson County: Its People, Industries, and Institutions* 2 volumes (Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen and Co., 1917), volume 1, 295-296, 314-315.

Interestingly, some of what Mark Fiege argued in *Irrigated Eden* applies here.

If, as Fiege contends, the natural world is affected by and affects humans, so too is it with transportation technology and links with the broader commercialized world. Indeed, these very railroads that made or broke the Nebraska towns and their comrades on the Great Plains more broadly were very much double-edged swords. Their impact on the one hand was to increase the possibility of a larger, more national commercial center. On the other hand, this attachment to a broader economy had its downsides. Again, slightly outside the scope of this study, the growth of the Grange and Farmer's Alliance on the Great Plains and elsewhere in the nation is the other side of the expanding market story. Like Fiege's Idahoans who wanted canals in their region to make farming profitable, Columbus' residents and others in Nebraska welcomed the arrival of rail lines to expand their connections with the country, and by extension, the world. However, with these connections came itinerant problems. The rail lines which brought and moved goods to and from Nebraska also brought rules and social costs. Fiege's Idahoans had to maintain the canals in order to get them to continue to work. While Nebraskans did not directly maintain the railroad that went through their territory and state, by using this means of transportation and paying for transport costs, residents embroiled themselves in more than the simple transit of corn. As alluded to earlier, eventually the Grange and Farmer's Alliance movements would become critical of the railroads and of the very national economy that the rails in theory provided. Nebraskans in Platte, Richardson, and Burt counties, across the state and similar people throughout the Great Plains would see this national relationship very differently. The local markets of Salem, Falls City, Monroe, Tekamah, or Decatur could be easily grasped and understood by their residents. The

national market, costs of transport, gradation systems on crops and livestock, banking systems, and the commodities markets in places like Chicago, were often great mysteries to farmers and their neighbors. This situation became increasingly true after 1870.<sup>86</sup> Then there is the issue of technology and transportation and the new markets combining to make the main occupation of these residents unprofitable. One need only examine the falling prices of main Great Plains staples like corn, wheat, etc. to see that in some ways, technology and transportation was creating a situation that would drive some of these individuals out of the agriculture business altogether. A great historical irony in many ways was that the very booster spirit that encouraged the development of rail lines or canals or other means of mass transport to build a community set in motion the very framework that would destroy these communities. So again, although outside the scope of this study, it is important to acknowledge that there was a negative side to broadening the commercial markets of these Great Plains communities.

Discussion about railroads, however, was an important and essential part of territorial life. Even when the railroads in question were not specifically aimed for within Nebraska's borders, their importance was grasped by the residents at the time. For example, on April 1 1857, *The Nebraskan* reported a railroad meeting held in Omaha at the end of March. Commissioners were named in a charter of the Nebraska Central Rail Road Company. A committee of four was chosen to open subscriptions to help build

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<sup>86</sup> For a study of rural areas in transition outside of the Great Plains, see Donald Hugh Parkerson, *The Agricultural Transition in New York State: Markets and Migration in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1995); also, Wayne C. Rohrer and Louis H. Dougals, *The Agrarian Transition in America; Dualism and Change* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

capital stock of the company. In Burt County and in Omaha, these subscriptions were to be collected until the amount of \$200,000 was reached.<sup>87</sup>

The newspaper is replete with references to other projects in neighboring Iowa and Missouri. These states had plans to extend existing rail lines and this would bring Chicago or St. Louis that much closer to the territory and the Great Plains more generally. As rails were laid from St. Joseph, Missouri up into Iowa, *The Omaha Nebraskan* encouraged such construction and used editorial commentary to extol the value of such projects.<sup>88</sup>

By February 1858, there had been discussion about preliminary examinations and surveys that would lead to a Central Pacific Railroad through Nebraska. At the time, the report indicates disagreement about where the rail line would cross the Missouri River. Arguments in favor of crossing at Dakota City were lobbed about and had they come to pass, the fate of Platte County residents, specifically in the community of Columbus, would have been quite different.<sup>89</sup>

By 1859, an engineer was pushing for a route from the Missouri River up the Platte valley on to Salt Lake City. In a letter reprinted in *The Omaha Nebraskan*, F.W. Lander argued that if duty free rails were allowed, he would build the line for \$5,000 per mile or about \$5,500,000 for the whole project. He further pointed out the importance of making the line primarily a military one at the outset (and thus a national project for the

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<sup>87</sup> "Railroad Meeting," *The Nebraskan*, 1 April 1857, column C, p. 2.

<sup>88</sup> "St. Joseph and Council Bluffs Railroad Meeting," *The Omaha Nebraskan*, 19 May 1858, column B, p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> "Pacific Railroad" and "Central Pacific Railroad," *The Omaha Nebraskan*, 10 February 1858, columns E and B respectively, p. 2.

Great Plains region).<sup>90</sup> Throughout the territory and the Plains more extensively, the need for military supplies moving quickly was seen as obvious. Whether dealing with potential conflict with the native population or with Mormons, the government needed to move men and equipment. Great Plains communities in general were hopeful that they might be on one such line. In Nebraska, this was as important as anywhere else on the Great Plains. In Platte County and in Omaha, F.W. Lander's plan would have been enthusiastically greeted. Even when Landers explained that his costs could rise to \$10,000 per mile of track if the government could not guarantee duty free rails, the project was seen as necessary and reasonable. After all Landers reasoned, the government already paid Russell, Majors, and Company \$3,800,000 in one year for army travel and equipment! The line would pay for itself and then it could be made into a private company which, Lander figured, would gladly take on such a burden to move products to and from farmers, military outposts, and the Mormon community in Utah.<sup>91</sup>

Eventually the railroad ran into trouble as it struggled over land grant issues. People supporting the legislation which would become the Homestead Act did not wish to vote in favor of a large series of land grants (all of which were on federally owned lands) to corporations when individuals might benefit.<sup>92</sup> Of course, not even all residents of the Great Plains or Nebraskans more specifically, favored this type of legislation. *The Omaha Nebraskian* complained, in a subtle fashion, about territorial representative Samuel G. Daily, printing reminders on successive days about Daily's position on the

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<sup>90</sup> F.W. Lander, "Pacific Railroad," *The Omaha Nebraskian and Omaha Times*, 9 April 1859, column D, p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> F.W. Lander, "Pacific Railroad," *The Omaha Nebraskian and Omaha Times*.

<sup>92</sup> "The Pacific Railroad," *The Omaha Nebraskian*, 31 March 1860, column C, p. 2.

Pacific railroad. Daily, a confirmed abolitionist and Free Soiler, helped defeat the Pacific railroad project initially, specifically the route that took the line up the Platte valley by Columbus. Residents of Platte County would have been upset – even those who allegedly held a Republican convention in 1858 might have been displeased. The reason for objecting to this construction was made clear the following day when *The Omaha Nebraskian* printed the following: “No railroad grants must be passed now, lest the influx of Irish and German laborers make Nebraska hopelessly Democratic.”<sup>93</sup> It would appear that Daily was angling politically rather than thinking exclusively about developing the community in which he lived. Perhaps it could be argued that he was concerned about developing the territory and the broader Great Plains region, but not while sacrificing the potential growth of the Republican Party? Either way, Daily’s popularity in Omaha and along the Platte River in Columbus would have been quite low.<sup>94</sup>

Ultimately the Pacific Rail Road, considered by some “the greatest contemplated work of the nineteenth century,”<sup>95</sup> was undertaken. The project did come, as we have discussed, up the Platte River valley passing by Platte County and Columbus. The benefits were there and Daily’s fears of Democrats taking over Nebraska forever were not quite realized, despite the large influx of immigrant laborers. Here, yet again, is a case of a national project that could make or break a local community, and this was repeated in Nebraska and in the Great Plains generally.

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<sup>93</sup> *The Omaha Nebraskian*, 28 and 29 September 1860, columns C and E respectively, p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Daily, who had been born in Kentucky, was raised by parents who abhorred slavery. The family moved to Indiana relatively soon after his birth. He began his professional life in Indiana as a cooper and lawyer.

<sup>95</sup> “The Pacific Railroad,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 1861, columns A, B, p. 2.



In 1864, at the age of fifteen, Sarah Crook married German immigrant August Schoenheit. Schoenheit was twenty-seven years her senior and a popular attorney in Richardson County. In 1860, Schoenheit was living with Sarah's uncle Isaac Crook's family, which probably explains how the two knew each other. Sarah's first child, Augustus John, was born about one year following the marriage. By 1870, A. J. had begun attending school in Falls City. In about five years, Sarah gave birth to three children, all sons aged five, three, and nine months when the census taker came to her house. August Schoenheit was by then a successful attorney in town. He had real estate valued at \$4000 and personal estate worth \$1000. To help Sarah in the house and perhaps with the children as well, Mary Thomas, a twenty year old Welsh woman was employed by the Schoenheits.<sup>96</sup>

In 1870, Benjamin Folsom was living in New York, though not permanently. He and wife Mary had gone back to Attica in the 1860s some time after sending their youngest son, also named Benjamin back to New York for schooling. Folsom maintained his property in Nebraska and returned there in the 1870s. When the enumerator arrived at Folsom's door in 1870 twenty-two year old Benjamin the younger was in the house. He and his younger sister Helen had both been enrolled in school in the past year. Benjamin the elder was identified as a land dealer, which in truth was how he had earned his living in most of the years in Nebraska. Folsom's personal estate was valued at around \$3500. The "land dealer" held \$100,000 in real estate. This is the more eye-opening figure in many ways. Benjamin and Mary were doing quite well as they

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<sup>96</sup> United States Census Bureau, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*; Tri-State Corners Genealogical Society, *Richardson County, Nebraska Cemeteries* Volume 6, (Lincoln: Nebraska State Genealogical Society, 1997), 513; United States Census Bureau, *Ninth Census, 1870*.

approached old age. At the house in Attica, the Folsom's employed two individuals. One employee was a black illiterate farm laborer named George Washington whose original birth state of Virginia indicates his probable recent freed status. The other was young Mary Gailey, born in New York and working as a domestic in the Folsom household. By 1880 Benjamin and Mary Folsom returned to their Tekamah home where the census noted, in very small print, that Mr. Folsom was a farmer in addition to his main occupation of real estate owner. At 71, Benjamin was back among his old neighbors in the community he had helped create.<sup>97</sup>

By 1870 Jacob Louis was well established on his farm in Platte County. Three years earlier, in the log cabin Louis had built in the late 1850s, his son Karl was born. Karl would grow up on the farm, attend classes through grade school, and around 1881, began working the farm with Jacob.<sup>98</sup> Karl remembered seeing Pawnees around the Louis farm quite often when he was a youngster. He recalled that Jacob Louis always had a gun handy in case of trouble, but that the elder Louis also spoke of the importance of treating the Indian "as a human being." Karl remembered that some adults in Platte County, though not Jacob and Katherine, used to try to keep their children in line by threatening to give them away to the Indians if they misbehaved. Even after 1870, when little Karl began to recall events, Platte County was still developing. There was game available and Jacob Louis took advantage of the hunting, bringing in turkeys, Canada goose, and other feathered creatures.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> United States Census Bureau, *Ninth Census, 1870*; United States Census Bureau, *Tenth Census, 1880*.

<sup>98</sup> Louis interview with Mohlman, 4.

<sup>99</sup> Louis interview with Kula, 5, 7, 8.

The Louis' lived far enough outside of Columbus that on occasion travelers would stop by and ask to stay the night. Perhaps thinking back to that time when he walked across the Iowa prairies and was refused housing, Jacob Louis was always welcoming. There were times, as happened in those days, when folks didn't ask and just stole a night in the Louis barn.<sup>100</sup> By 1870, Jacob Louis owned \$4000 worth of real estate and \$800 in personal estate, probably including much of his farm implements in the latter collection. Compared to fellow immigrants, Louis had over \$400 more in personal estate and over \$3200 more in real estate. Additionally, Louis was far ahead of the average Platte County neighbor. Of the 660 respondents in the 1870 census listing real estate value, only thirty-seven reported higher values in land than Jacob Louis. This success was most likely due to Louis's long time in the community.<sup>101</sup>

In building successful farms and industry, these rural communities were attempting to bring people together whether through common place, shared circumstance, success and failure, or interest in personal and community-wide improvement. When communities do not exist, individuals often feel alone, perhaps to the extent of losing some purpose. The individual in a community saw a personal purpose of what it was they were supposed to accomplish or get out of the larger whole. Residents learned what to expect of their neighbors and of themselves when the residents conformed or broke form from the rest of the group. Living in Burt, Richardson, or Platte counties, people saw the chance for order in their worlds that was not always so easy to understand, yet was viewed as essential. In these communities then, success at agriculture or in various

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<sup>100</sup> Louis interview with Kula, 8.

<sup>101</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Ninth Census, 1870*.

businesses or controlling rampaging livestock was pieces of this whole. The aim was to create and utilize order to build a better place. Mobility reshaped these communities and sometimes the end result was an attempt to recreate parts or elements from the original. This idea could mean different things if you were an immigrant farmer like Jacob Louis or a native businessman like Benjamin Folsom. In some cases, particularly among these early residents of the towns and farmland in these counties, the attempt at recreating that past order meant including entire family elements into the development of the counties. The Crooks of Tennessee stand as an excellent example as Sarah Crook saw uncles, cousins, mothers, fathers, and brothers make their way west as a unit. In some instances, sacrifices were made in order to maintain and build these nascent communities. This may have meant a sacrifice of a personal nature, or it could have meant giving up part of the individual drive in order to help build the overall group.<sup>102</sup>

In the rural regions of these three Nebraska counties, the typical communities were agricultural villages or the larger towns and village communities. The different types largely depended on available technology. Technology, whether transportation or farming techniques, helped communities develop. Relative comfort levels in terms of security (i.e. economic, basic subsistence), and due to cheap or almost free land, plus a system of land inheritance that relied on the individual helped the evolution of these communities. The agricultural village and small towns were more or less independent units joined together by primary institutions like schools, churches, the courthouse and so

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<sup>102</sup> R. Douglas Hurt, *American Farms: Exploring Their History* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 1996), ix; for discussion on community development in small towns and rural environments see, Elvin Hatch, *Biography of a Small Town* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); also, Dwight Sanderson, *The Rural Community* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1932).

on, or by common experiences, e.g. relationships with Native Americans. Those small villages became important meeting centers because of the growing nature of commercial agriculture, increased communication with the outside world, and developing market relations. The individuals therefore joined together to create these new systems of communities. As we will see in the coming sections, the evolution of schools, churches, common experiences with Nebraska's Native Americans and political relationships will have their influence on community development as well.

## CHAPTER FOUR: COMMUNITY THROUGH FAITH AND SCHOOLING

Ira Alexander Draper was born in a cabin a few miles from Indianapolis in May 1849. When he was eighteen months old the Draper family moved by wagon to Vandalia, Iowa a community located east of Des Moines. Ira's father was born in Kentucky, and by the time Ira was six, his father had moved on at least three separate occasions. The younger Draper remembered that despite his father's Kentucky roots, he was no friend to slavery. Draper's father had Ira carry food to runaways who hid near their home in the 1850s. Ira's three older brothers joined the Union Army between 1862 and 1863. While his sons were at war, Ira's father moved the family once again, this time coming to Richardson County, Nebraska Territory in fall 1864. The family crossed the Missouri River at Brownville on a flatboat propelled by human power, four oars to each side. Draper's father purchased a farm west of Dawson, a small community that lay north and west of both Salem and the county seat, Falls City.<sup>1</sup>

Draper was fifteen when the family came to Nebraska. He recalled that the neighbors were friendly, kind, and helped his family out a good deal, especially in the early days as basic thoughts like gathering food and building a home dominated the family's thinking. Shortly after the family arrived, the neighborhood began to discuss running a school. A log schoolhouse was constructed near the Rothenberger ford on the Nemaha River, which at that time was a prominent point. Anyone who was raising grain in the vicinity traveled by that ford on their way to Brownville in Otoe County in order to sell at market. The oldest girl in the Draper family, Ruth who was eighteen in 1864, was asked by the school board to teach. When informed that she would be facing about forty

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<sup>1</sup> "Ira D. Draper and Family Came to County in 1864," *Dawson Herald*, August 20, 1863; United States Census Bureau, *Ninth Census, 1870*. In 1936, Ira A. Draper built a recreation of his birthplace in miniature, down to a tiny axe hanging on the door, and displayed his work at the Richardson County fair.

students, some old, most large, and some already growing whiskers, Ruth demurred. The board, very much wanting to begin a school, kept after her.<sup>2</sup>

At the time, the Draper family lived in a log home, which Ira remembered was about sixteen feet by eighteen feet. In addition, a detached room of about ten by twelve feet allowed the family to live relatively comfortably and even entertain travelers and friends on a somewhat regular basis. Ira's sister Ruth was finally convinced to take on the task of teaching the community's children, although she was barely out of childhood herself. The board insisted that if any of the boys in particular were to give Ruth trouble or not mind her lessons, the adults of the community would help her with an elm club. Ira remembered that his sister thought she was truly pioneering in that she lived in a log cabin and worked in another one. A future member of the Draper family taught in Richardson County as well. Ira's younger brother Robert married Ellen Deweese in the 1870s. Ellen was the daughter of James Deweese, a successful farmer from Kentucky and Matilda Deweese who was born in Pennsylvania. Like the Drapers, the Deweese family had spent time in Iowa, residing there roughly between 1851 and 1863. When she was only fifteen years old, Ellen was drafted to teach in the Page district of Richardson County. The Deweese family lived only two households away from Ira's older brother William's farm, which probably explains how Ellen and Robert met one another. The Page school, named for the Page family who arrived in Richardson County in 1860, was a strong example of community spirit. F. P. "Bud" Page recalled attending the school two years prior to the hiring of Ellen Deweese. This community schoolhouse was a single room about twelve feet by sixteen feet, with one door and one window. It was constructed of logs and had a clapboard roof. Students sat on slabs with the bark side

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<sup>2</sup> "Ira D. Draper and Family."

down, four legs to a seat but no backing. The labor and land were volunteered by the Headricks, Chaffins, and Pages among others. The logs were cut on land owned by John Headrick. As there was no way to heat this school, “Bud” Page remembered that all sessions were three months and held in the summer. Page’s first teacher was Grisell Wheeler, a young woman from Kansas. The school had been built by volunteer labor and the attendance was voluntary as well. A subscription service was organized and each patron paid one dollar per child per month. Miss Wheeler roomed with neighbors in the community.<sup>3</sup>

Harriet Arlington was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania August 28, 1841 and at age fourteen moved with three sisters, a brother, and her parents to the west. Her father Aaron Arlington had owned a book and stationery business but was tired of city life. In addition, Harriet’s mother was unwell and her doctor had suggested that a western climate might be of some use. The family arrived in Dubuque County, Iowa in the early fall of 1855, remaining there with relatives until October. Harriet remembered traveling as far as thirty miles per day without seeing a home or settlement. In early November, Aaron Arlington purchased two yoke of oxen and the family headed towards Council Bluffs, Iowa reaching the city on November 9, 1855. Taking a ferry boat, the family crossed into Nebraska Territory the following morning. Harriet recalled that Omaha City was not much to look at – particularly in comparison to Philadelphia. A Reverend Gaylord was conducting church in the basement of a building. There were only three hotels and very few stores. A portion of the city was made up of sod houses and derisively referred to as “gopher town.” The Arlingtons moved into a small green

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<sup>3</sup> “Ira D. Draper and Family”; United States Census Bureau, *Ninth Census, 1870*; “Page Family Came in Covered Wagon Drawn by Oxen, in 1860,” *Dawson Herald*, August 20, 1936.



cottonwood lumber home with General John M. Thayer. Aaron Arlington arranged for this accommodation because of a shared free mason relationship between Thayer and himself. Soon after their arrival, Aaron Arlington and other Pennsylvanians John Neligh, James Crawford, and Uriah Bruner went north of Omaha to prospect land. Part of the land they came across in the winter and spring of 1856 was Burt County's Logan Valley.<sup>4</sup>

During summer 1856, Harriet and her sister went up to Logan Valley and camped for three weeks near where the town of Oakland would develop. Aaron Arlington put up hay for the winter, using a scythe to mow his lands and he and his son-in-law built a cabin with lumber purchased from Fontenelle community founder John Lemmon. Harriet recalled that her father's knowledge of farming was rather limited as he had spent most of his life in the city. Aaron Arlington relied on some minimal experience he had as a young man in New Jersey where, as he put it, only white beans and stones were raised. With Harriet's brother employed in Omaha, it fell upon then fifteen-year old Harriet herself to work the farm with her father. She helped him break twenty-five acres of prairie on their section of land about twenty-five miles from the nearest town. As Harriet remembered, the land had yet to be surveyed and any immediate neighbors were non-existent. The importance of not having nearby neighbors was revealed quickly when the Arlington's supplies, thought to be enough for a year, fell short and there was no one to lend a hand. In those first few years of farming, Harriet worked alongside her father quite a bit, pounding corn with a pestle and mortar to make flour, cutting the wheat with a hand sickle and guiding the horses through the threshing process to separate out the chaff. As Harriet later wrote, "we were fully aware that nature can only be subdued by sturdy

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<sup>4</sup> Harriet Pilcher, "My Pioneer Life in Nebraska," Record Group 1352, Box 1, Series 2, Folder 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

blows intelligently directed.” The family depended on wild game as their principal source of meat.<sup>5</sup>

In the winter months, the Arlingtons often did not see another person for as much as four months. They had brought from Philadelphia a box full of books, magazines, and newspapers which were dutifully read and re-read over the years. In the universally agreed upon cold winter of 1856-1857, one incident involving the family broke up the monotony a bit. Harriet’s brother had been working in St. Joseph, Missouri but he intended to settle in Nebraska. He came up to Omaha and bought a horse to ride up to Burt County, but he needed to return to Omaha to pick up his wife who was taking a steamboat from St. Joseph. Harriet yoked the ox team and she and her brother drove down to Omaha. On the return journey, it was slow going as the three took nearly a day and a half to get to Fontenelle. When the Arlingtons were within eight miles of home, the weather shifted and blinding sheets of snow fell upon the small party. They tied the oxen to the wagon wheels so they would not wander off in the storm and settled down for the night to do what they could without food or heat. Harriet’s brother had been watering the oxen when the storm hit them and his feet were wet, so the women cut his boots off and rubbed his feet with camphor and hay. When the storm lifted by morning, they headed home as quickly as possible where Harriet’s mother made a poultice for her son’s feet.<sup>6</sup>

In 1858 and 1859, Harriet became an aunt twice over as first her sister bore a son and then niece Carrie Arlington was born to her brother’s wife. In those years as well there was a degree of uncertainty and nervousness along the Platte and Elkhorn Rivers as

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<sup>5</sup> Pilcher, “My Pioneer Life.”

<sup>6</sup> Pilcher, “My Pioneer Life.”

reports of raids by Pawnees worked their way across the rural communities. Harriet remembered that the agent to the Pawnees had apparently made off with their annuity funds which did much to create a hostile environment. Four Pawnees stopped at the Arlington house in the summer of 1858 and stayed with the family before heading north to the Omaha reservation. Harriet also recalled seeing natives as they moved through the region on their way to summer and winter bison hunts. In 1859, Harriet's connection with her native neighbors was increased as she went to work at the mission on the Omaha reservation as an assistant matron. Stephen Decatur hired her for this position. It was probably while working this job that Harriet met John Pilcher, the man she would marry in the spring of 1860.<sup>7</sup>

The arrival and impact of the North family in Nebraska Territory is a story of tragedy and triumph. The majority of the Norths came to Nebraska from Ohio in 1856. The patriarch of the family, Thomas Jefferson North, worked as a surveyor out of Omaha. Thomas Jefferson North had been moving west since his marriage in New York to Jane Elvira Townley in 1837. The Norths had five children, three sons and two daughters, all but one of whom were born in Ohio. In 1855, James North the eldest son came to Nebraska traveling on steamboats, rails, and stagecoaches. His father followed soon thereafter and the two Norths settled in Florence, north of Omaha. Thomas Jefferson North sent for his wife and the rest of the family in 1856. In July of that year, Jane, with sons Frank and Luther and daughters Alphonsene and Sarah landed at Omaha. In the months immediately preceding their arrival, James North had taken on a government survey job in land west of Omaha among the Pawnees. James and his fellow surveyors ran into some trouble on the job as some of their work, particularly the

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<sup>7</sup> Pilcher, "My Pioneer Life."

construction of section marker mounds, interfered with the corn hills being planted by Pawnee women. The Pawnees, while not pleased with the surveyors' work, allowed them to continue. James North lost a hat to a confident Pawnee warrior who snatched it from North's head following a successful battle with Lakotas. While James was completing his surveying contract, young Luther North was learning bits and pieces of the Pawnee language from boys about his age living in the vicinity of Florence. The North family was closely tied to the Pawnees from that time forward.<sup>8</sup>

Like his son James, Thomas Jefferson North took work as a surveyor. North also worked as a timekeeper for a crew clearing timber near the Missouri River. The Norths were poor having failed at farming in Ohio, so any augmentation to the family budget was welcomed. On March 12, 1857, while working on a survey west of Omaha, Thomas Jefferson North was frozen to death in the same blizzard that nearly cost Harriet Arlington's brother his feet. Jane was devastated and leaned heavily on her oldest sons taking jobs and her own efforts at building a boarding house business to survive. James North became a storekeeper, while seventeen-year old Frank North took over Thomas' job as timekeeper for the timber crew. About a year after her husband's death, Jane took her two daughters and youngest son Luther on a return trip to Ohio and New York. She was unsure of both her own future and that of her family and not entirely certain she wished to stay in Nebraska. While most of the family was away, James and Frank North came to Columbus in Platte County and purchased land there. James operated a ferry across the Loup River while also surveying. Frank, now eighteen took up a preemption

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<sup>8</sup> Donald F. Danker, ed. *Man of the Plains: Recollections of Luther North, 1856-1882* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 4, 327, 328; Scrapbook volume 1 Frank North, Record Group 2321 North Family, Nebraska State Historical Society; Luther North, Record Group 2322, Box 1, Series 4, Folder 1, Nebraska State Historical Society, 1.

claim about three miles west of Columbus where he constructed a log house and took up farming.<sup>9</sup>

When Jane, Luther, Sarah, and Alphonsene returned to Nebraska in spring 1859, their first task was to reunite with the family. Jane North hired a team out of Omaha to make the nearly ninety mile journey to Columbus. Luther North, then twelve and going on thirteen, recalled that other than six log houses at Fremont and an occasional stage station, there was very little between Omaha and Columbus. Luther's oldest brother James had signed a government contract to deliver mail from Columbus to Monroe, a small post office about twelve miles to the west. Like Ira Alexander Draper's father, the eldest North took on the contract with the intention of farming out the task to another member of the family. Luther carried the mail three times a week on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Over half of his trip was on open prairie with not a house to be seen. Jane North was constantly worried about all of her children, but Luther's delivery of the mail, especially in winter, particularly concerned her.<sup>10</sup>

During the summer of 1859, the residents of Columbus became uneasy regarding their Pawnee neighbors to the east and west of the town. An air of concern grew in the community as alleged stories of depredations against livestock and property were circulated. James North took a party of men from Columbus out to join soldiers under General John Milton Thayer the territorial militia commander and friend of Harriet Arlington's father. The Columbus men were armed with flintlock muskets issued to them by the government. James North later questioned the logic of giving settlers firearms for

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<sup>9</sup> Danker, ed. *Man of the Plains*, 5; 328; Luther North, Record Group 2322, Box 1, Series 4, Folder 1, Nebraska State Historical Society, 1; Scrapbook volume 1 Frank North, Record Group 2321 North Family, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>10</sup> Danker, ed. *Man of the Plains*, 6-8.

protection and wondered if that action might have ended up causing more trouble than it was worth. The oldest North son had very little to do in what turned out to not be a battle at all between Pawnees and American soldiers. North was sent to gather supplies from John Rickly's store in Columbus. After loading up his wagon, James met up with the soldiers to discover that the Pawnees had not even been aware that there was any kind of trouble until the soldiers appeared. Pawnee leader Pitalesharu parleyed with Thayer and his soldiers (whom the Pawnees vastly outnumbered), and straightened out the misunderstanding with the only loss of life being a horse that belonged to a member of the Omaha tribe and was accidentally shot by a soldier. The soldier in question surrendered his horse by order of General Thayer and Pitalesharu turned over a young man who had apparently killed a pig belonging to a settler somewhere in Platte County.<sup>11</sup>

The Pawnees were moved onto a reservation west of Columbus that fall in 1859. Luther North met some of the Pawnees from time to time while delivering the mail to and from Monroe. He spoke to them in their own language when possible, having remembered the Pawnee words he learned when first moving to Nebraska. During the summer of 1860, Luther's mail route was discontinued and he worked alongside his neighbors herding cattle in order to earn money. Luther and Frank North also hauled freight to Fort Kearny that fall. During the winter of 1860-1861, Jane took Luther, Sarah, and Alphonsene to Omaha. Luther had the opportunity to attend school for a few months and did so before returning to Columbus to work on James's farm. The Norths continually worked as a family unit in the years after father Thomas's death to help the

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<sup>11</sup> Danker, ed. *Man of the Plains*, 6-7; James North, "recollections" *Nebraska History* 194. Sadly, these kinds of misunderstanding were all too common. At the very least, they contributed to negative perceptions of native people, and in some cases ended up getting people killed for no reason. see, Michael Tate, *Indians and Emigrants: Encounters on the Overland Trails* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 154, 155, 183.

entire family survive.<sup>12</sup>

Key components involved in the construction of these three communities were schools, churches, and general neighborliness. Sometimes the latter meant building relations with “outside” neighbors such as Native Americans. In Richardson County this included “half-breeds” and others residing in contested land along the Missouri River. In Burt County, the community had a constant relationship with the Omahas once that tribe settled into reservation land north of the county. As has been seen, this could mean intermarriage. In Platte County, the neighboring tribe of the Pawnees was inextricably linked due to their proximity to the Genoa agent office and the reservation, as well as the historic links created between the Pawnees and the prominent Platte County family the Norths.

As the 1860s went on year by year, each county developed the above communal institutions out of necessity, progress, and practicality. A key institution such as local government will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter, but churches, schools and building relations with the neighbors was very important. As Susan Gray described it in relation to southern Michigan, schooling and religion both had the potential to reign in “barbarism” of the frontier. Gray described a sense of the Congregation among New Englanders.<sup>13</sup> In the case of Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties, the presence of an active native population nearby added another important element to the construction of these communities. Gray emphasized that settlers in

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<sup>12</sup> Danker, ed. *Man of the Plains*, 6-8; David J. Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness: The Dispossession of the Nebraska Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 175.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Gray, *The Yankee West: Community Life on the Michigan Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 6-7, 19. Gray explored Turner’s notion as to the importance of education, character, and politics to New Englanders as expressed in his “The Problem of the West” essay in 1896. She also emphasized the importance of temperance and the plan to establish both churches and schools (common and Sunday) in Kalamazoo County, Michigan.

Kalamazoo County counted on the notion that each other would be supported and promoted “as individuals and as a community.” While the counties in Nebraska were not quite as formal in most cases as those Gray described, partially because the town companies were more concerned with creating some kind of income through land sales, bridge construction, or ferry operating, the desire and need for schools and churches certainly was similar.<sup>14</sup>

Around 1819 at Fort Atkinson, one of the first Christian sermons was delivered in Nebraska. By the 1830s, ministers such as Moses Merrill a Baptist and Samuel Allis a Presbyterian were preaching their message among the Otoe-Missourias, Omahas, and Pawnees. In preparation for his journey, Merrill spoke of his desire to have the Lord’s help in preparing for service “among these benighted Indians. May we be the honored instruments of turning many from darkness to light.”<sup>15</sup> Allis arrived in Bellevue in 1834 and then moved farther west and served as missionary to the Pawnees until 1845. At that point, Allis briefly built and ran a boarding school for natives before returning to the Bellevue area around 1851. Also in the 1830s, the Belgian Catholic priest Father Pierre-Jean De Smet conducted services and baptisms in the area, chiefly among fur traders, those of French descent, and certain natives who had taken on the Catholic faith.<sup>16</sup>

In mid-August 1854, a Methodist minister named Peter Cooper preached a sermon at Omaha and by 1855 additional traveling ministers and some Catholic priests were coming to the Nebraska Territory to spread the Gospel. By the early 1860s, many

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<sup>14</sup> Gray, *Yankee West*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Moses Merrill diary entry 1 December 1832, RG 2242, Box 1, Series 1, Folder 2 Diary 1832-1834, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>16</sup> Logan Fontenelle records, RG 1001, Nebraska State Historical Society. A fairly sparse collection, this record group does contain some hand copied notes regarding Logan Fontelle’s parents and Logan’s children. It indicates that Father De Smet baptized Logan’s children Albert, Tecumseh, Henry, and Josephine on June 9, 1839. The Fontenelle’s were an important family in early Nebraska Territory and an example of the mixed-race families that emerged on the frontier.



additional denominations were represented including Congregationalists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, the Christian Church (Campbellites), and Mormons. In these early days, most church meetings were established at the hands of circuit riders – ministers who traveled from place to place in search of those willing to understand that “Christ is carryin’ the golden candle for you...so come forward now and repent your sins. Cast out your sins through belief in Him. He’ll tote your burdens for you if you only let Him.”<sup>17</sup>

Circuit riders covered a wide area of territory attempting to spread out his meeting appointments so he could speak with a congregation about every two weeks. The wider the circuit or the larger the number of appointments, the less often the minister might arrive at a community. This challenging position required physical endurance and a strong religious spirit. The weather was challenging whether it was a snowstorm, thunderstorm, or blistering heat. The majority of ministers rode horseback carrying bare necessities with them and traveling as much as sixty miles without seeing anyone else. Andrew Johnson recalled a circuit preacher named G. B. Worley he heard in the summer of 1866 when he first arrived in Saunders County, south and east of Platte County. Johnson had only just arrived with his family and came up on a meeting beginning in front of a sod house. Neighbors had come from as far as ten miles around. When the Johnson family approached, Reverend Worley was calling out, “Lord, save a lost and ruined world! Lord...have mercy on their souls. Ain’t you said, Lord, that where two or three meet together there ye’ll be in the middle? We’re here. SO COME NOW!” A chorus of “Amen” punctuated each pause by Reverend Worley.<sup>18</sup>

While many of these early meetings were held simply in fields or people’s homes,

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<sup>17</sup> Nebraska Writers’ Project, *Nebraska Folklore Pamphlet Twenty-Six: Pioneer Religion* (Lincoln: Work Projects Administration, 1940), 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> Nebraska Writers’ Project, *Pioneer Religion*, 6-7.

through the late 1860s, there were other unusual locales for worship. Courthouses and state government buildings as well as schoolhouses were used. Sod houses of various types, cellars and barns, bars and beer gardens, even tents doubling as feed stores were all used. Nowhere was viewed as too lowly for those seeking to pray and hear the Gospel. As the railroad came out to Nebraska Territory, boxcars and depots became popular meeting spots as well.<sup>19</sup>

Protestant Christian meetings were often informal affairs with the congregation not being of any particular denomination and commonly becoming very involved in offering their own words and reactions to those of the minister. At the beginning and close of such services, people would often greet one another with great spirit and warmth. Singing hymns helped build a strong sense of community among the members as well. Particularly in the early days, there was rarely an organ so a tuning fork might appear and the minister would “line the hymn” (sing a line or two, followed by the congregation). In these song sessions and greetings at the meetings, people who were often quite distant from one another for weeks on end had a chance to see their neighbors, socialize, and nourish their souls.<sup>20</sup> In the 1870s, in Holt County, north and west of Platte County, J. P. Berry recalled that while folks, including his parents, wanted their religious meetings, they were not always stuck on “a lot of church rules and high falutin’ ways.” Berry described how at a schoolhouse, the preaching was mostly done by a farmer who lived nearby. Called the “Barefoot Parson” he was a Free Methodist who often appeared before the congregation in his overalls and, clearly, bare feet. Brother Monroe as he was known was a spirited minister, and certainly not beyond pointing out faults such as

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<sup>19</sup> Nebraska Writers’ Project, *Pioneer Religion*, 2-5.

<sup>20</sup> Nebraska Writers’ Project, *Pioneer Religion*, 8.

dancing or chewing tobacco among the congregation. Berry recalled that at times Monroe would point out culprits and offer his standard line: “The Devil’s aimin’ at you. Better get right on His wagon or else kick the Devil off of your’n. You’re pert’n near in his fiery furnace now. Turn back, brother, turn back afore it’s too late.”<sup>21</sup>

Despite the fact that some people like J. P. Berry’s parents would travel to any ministry available, it was not always the case that ministries from rival factions got along. Protestants and Catholics were mutually suspicious of one another and both groups were not quite sure what to think about the Mormons. But among Protestants there were sometimes problems as well. In Nebraska Territory, Methodists and the Christian Church (Campbellites) were not always on speaking terms. The Christian Church argued that baptism required full immersion and anyone not so baptized were sinners, not fit to receive communion. An amusing tale occurring near Falls City, Richardson County illustrates how much trouble the rivalry had caused. Two Methodist ministers were crossing the Nemaha River in a ferry when Reverend Zenas Turnman’s horse leapt into the river. Turnman held on to the bridle so he could force the horse to swim to shore. Reaching the opposite shore, the soaked Turnman turned to reverend Burch and said “I have just found the true sentiment of my horse. He is a Campbellite, so I will sell him. I refuse to own such a horse.”

### **Richardson County**

Within four days of the passage of the Kansas –Nebraska Act, Bishop E. R. Ames, executive secretary of the Methodist-Episcopal Board of Missions wrote a letter to Reverend W. H. Goode ordering him to explore in Kansas and Nebraska. Goode was

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<sup>21</sup> Nebraska Writers’ Project, *Pioneer Religion*, 10. Concern over lay people taking over preaching is discussed in Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (Yale and London: Yale University Press, 1989), especially 17-46, 133-141, 162-189.

further instructed to report back to the Board of Missions about his findings. Goode traveled to Kansas first and after a brief stop in St. Joseph, Missouri, headed north towards Council Bluffs, Iowa. While staying with a family of Tennessee Methodists in Holt County, Missouri, Goode's host took him across the Missouri River and up the Nemaha River. Goode stepped foot in Richardson County on July 29, 1854 and finding no settlers, spent a brief amount of time meditating and writing before traveling up the Missouri towards Omaha. He met up with Reverend William Hamilton in Bellevue. Hamilton would later live in Burt County and on the Omaha Reservation. Reverend Goode's report on the territories was mostly a call for men to begin the missionary process among the present and future residents of Kansas and Nebraska.<sup>22</sup>

In spring 1855, Reverend Goode found a promising missionary in the form of a young Englishman named David Hart. Goode's intent was to send young Hart into what he called the Nemaha Mission. This was to include Richardson County and parts of Pawnee County. Reverend Hart held classes and services in at least two places among the families coming into Nebraska Territory in those first few years, including frequent stops at the home of young Sarah Crook. At the cabins of Christian Bobst and Henry Shellhorn, Reverend Hart found welcoming people. Hart also found willing listeners at Archer, Richardson County's original county seat. Wilson M Maddox and his new wife Margaret were two such recipients of the Gospel. In October 1856, Reverend Hart reported that the Nemaha Mission consisted of forty-four members, a local preacher, and about six probationary members. As was necessary given the size of the Nemaha Mission, ministers worked the circuit throughout the community. Hart himself had

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<sup>22</sup> Harold C. Prichard, *One Hundred Years of Service in Southeastern Nebraska, First Methodist Church Falls City, NE* (Falls City, NE: First Methodist Church, 1955), 1.

stayed with the Crook family on occasion. Reverend John Stewart and Reverend Beck traveled through the region as well to help ease Hart's burden. In 1858, the name of the circuit was changed to Falls City Circuit from Nemaha Mission.<sup>23</sup>

By 1860, Falls City's Methodist spiritual needs were mostly covered by a local resident, Brother Wingate King. A farmer, King also served in the Nebraska Territorial legislature when not tending to the moral nourishment of his neighbors. In 1861, Reverend J. W. Taylor served the community for one year, moving east from Table Rock. Through a large revival effort made over the next two years, the members grew from about seventy-four to first 106 and then 242. Reverend T. M. Munhall was assigned to the Falls City circuit during that time and sought the aid of Reverend L. W. Smith. Smith recalled that in holding meetings both outside and in throughout 1861, the ministers had one of their most successful personal experiences ever. Smith found that on one particular evening, he preached with a great deal of passion and less formality. He encouraged the participants to sing at the close of his sermon but at that moment, about fifty were falling, struck with the Lord. Recruiting more ministers to help out, Smith and Munhall saw many conversions as a result of those sessions. Despite these conversions, there was no formal Methodist church constructed until 1867, although a tiny parsonage was put up while Wingate King was again leading the flock in 1863.<sup>24</sup>

When meetings were held in Falls City itself, church was often held in a small wooden building that also served as the law office of Isham Reavis. Reavis's son recalled that Brother Wingate King would encourage members of the town to welcome God into the community. This was especially true when residents were frequenting a

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<sup>23</sup> Prichard, *One Hundred Years*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Prichard, *One Hundred Years*, 3, 4.

saloon which was just south of where the Methodists would meet in Reavis's office. The next important development among Methodists of the Falls City community was the pastorate of Reverend W. A. Presson. With Presson steering the course, the first church was built in Falls City and from that time forward, the community always had a minister among them. Presson, along with Elmer Dundy, were the primary movers behind the church's construction. Dundy convinced a Mr. Robinson to offer three trees for use as timbers. Members of the church went to work to fell the trees and prepare them for framing the new building. Abel Boyd resided on the road to Salem, and was encouraged to offer some timber of his own – Boyd cheerfully complied. George Dorrington recalled that the residents joined together contributing livestock, labor, materials, and food and shelter for the workers to the cause. Sarah Crook's husband August Schoenheit was among those working to raise the church. In the years after construction was completed, a bell was unloaded from a river boat at Rulo where it acted as a slide for local children until such time as proper transportation could be acquired to move the bell to Falls City. Reverend Martin Pritchard of Ohio saw the church through to 1869 and Reverend David May led the parishioners into the early 1870s, preaching at Falls City until 1871. In many ways it is fitting that so many important families in the Falls City community should have been a part of this church. Three of the town's most accomplished attorneys in Isham Reavis, August Schoenheit, and Elmer Dundy were active members, along with early resident David Dorrington and his family.<sup>25</sup>

To the west of Falls City, towns like Salem and farming regions around what would become Humboldt sought spiritual nourishment as well. On April 15, 1860, a small group of Christians met to organize the Christian Church that the message of Christ

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<sup>25</sup> Prichard, *One Hundred Years*, 6, 7.

might be propagated in the Humboldt community. Elder Oliver J. Tinker led deacons Silas Morpew and A. N. Gentry as well as local pastors R. C. Barrows, Thomas Edwards, and Reverend Mullins. This church started small with a resident membership of only fifteen but the numbers grew after Reverend William Smith became the first regular pastor of Christian Church. Smith and his family came from Indiana and began labors with church in July 1870, preaching at Humboldt until 1880. The Humboldt community opened its doors to ministers and neighbors alike, as services were held in private homes until 1867, at which point the school was used as a meeting house for both the Christian Church and Methodists in town.<sup>26</sup>

### **Burt County**

Religion was an important part of the lives of Tekamah residents from early in the small city's development, although construction of a building exclusively for worship was not accomplished for quite some time. Through the work of Reverend J. M. Taggart, a missionary from the American Baptist Home Mission Society, services were held throughout the county, particularly along the Missouri River. A Baptist Society was founded in Tekamah in October 1856, largely as a result of these communal and spiritual get-togethers. This more informal meeting was organized into a church in fall 1858. Reverend Taggart kept at his work among Tekamah residents until 1860 when he was replaced by Reverend James D. P. Hungate. Early notes from these meetings reveal that as was often the case in early settlements, members of the church opened their homes to ministers and fellow believers. Taggart recorded in late February 1860 that he held divine services twice. On the previous Friday and Saturday, Taggart recorded that

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<sup>26</sup> Veronica Arington, *History of Humboldt, 1867-1976* (Humboldt, NE: Humboldt Standard, 1976), 23, 33; The Christian Church, *The Christian Church, 1860-1960* (pamphlet for Centennial Services April 10, 1960), 1, 3.

George Peterson and his wife had opened his home to the members. George's wife Anne related her Christian experience (conversion moment) and was welcomed as a candidate for baptism. Early in March 1860, Taggart recorded that Anne Peterson was immersed and baptized in Tekamah Creek in accordance with her desires and the welcoming arms of the members.<sup>27</sup>

Typically, Reverend Taggart and his successor Reverend Hungate preached regularly every four weeks. In the early 1860s, the Baptists began meeting at the Silver Creek schoolhouse when their numbers became too large for private homes. When Reverend Hungate arrived to replace Taggart, he was paid by the community fifty dollars for year one, sixty dollars for year two and twenty-five dollars each year thereafter. Hungate preached his first sermon in late August 1860 and remained with the congregation until 1864 when he was sent to Oregon by the Home Mission Society. Reverend Whiteside replaced Hungate, preached for two years, and had but one conversion during his pastorate. In 1867, Reverend I. C. Jones became the pastor. He was both a missionary and a homesteader, taking a claim of land in Silver Creek. That same year, the Baptists of the Nebraska Association divided into two groups, north and south of the Platte River. The church was still relatively small with membership standing at about twenty-three through to the early 1870s. To instruct the young in the community, a Sunday School was conducted beginning in 1868. Reverend Jones reached out to other religious communities, advising and helping the growth of the Swedish Baptists in Oakland and then after he left his pastorate in Tekamah, the Baptist churches

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<sup>27</sup> Mrs. Arthur Morrow, Reverend Oliver A. Enersen, et. al. *First Baptist Church, Tekamah, Nebraska, 1858-1958* (Tekamah, NE: 1958), 2.



at Silver Creek and Riverside.<sup>28</sup>

In fall 1858, Lutheran minister Henry W. Kuhns stopped at the family of Michael Olinger. An itinerant minister, Kuhns traveled west of the Missouri River in the Dakotas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, and even as far north as Canada. After two years, plans were made to build a small church and subscriptions were requests. Reverend Kuhns went to the Alleghany synod to request money. Benjamin Folsom and George Thomas, though not Lutherans, each donated a number of city lots to the cause. Reverend Kuhns was able to sell a few lots, returning with \$50 to be invested in the church. In 1861, the frame of the little church was blown over by a windstorm. Before it could be repaired, a prairie fire destroyed the wreckage. Almost before it could get underway, the first attempt at establishing an independent church building failed. Lutherans continued meeting in the Olingers' home and elsewhere. Reverend J. F. Kuhlman came to the region in 1864, and assisted the work of Reverend Kuhns. A second attempt to build a church in 1867 was also destroyed by a windstorm, as was the third one year later. Despite what to some might have seemed like clear indications that a church of this denomination was not desirable, the community did not fade away. Finally in the late 1870s, the Olingers, Crannells, Kettletons, and others were rewarded for their Job-like patience and a church was successfully completed.<sup>29</sup>

Outside of Tekamah other communities such as Lyons and Alder Grove developed religious organizations as well. Waldo Lyon, who along with the Everett and Hart families was considered to be very influential in the area moved to Nebraska from

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<sup>28</sup> Morrow and Reverend Enersen, et. al. *First Baptist Church, Tekamah, Nebraska*, 3; N. C. Parsons, *Historical Sketch of the First Baptist Church Oakland, Nebraska 1869-1919* (Oakland: First Baptist Church, 1919), 14, 19.

<sup>29</sup> Ludi Brothers, *History of Burt County, Nebraska* (Wahoo, NE: The Ludi Printing Company, 1929), 96-97; Gray, *Yankee West*, 24. Gray discussed how settlers did not seek to create a single church for the entire community but est. institutions suited for religious preference is important.

Wisconsin. A great believer in community peace through temperance, Waldo Lyon sold land plots in what became the town of Lyons with one stipulation. No “malt, spirituous or vinous liquors [could] be kept nor disposed of on the premises...any violation of this condition...shall render this conveyance void, and cause the said premises to revert to Waldo Lyon, his heirs and assigns.” Many in the Lyons community came from the same area of Wisconsin in 1866 and the years following. An early resident, Charles Hotchkiss, worked as a carpenter in the community but also conducted religious services on Sundays for those who were interested. In 1868, the first church was constructed and the entire community joined together in its construction. Camp meetings had been held in the area in good weather, but through the efforts of people like Joel Yeaton, Franklin Everett, and Waldo Lyon, a formal building was established. Reverend John Peebles a Presbyterian from Decatur traveled west to Lyons to minister the congregation, but all denominations used the building and paid the organizers a nominal fee. Joel Yeaton for example was a Methodist, but aided in the construction of what became a largely Presbyterian church.<sup>30</sup>

Almost the same story could be told of the Alder Grove Methodist church south of Craig. In 1869, a group of settlers, not all Methodists, gathered in an alder grove and at the home of Stephen Longwell for religious instruction. Ultimately, the congregation followed the Methodists because Reverend F. B. Pitzer whose circuit took him by the community happened to be a Methodist. Christian neighbors drew together and worshipped as a group, also organizing a Sunday school for young and old alike in 1869. Classes were designed not necessarily with only Methodism in mind, but were based on

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<sup>30</sup> Northeastern Nebraska Genealogical Society, *Lyons Heritage* (Lyons, NE: The Society, 1983), 5-7, 23-25; Ludi Brothers, *History of Burt County*, 70. The liquor ban was an interesting problem. In 1902 and 1903, Waldo Lyon’s descendants won a legal case against John Carlow and Belthas Jetter who attempted to run a saloon in Lyons. The legality of liquor sales in the community was not fully resolved until the late 1960s. Northeastern Nebraska Genealogical Society, *Lyons Heritage*, 12.

the Bible and the school had a small library of books and stories of religious instruction. Because a church building was not constructed until 1880, the congregation continued to meet out of doors among the trees in good weather and at the homes of neighbors. The success of the Alder Grove Methodist Church was a true testament to desire for community among this diverse group of immigrants from Europe, Civil War veterans, and others who moved into the community after 1867.<sup>31</sup>

### **Platte County**

The Catholic Church was the first to meet regularly in Columbus as Irish settlers like Pat Murray and Mike Deneen attended services in neighbor's homes and a small log cabin. St. John's parish organized in 1860 and was initially served by Father Fourmont. In 1866, Father Ryan took command of the parish. Father Ryan also traveled outside of Columbus to rural families in the early years. By the early 1870s, St. John's had a membership of about 125, representing roughly forty-five different families.<sup>32</sup>

A Congregational society met in Columbus in 1865 and was ministered by E. M. Lewis. In October 1866, Omaha-based Reverend Ruben Gaylord aided in the formal organization of this church, whose members included early Columbus residents like Vincent Kummer, Charles Speice, and Michael Weaver. The first church building was dedicated for services on February 3, 1867. Religious meetings prior to this point had occurred infrequently and typically in people's homes. The construction of the church was greatly aided by the Union Pacific railroad on whose rails the lumber was shipped to Columbus. Because this lumber would be used to build a church and as an effort to promote the successful connection between Columbus and Omaha, no shipping fee was

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<sup>31</sup> J. S. Spencer, *History of the Alder Grove Methodist Church, 1869-1955* (typescript, 1980), 1, 2.

<sup>32</sup> A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska* volume 2 (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1882), 1273; I. N. Taylor, *Early History of Platte County, Nebraska* (1876), 22.

charged and the cost of the lumber was greatly reduced. The Congregational church had a Sunday school with about sixty attendants on its small piece of property by the early 1870s.<sup>33</sup>

On April 29, 1869, the Presbytery of the Missouri River, in session at Sioux City, Iowa gave Reverend Sheldon Jackson the job of Superintendent of Missions for Nebraska and neighboring states. At that time, the religious needs of Platte County were serviced by the Catholic parish of St. John's, the Congregationalists, a small group of Episcopalians organized in October 1868 with seven original members, and an even smaller number of Methodist Episcopalians. The Presbyterians held meetings in the summer and fall 1869 beginning monthly sessions at George W. Brown's home and Mrs. A. J. Arnold's house. Reverend J. M. Hutchinson and Reverend Sheldon Jackson preached when available. The Presbyterians officially organized in late January 1870. This church started with about five members and kept fairly detailed records indicating when and how new members joined. Typically, a member might declare a profession of faith or bring a letter from a prior pastor to indicate good standing. A. L. Adair and Mary Adair took the latter approach when they joined on December 18, 1870. The couple presented a certificate of membership to the Presbytery of Odin, Illinois to Reverend Joseph M. Wilson after Elder George W. Brown opened meeting with a prayer. Like other churches in Richardson and Platte counties, the Presbyterians took advantage of the Christian neighborliness of other denominations. While the Presbyterians continued to meet at George W. Brown's house many of their meetings took place in the Congregational Church building. The oldest son of Jane North, James, was a member of

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<sup>33</sup> Ruby Freeman, *History of the Early Organization and Members of the Congregational Church* (Columbus, NE: Congregational Church, 1953-1954), 2; Taylor, *Early History*, 22, 23.

this church.<sup>34</sup>

## Schools

Nebraska pioneer Nicholas Sharp had this to say about schools in frontier territory: “Schools are like water, you never miss them until you are without them.”<sup>35</sup> Many early Nebraskans thought about forming schools in their communities soon after successfully beginning a business or getting a farm started. Like Missouri during the French and Spanish periods, schools were essentially non-existent in Nebraska prior to territorial status.<sup>36</sup> Although the Territorial Legislature enacted a free school law in 1855, many of the first schools in Nebraska were subscription schools. Teachers would typically ask for \$1.50 per month per pupil for a term, which was typically three months in length. Schools had varied schedules – some went as long as three terms, some could only manage one term in a year. Classes were conducted in private homes, tents, government buildings, granaries and eventually small buildings expressly for students or perhaps shared with local churches and government.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the free school law in 1855, which also demanded that each county select

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<sup>34</sup> Ruby Freeman, *Communicants – Presbyterian Church, Columbus NE, 1870-1916* (Columbus, NE: Presbyterian Church, 1951-1953), 2-8; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1273; Meeting minutes, April 29, 1869, July 26, 1870, December 18, 1870, August 22, 1873, September 1, 1873, MS 446 Presbyterian Church Records, microfilm, Nebraska State Historical Society. The Presbyterian Church was serious about managing aberrant behavior of its congregation. Founding member George Brown was cited in 1873 with charges of conduct unbecoming a Christian, specifically frequenting a saloon (actually two) and playing games of chance. James North was asked to testify as to Brown’s behavior. When found guilty, Brown was suspended from receiving communion until such time as he showed repentance. The close relationship between Presbyterian and Congregational churches in Columbus developed throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with both churches sharing a building and ministers in some cases. Ultimately, the two churches joined together in 1914 after the health of Congregational pastor George Munro failed. Federated Church, *Federated Church 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary* (Columbus, NE: 1989), 1, 25; Thomas Griffiths, “Dedication Services of the Federated Church, Columbus, NE April 9, 1922,” 1.

<sup>35</sup> Nebraska Writers’ Project, *Nebraska Folklore Pamphlet Thirty: Pioneer Schools* (Lincoln: Work Projects Administration, 1940), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Sue Thomas, *A Second Home: Missouri’s Early Schools* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 4.

<sup>37</sup> Nebraska Writers’ Project, *Pioneer Schools*, 2, 3.

school superintendents, directors, and boards, very few counties leapt at the opportunity to educate their children. Governor Cuming complained that by late 1857, most counties had not formed school districts and no taxes had been levied to pay for buildings, and except in very few cases no steps had been taken to try to deal with school laws at all. By 1858, the territorial government decided to place the school system in the hands of townships rather than counties. Every township became a district which in turn was supposed to levy school taxes, hire teachers, and build schools. For the next six years, this law was deemed somewhat impractical, but eventually funds were found through various land sales, etc. to make it possible to organize schools. By about 1870, Nebraska contained 797 school districts yet only 298 school houses. Only thirty-three per cent of school districts actually contained a school house. In 1870, only 12,791 students were enrolled out of a possible 32,589 in the proper age range (five to twenty-one). Throughout the state in 1870 there were 536 teachers – 267 men and 269 women.<sup>38</sup>

Schools were typically built by the settlers before waiting for any government agency to say that the taxes had been acquired. With the scarcity of building materials on the prairie, this meant that many early schools were either sod houses or dugouts. These buildings were not easy to heat in their busiest term, the winter. With little access to coal in the earliest days, burning corn or cow chips was often the alternative. Locating the school house was another challenge. Settlers already made sacrifices in labor or what little cash they had to support schools. The next battle came over how far away from their homes would the school be held. This problem was not unique to Nebraska, but it was a common problem as neighbors and local governments tried to locate schools in neighborhoods and on lots of land that were not that expensive, as well as centrally

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<sup>38</sup> Nebraska Writers' Project, *Pioneer Schools*, 3.

located.<sup>39</sup>

Once inside the actual building or tent or whatever structure existed, students did not see anything of particular sophistication. Most schools had poor lighting and ventilation, no storage facilities for coats or books, no maps, and not enough chairs for teacher or pupil. When these shortcomings were combined with leaky roofs, dirt floors, tables not adjusted for the various sizes and ages of the students, the learning environment was a challenging one indeed. Early blackboards were often simply boards painted black, but some students learned their first letters by writing on a stove. Chalk might be actual chalk, but more often than not it was white rocks or soapstone. Some students invested in a slate board on which to write their lessons, but these were often a challenge to clean. A student in Colfax County, directly east of Platte County, remembered cleaning off his slate in 1868 by spitting on it and wiping the slate with his coat. After many such cleanings, C. H. Smith said the “slate acquired an odor which would have staggered a healthy man. But...a slate without an odor was as uncommon as a rose without a smell.”<sup>40</sup>

In most instances, the students did not have textbooks in the early going either. What books did exist were often the same ones used by pupils’ parents in years gone by. One early Nebraska territorial teacher recalled seeing six different readers in a class of eight beginners, while another teacher faced students who did not have a single textbook during the entire first

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<sup>39</sup> Nebraska Writers’ Project, *Pioneer Schools*, 3, 6, 7, 9-10; Gray, *Yankee West*, 41.

<sup>40</sup> Nebraska Writers’ Project, *Pioneer Schools*, 7, 8.



**Figure 4.1:** Images of the “ideal” rural schoolhouse.<sup>41</sup>



<sup>41</sup> Nebraska Territorial Government, *Second Annual Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools of the Territory of Nebraska to the Seventh Legislative Assembly, Session 1860-1861*. (Omaha City: Robertson and Clark, 1861) n.p. Commissioner of the Commons Schools W. E. Harvey included these illustrations as guidelines for building schools in Nebraska. Note that there is very little difference between the two designs. Also note the “hopeful” tree break located behind Design No. III.



year of school. In Burt County, if students did have a text of some kind, the McGuffey Eclectic reader series was the most likely.<sup>42</sup>

Most classes were focused on very basic lessons for their students (see table 4.1). Other than perhaps offering time up for singing or a small class play, students and teachers focused on reading, writing, and basic arithmetic. Recitation was one of the most common methods of learning as multiplication tables might be sung and spelling was certain to be repeated again and again. As most classrooms in the early days were meant to serve one and all, the variety of ability was wide. Some students could read but not write. Some students were older than the teachers (or only a year or two younger) and some teachers had very little training. In Columbus, Platte County, John Turner remembered a teacher who was hired in 1871 after having one two-month term of school herself! At the time, if you could prove that you could pass McGuffey's sixth reader, that was often enough to secure employment. Teachers were usually far outnumbered and faced issues ranging from how to get through lessons to discipline issues. In both cases, teachers often leaned on older students to help out whether that meant reciting with younger ones outside of the main classroom, or keeping peers in line.<sup>43</sup>

Food and pay were problematic for these early instructors as well. The pay was small to begin with, and not exactly guaranteed. Teachers might reside with a student's family for a whole term, or move from home to home staying the longest in homes that had the largest number of children. Home-made molasses and corn bread were reported as the most common food and in an extreme case, a diet of nothing but milk and parched wheat was available! One instructor remembered that he received twenty dollars a month

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<sup>42</sup> Nebraska Writers' Project, *Pioneer Schools*, 10, 11; John H. Westerhoff, *McGuffey and His Readers: Piety, Morality, and Education in Nineteenth-Century America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978).

<sup>43</sup> Nebraska Writers' Project, *Pioneer Schools*, 11-13, 14.

**Table 4.1:** Subjects taught in Nebraska Territorial schools as of December 1860<sup>44</sup>

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>
Alphabet	254
Algebra	20
Orthography	1614
Geometry	9
Reading	1574
Composition	114
Penmanship	715
Declamation	274
Mental Arithmetic	580
Drawing	13
Written Arithmetic	583
Vocal Music	284
Geography	482
Rhetoric	11
English Grammer (sic!)	258
Astronomy	9
History	53
Physical Geography	5
Natural Philosophy	34
Latin	18
Chemistry	6
Greek	1
Physiology	42
French	2

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<sup>44</sup> *Second Annual Report of the Commissioner of Common Schools*, 5-6.

in term and could stay one week at a time with various settlers. When he was through one group of settlers, he began again at the top of the list. For his troubles, he recalled getting a good appreciation for the various cooking and cleaning habits of his neighbors.

### **Richardson County**

Sarah Crook first attended school in a log cabin about one and a half miles from her home. The school was one large room and had a large fireplace. There were only a few children attending in Sarah's first few years. Sarah recalled that Mrs. Samuel was her first teacher and her second was David Hooper. Sarah studied spelling, reading, writing, and ciphering. She used Webster's speller, wrote with goose quill pens and used a copy book as a guide to writing. Sarah remembered using the Spencerian system in her copy book. Years later, the one copy that stood out in Sarah's mind was: "Do Your Best You Old Rip, by Jingos."<sup>45</sup>

As early as 1858 there was a small school in Falls City where Miss Barnum taught. In 1859, David Dorrington, Anderson Miller, and Thomas McIntire organized a school district for the small town. It was here that David Dorrington's son Fred taught during the terms in 1859 and 1860. In 1861, a small schoolhouse was built close to Falls City's public square. The new building was an improvement and could hold a larger number of students, but was still a rather simple affair. The building was also used as a court room and as a host for entertainments and shows. In the mid 1860s, a plan to build a larger structure was put on hold when somebody stole the lumber that had been purchased for the task. Unfortunately, the old schoolhouse had already been sold, so for about one year, the Falls City community was without a school. The district ultimately

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<sup>45</sup> *Illustrated Richardson County*, supplement to *Falls City Journal* October 15, 1919 located in a manila folder in an unnumbered hanging folder, Nebraska State Historical Society, 7

repurchased the property, and the building remained as a schoolhouse until 1871 when W. S. Stretch purchased it and turned it into a home. In the spring of 1870, a larger building was put up at the cost of \$2,500. Jonathan Spragins was the contractor and put up a building with two floors. Each floor was intended to allow the district to divide up the children to a degree which was an improvement over the idea of having all students regardless of ability in one space. Almost immediately, Falls City's children overwhelmed the new construction. By 1872, a third and fourth department were organized and students were taught in the basement of the Episcopal Church and at the Baptist Church. Finally, in the late 1870s, Falls City constructed yet another building which housed two different primary, grammar, and intermediate departments, and one high school.<sup>46</sup>

In Humboldt, the first school was taught in a building belonging to town founder Oliver J. Tinker. Tinker and others in the small community raised a sum of \$300 and established a small stone schoolhouse in which ten scholars labored. Oliver's son Edward Tinker was the first teacher. As in many smaller towns throughout Nebraska, the "Grand School" as it was known was more than just a place for educating the town's youth. The building served as a church, town hall and opera house until 1872 when a new building was proposed at the cost of ten times that of the original. As can happen in construction projects, the costs ballooned and the new building eventually was completed for \$5,000. The residents surrounding Humboldt purchased bonds equal to construction costs and earning ten per cent interest over ten years in order to finance this structure.

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<sup>46</sup> A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1310, 1311. The new construction was not completed before students required use of the space due to a disagreement between contractor Joseph H. Burbank and the school board. While a universally well-regarded building was produced, it was far costlier than anything previously constructed. Burbank had won the bid at \$19,000.

This is a strong example of the community's willingness to invest in education.<sup>47</sup>

Along the Missouri River in Rulo, the initial school was taught in 1860. This first edifice of education was a subscription school, in which students paid a fee directly to the instructor for the term. In 1861, a public school was taught by T. V. Thomas. Rulo residents came together and raised \$450 for the construction of the building. Like other communities in Richardson County, the citizens of Rulo soon had need of a larger school. Rulo's residents financed the operation through bonds issued in the amount of \$3,400 with an additional \$1,000 raised by going directly to the residents of Rulo for donations. In the new building, which opened in 1867, students were divided into departments as would be done in Falls City. The first teacher in the new building was L. Messler who was assisted by two unnamed women.<sup>48</sup>

By 1870, Salem decided to raise the funds to construct a public schoolhouse. Education in Salem began as early as 1856, but a public schoolhouse was not financed in the first fourteen years of Salem's existence. In William Davis's home, Mrs. Hutchinson of Falls City taught students during that first year. Mr. Currence taught for one term in 1857 at the end of which point a hole appears in Salem's educational record until 1860, when Mrs. Leaveritt taught her classes at an unidentified private home in the community. For the next ten years, Salem's school children attended classes in different homes and were taught by a succession of teachers. In 1865 Emma Stout ran the school and the following year Pierce Tisdell was in charge. Perhaps some romance evolved in the classroom as Tisdell and Stout were married soon afterwards. Finally in 1870 the community borrowed the funds to construct a public schoolhouse. Like the residents of

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<sup>47</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1320-1321; Arington, *History of Humboldt*, 10, 11.

<sup>48</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1325.

Rulo and Falls City, Salem's citizens found that a plan to spend a certain amount of money was one thing, but the reality was often quite another. The building was to cost \$2,000 but costs quickly soared to \$5,000. Unlike the other two larger towns in Richardson County, Salem borrowed all of the money rather than selling bonds.<sup>49</sup>

Numerous schoolhouses were opened throughout the rural areas of Richardson County as well. Several examples will furnish the sense that at times, school construction and operation in the farming communities could be just as haphazard as in some of the towns. In 1866, Amanda Davis and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Mathias Davis moved to Richardson County. There was no school at the time but in the manner that became a sign of community building throughout the region Mrs. Davis offered the use of her kitchen to neighborhood children and families interested in beginning a school. That first winter, Miss Matilda Vanderverter taught the school while boarding with the family of Joseph Noel. Miss Vanderverter taught about twenty students in the house of the Davis family. The building was a combination log house with weatherboarding and frame construction. Vanderverter's students met in the frame end of the home, borrowing an old cook stove for heat. Parents from the neighborhood supplied the necessary wood for fuel and cottonwood slabs served as benches. A separate schoolhouse was built by the community in 1867 and 1868.<sup>50</sup>

In the spring term 1862, a rural school was taught in a private home by Jane Cooper. The next term Miss Cooper taught was not until 1864. She worked in another private home, that being William M. Osmon's log house. Osmon was later the moderator

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<sup>49</sup> Salem Benefit Club, *Early History of Salem, Nebraska*, unpublished manuscript, University Archives/Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, special folio; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1330.

<sup>50</sup> D. L. Wyaman, *History of Rural Education in Richardson County, Nebraska 1860-1990* (Marceline, MO: Walsworth Publishing, 1990), 18.

for the formal school district established in spring 1870. In 1868, Frances McLain taught on the east bank of what was called Sardine Creek in an unidentified private home. The schools in this region met for three months per term, but only three such terms took place between 1862 and 1868. Whether this was for want of students or finances is unclear. Regardless, the community did eventually organize a district and included sections 26, 27, 34, and 35 in Township 3 North, Range 15 East. Although a building was not constructed expressly for students until the fourth of July 1872, instruction for these rural residents of Richardson County was more consistently available once the school district was organized.<sup>51</sup>

Regardless of whether Richardson County residents lived in towns of 300 to 500 people or in rural districts where there might be five to ten families in a four square mile area, schooling was thought to be an important part of community building. The finances were pulled together through subscriptions, donations, or bond sales. The people provided fuel, food, and shelter for the teachers. During the terms offered, young people ranging in age from five to twenty-one could take advantage of the opportunities for basic instruction.

### **Burt County**

J. R. Conkling a physician from Illinois and Mrs. W. B. Newton were the first teachers at Tekamah in 1857. This initial foray into public education met in a log cabin owned by Peter Kettleison. The schools of Tekamah met at various private homes for many years, although by 1864 a log schoolhouse had been established on the southeast corner of W. B. Newton's farm. In 1867, a twenty by thirty foot building was financed by taxes to serve the community for about six years. It was not until 1873 that a two

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<sup>51</sup> Wyaman, *History of Rural Education*, 63.

story frame schoolhouse was built by J. R. Sutherland and Sanford West. A school tax levy administered by the county of two mills in 1859 and six mills in 1860, indicated a growing interest in sponsoring education in the growing community.<sup>52</sup>

To the north and along the Missouri River, Decatur residents met in March 1860 and voted to organize a school. Thomas H. Whitacre, A. B. Fuller, and H. B. Gaylord received enough votes of the thirty-eight cast to serve as the first directors. On March 6, 1860, the school board had its first meeting in the home of H. B. Gaylord. The three men decided to do an enumeration of children in the community and Gaylord and Whitacre were assigned to complete the task. On October 9, 1860, the board met at A. B. Fuller's home and the enumeration list was presented. The Decatur school district was defined as including students within township twenty-three and the northern portion of township twenty-two. Gaylord and Whitacre found sixty-one children eligible for education ranging in age from five to twenty. There were no blind, idiotic, deaf, or dumb in the precinct among the children.<sup>53</sup>

The school board gave the sum of \$310 to be spent over a year, hoping to have children in school for nine months. The teacher's salary was to use \$180 of the budget while the remainder would be broken down as follows: \$36 for rent, \$20 for a stove pipe, \$5 for stationery and a blackboard, \$15 for seating, \$12 for maps, \$27 for fuel, and \$15 for a teacher's desk or table. Shortly before the first term of school opened, it was

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<sup>52</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume I, 403; Mrs. Dee Valder, Elmer Olinger, and Frederic Hemphill, eds. *Tekamah, 1854-1954* (Tekamah, NE: Tekamah Chamber of Commerce, 1954), 21, 24, 88, 157; Ludi Brothers, *History of Burt County*, 88.

<sup>53</sup> John Wesley Cunningham, "History of Decatur, Nebraska to 1909" (MA thesis, University of Nebraska, 1934), 53, 54. Although much of Cunningham's thesis is largely a repetition of A. P. DeMilt's *Story of an Old Town, with Reminiscences of Early Nebraska and Biographies of Pioneers* (Omaha: Douglas Printing Co., 1902), his work on Decatur's schools is full of interesting information. Cunningham had access to the school director's record for Decatur as well as several other unpublished sources and private letters. Because of Cunningham's material, the most detailed school history of all three counties by far exists for Decatur, Burt County.



decided to create a sub school district for the children of families living in the northern portion of township twenty-two. In Decatur the first term of school opened November 21, 1860 and ran until March 22, 1861. Mrs. A. R. Canfield was the first teacher and received \$15 per month in salary. Her classes had a total enrollment of eighteen and an average attendance of thirteen. Among Mrs. Canfield's first students were T. R. Ashley, Lizzie Lambert, Will Hobbs and his sister Beatrice, Gertie Fuller, James and Tim Calnon, Lizzie Thompson, and Albert Kline. The sub-district opened for classes in January 1861, serving twelve students. At Decatur, a second term ran from June 17, 1861 until September 12, 1861. Vocal music was added to the coursework and Miss Alice Perry was employed at a rate of \$12 per month. While these terms ended the year two months shy of the hoped for nine months of education, the community of Decatur was far ahead of other towns in Burt, Richardson, or Platte counties.<sup>54</sup>

In 1862 and 1863, Decatur schools observed short sessions as a lack of funding combined with parents keeping older children working on their farms during planting and harvesting time. The winter and mid-summer terms continued to be the most successful. This trend continued into 1864 when the session running from June 15 until September 10 was most popular. Both the sub-district school and the main school in Decatur offered the same types of courses that year. The main books used by the schools were Sanders' Pictorial, Spellers, and Reading series, Smith's Grammar, Spenser's Penmanship, and Kay's Arithmetic (see figure 4.2). Such books were commonly available across the United States throughout much of the nineteenth century. In Nebraska, Sanders's work had been recommended early on by the Territorial Commissioner of Common Schools, William E. Harvey. Harvey had hoped that communities throughout Nebraska might

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<sup>54</sup> Cunningham, *History of Decatur*, 55,56; Ludi Brothers, *History of Burt County*, 59.

adopt the same textbooks. Not only might this bring uniformity to the education process in Nebraska, but it could lead to the schools aiding the build up of community as pupils from across townships and even from different counties would have something in common to draw upon when building relationships.<sup>55</sup>

On May 20, 1865, the board of education in Decatur Township asked voters to consider levying a special tax of one cent on the dollar of property value to be applied to sub-district one. The tax was approved as was an additional two mill tax on the dollar to be used for other expenses. This money would be put to good use in the next few years as student attendance was on the rise. When Decatur school opened its doors that fall on November 15, 1865, Miss Kitty Shaw counted thirty students. Over the coming year, three new sub-districts were formed as schools were opened near sections twenty-three and thirty-one, as well as sections nineteen and twenty. Each sub-district had its own board of directors under the jurisdiction of the Decatur Township board of education. The main board of education in Decatur levied all the appropriate taxes and gave out the money. The year after the expansion, the town treasurer showed that \$654.12 in repairs and construction was done in Decatur. In spring 1867, a tax of two mills was levied on taxable property intended for use by the schools.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Cunningham, *History of Decatur*, 57; Nebraska Territorial Government, *Commissioner of Commons Schools*, 194-196.


<sup>56</sup> Cunningham, *History of Decatur*, 58, 59; Nebraska Territorial Government, *Commissioner of Commons Schools*, 189, 190. Writing seven years earlier than the changes described in Decatur, the commissioner, William E. Harvey, expressed grave concern over an apparent lack of willingness to pay taxes related to education, books, etc. among some people. Harvey argued emphatically that when it comes to education and reading these factors should be too important for people to argue over one or two mills on taxable property.

**Figure 4.2:** Lessons X and XI, from Charles W. Sanders, *The School Reader. First Book: Containing Easy Progressive Lesson in Reading and Spelling*<sup>57</sup>

14 SANDERS' NEW SERIES.

LESSON X.

sing	cross	harsh	boys	hawk
lark	bird	voice	girls	crow




1. The jay can not sing as well as the lark.
2. The jay is a cross bird. It has a harsh voice.
3. Bad boys and girls, like bad birds, do not like to sing.
4. Good boys and girls like to sing.
5. The hawk and crow do not sing.

Can you sing?

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LESSON XI.

fall	horns	grass	trees	thick
grown	dark	herbs	flesh	warm
elks	keen	twigs	skins	gloves



1. A full grown elk is as large as a horse.
2. Elks have large horns, and dark, keen eyes.
3. They feed on grass, herbs, and the twigs of small trees.
4. Their flesh is good for food, and their skins make thick, warm gloves.

<sup>57</sup> Charles W. Sanders, *The School Reader. First Book: Containing Easy Progressive Lessons in Reading and Spelling* reprint (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Digital Research Library, 1999), <http://digital.library.pitt.edu>, accessed August 4, 2007.

In 1868, a change to public schools in Nebraska was introduced as the state legislature passed new laws altering the organization of the common schools. The new law created the position of a county superintendent and changed the old township organization to one based on districts. The school in Decatur proper became the seventh district. Leading this new system into the 1870s were board members Robert Ashley, B. Park, and A. Rockwell. The old sub-districts of the township system became separate rural districts directly under the supervision of the county superintendent. In some ways, this change may have had both good and bad effects on the communities. With the new system, bigger towns like Decatur could, in some ways put the rural districts in an “out of sight, out of mind” place. Beforehand, officials had to directly concern themselves with the educational needs of those who lived outside the immediate boundaries of the towns. It could be argued that such a concern, forced as it may have been, fostered a sense of connection and community between town and out of town folks.<sup>58</sup>

By the end of the 1860s, Decatur’s schools were still on the rise. By mid-term in February 1868, Decatur school had enrolled forty-three males and thirty-six females for a total of seventy-nine students. Although average attendance was only about forty-nine pupils, Miss Rosabelle Laughlin taught a wide array of courses (see table 5.2). Laughlin was paid \$40 per month between November 1867 and April 1868. She reported her students’ deportment as “fair to middling.” A new session opened on May 11, 1868, running for three months with instructor Emma Benjamin at the helm. Benjamin received the same rate of pay as had Laughlin. In 1869, the Decatur district added a two mill tax to create a specific teacher’s fund and a three mill tax to cover additional school expenses. School funds ran very low that year as expenses of repairs, fuel, and an

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<sup>58</sup> Cunningham, *History of Decatur*, 59, 60.

increase to a \$45 monthly salary for new teacher Mary Force, a twenty-four year old native of Pennsylvania whose father Benjamin was a moderately successful farmer living west of Decatur.<sup>59</sup>

At the annual meeting held at the schoolhouse on April 4, 1870, Watson Parrish, a lawyer born in Tennessee, was elected moderator of the school district for a three-year term. Parrish would work alongside farmer Dan Griffin, a native of New York. Here were a Southerner and a Northerner working together to help educate the community's youth. A tax of two mills on the dollar for teacher salaries was assigned, as was ten mills on the dollar for repairs, furnishings, fuel, back debt and a new expense; officers of the district were now to be paid a modest stipend. Over the next few years, the district would agree to order new desks for the pupils as well as a desk for the teacher.

Another farmer from New York, S. C. Smith, took over from Dan Griffin to act as treasurer, and the district board disagreed with one another about how to raise more money. District members wanted to pay salaries in a timely fashion, but had failed to do so in 1870. The district wanted to attempt to run school for ten months out of the year, but was not sure about either having enough funds or how to get the money in the first place. Despite such concerns and debates, for the good of the community, school continued at Decatur. As the 1870s began, the district was successful at having two sessions add up to nine months, just shy of the desired ten. Finally, in fall 1873, the Decatur district decided to put a "graded school" into place, changing the nature of education in the county in a permanent fashion.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Cunningham, *History of Decatur*, 60,61; United States Census Bureau, *Ninth Census, 1870*.

<sup>60</sup> Cunningham, *History of Decatur*, 61-63; United States Census Bureau, *Ninth Census, 1870*.

**Table 4.2:** Subject matter offered and numbers enrolled at Decatur School, 1868<sup>61</sup>

Subject	Number of Students
Alphabet	8
Orthography	72
Reading	72
Penmanship	10
English Grammar	21
Composition	2
Declamation	79
Mental Arithmetic	47
Written Arithmetic	25
Primary Geography	20
Common School Geography	8
History	18
Vocal Music	79

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<sup>61</sup> Cunningham, *History of Decatur*, 60.

## Platte County

Despite an early enumeration of potential students in October 1860, very little schooling took place in Platte County until after 1865. The Columbus Town Company house was donated as a potential school. It was a log construction with a grass roof but served as the school building for only a few short months before being sold to Charles Speice as potential firewood. George Stevens was the first teacher in Columbus to draw a salary, getting paid \$67.45 for his duties. Early Columbus resident I. N. Taylor speculated that the reason there was not much to tell about Platte County's early educational life was due to the "incorrigible bachelors" in town like Carl Reinke (before he married Anne Pilling), John Becker and so forth. When Stevens was teaching, he pulled in pupils from the Rickly family, the Weavers, Jacob Ernst's children, and the Wolfels. Some Columbus students came from outside of town, though Luther North recalled heading back to Omaha for schooling in his early days in Columbus's outskirts.<sup>62</sup>

The school records show in a general way some progress made by efforts at increasing educational opportunities in Platte County. Between 1861 and 1865, the school funds grew from \$157.34, barely over one dollar per eligible student in the community to \$821.80 or about \$4.15 per potential pupil. In the latter year, I. N. Taylor was made superintendent of public schools in Columbus and former teacher George W. Stevens became a member of the district board, acting as secretary and librarian. Henry J. Hudson, Charles A. Speice, Michael Weaver, and Johanna Bauer all served as teachers. The town hall was used as the meeting room. Throughout the 1860s county commissioner reports, there are indications that schools were subject to discussion. One

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<sup>62</sup> Taylor, *Early History*, 20-21.

or two mills per assessed dollar value would be assigned every meeting to construction of schools or teacher salaries or general school funds, but the schools themselves were few and far between until the mid 1870s. The school fund itself leapt to \$1,433.21 in 1867 significantly higher than 1865 or 1866. As the Union Pacific railroad's path passed by Columbus's door, a steady upward trend continued and in 1876, there were thirty-two schools and a fund of \$18,742.52 for the 1,677 eligible students.<sup>63</sup>

A central debate on the origins of schooling in America focuses on the essential question of why have schools in the first place. Historians have suggested that schooling and reform of the same in antebellum America was motivated by issues ranging from ideology to humanitarianism or even a budding sense of responsibility to contribute to meritocracy in America.<sup>64</sup> Other historians disagree, believing that reform and school crafting was more often an imposition of upper and middle class values on others. In particular, the school and changes wrought upon it were seen as a bailiwick against the new social dangers emerging in a society that was both industrializing and urbanizing. Such reformers were "joined and supported by middle-class parents anxious about the status of their children."<sup>65</sup> Still others note that school creation, support, and reform did not necessarily arise from the capitalist element of society using schools to create a docile working class.<sup>66</sup> In many ways, school origins and support for these alleged bastions of

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<sup>63</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2 1270; Taylor, *Early History*, 21-22; County Commissioner Reports, various meeting dates 1859-1864, Record Group 267, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>64</sup> Ellwood Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States* 1919 reprint 1934; Paul Monroe, *A Brief Course in the History of Education* 1932.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 213; also discussed in R. Freeman Butts, "Public Education and Political Community," *History of Education Quarterly* 14, No. 2 (Summer 1974), 165-183; Michael Katz, "The Origins of Public Education: A Reassessment," *History of Education Quarterly* 16, No. 4 (Winter 1976), 381-387.

<sup>66</sup> Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic, Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983). Kaestle believed that society and economy influenced education reform both



democratic, republican, and Protestant Christian values were heavily conflict driven. Partially, this could be explained as the dichotomy between somewhat contradictory purposes of education. This contradiction brings us back to the debate among historians of education. Was school intended to equalize society by offering access to political and intellectual material or was its purpose to keep the working citizens in their place? If the former, then perhaps some of the working class learned that school could lead to liberation.<sup>67</sup>

While compulsory laws were the order of the day by the 1850s to clean up the permissive nature of schooling pre-1830 and reformers in the East were shuddering at immigrants, the schools of Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties were formed in a slightly different atmosphere.<sup>68</sup> In Platte County for example, the schools were founded upon the labor and with the support of the largely immigrant community.

Because education reformers were convinced that "environment has prime influence in forming mind and character" educators wanted to "usher in a new and better society."<sup>69</sup> The main concern and idea was that the environment of the Eastern city was the wrong place for some children and even family homes might be the wrong place if

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in terms of curriculum and order, but it was not a singular motivating force. On the other hand, Kaestle believed that schools were not simply creations of benevolence either.

<sup>67</sup> Joel Spring, *The American School: 1642-2000* 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2001), 1-2, 58-82, 86-92; John L. Rury, *Education and Social Change, Themes in the History of American Schooling* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2002), chapters three and four in particular deal with the origins of the modern school system, conflicts within, and issues dealing with social changes for gender and race in terms of education in the nineteenth century; Paul Theobald, *Call School, Rural Education in the Midwest to 1918* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), chapters one and two in particular examine conflict in school creation, largely focusing on questions of religious connections to common schools and how the incredible impermanence of life on the plains meant a shifting rural society and constantly evolving notions of how to approach questions of education; Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School: The Story of Rural Education in the Middle West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 23-24 referencing Edward Beecher's belief that the common school would allow republican values, literacy, and Christianity to be embraced in communities.

<sup>68</sup> Katz, *Irony*, 214, 215.

<sup>69</sup> Katz, *Irony*, 216.

certain influences were found to be prominent there. In these three Nebraska communities, while influential residents may have pushed for and supported the creation of public schools, it would be difficult to argue that these schools were designed to "simultaneously promote economic growth and prevent the consequences that industrialism had brought in other societies."<sup>70</sup> Unlike their fellow Americans, early Nebraskans looked to schools as a way of promoting growth of a different kind. The development of schools was not initially believed to be a struggle for control over neither individual families nor even broader community concerns focused on the economy. These schools, however infrequently they met, however incomplete their lesson plans were truly more about fostering community.

These small Nebraska towns and rural counties were communities, no matter the arguments of Richard Hofstadter to the contrary.<sup>71</sup> As Wayne Fuller argued in reference to Kansas and the frontier in general, these communities coming under construction were not completely new structures. People brought with them traditions and family structure as well as an understanding of community. Schools, argued Fuller, were an integral part of this neighborhood building. After all in Kansas and in Nebraska it was the local population who had to make decisions about who would serve on the school board, how long school would be in session, the tax rate, salary scales for instructors, and construction of the very buildings.<sup>72</sup> Even when the territorial government got involved,

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<sup>70</sup> Katz, *Irony*, 217.

<sup>71</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (1955), 45-46. Although a bit outside the period of this study, Hofstadter believed the frequent movements of farmers combined with no "villages" in the European rural sense meant that American farmers tended toward individualism over community.

<sup>72</sup> Wayne E. Fuller, "School District 37: Prairie Community," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 12, No. 4 (October 1981), 420-423.

as was the case in Nebraska, for many years it was left up to the local districts to make these decisions.

To come to these decisions then, the citizens had to demonstrate willingness to compromise and build something for the greater good of everyone. As has been demonstrated, the residents of Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties did not come from one region of the United States. Indeed, they did not even all originate within the United States, so people who might not always see eye to eye had to meet and discuss what would happen in their schools. This is the essence really of the local school district and an extremely important element in fostering community in these Great Plains counties.

Miles to the south and east of Platte County, the Union Pacific railroad had an impact on the life of Richardson County's Ira Draper as well. In 1865, Ira Alexander Draper's father, who was primarily a farmer, sought extra income as was not uncommon among many frontier settlers. The senior Draper subcontracted from Stephen B. Miles to carry mail on a forty mile stretch through Nebraska. The route was part of the express mail service from St. Joseph, Missouri to Sacramento, California. Ira and his brother John, aged fifteen and thirteen when they started this job, were to ride the mail from Falls City to Pawnee City, using a relay of ponies. Younger brother Robert, who was only ten at the time, was assigned the task of hostler for the family. Robert's duties included wrangling fresh ponies so that John and Ira could have fresh mounts at all times. The task was no easy one as the ponies were typically turned out onto unfenced fields for grazing! Ira remembered brother Bob complaining about some of the horses wandering as much as four or five miles away from home. The Draper house was close to the

Monond Post Office, which was roughly the halfway point for the trip, so the boys often made it home for meals and to see the rest of the family.<sup>73</sup>

Ira remembered that the mail would be picked up at Falls City and their horses carried as much as ninety-five pounds of mail. Whichever brother was riding would stop in Salem at Justus C. Lincoln and Daniel Holt's store and deliver or pick up mail there. The next stop was at the Miles ranch where a Miss Cook kept the mail. From there, the rider stopped at Monond near both the Draper house and the log cabin schoolhouse. The last stop in Richardson County was at Oliver J. Tinker's farm near what soon became Humboldt. Tinker or member of his family was in charge of the mail in that part of Richardson County for a number of years. Ira's first two months on the job meant three more stops after Tinker's farm. About nine miles west of Humboldt, he would make a drop and pick up at Table Rock. Another six miles and a turn to the south carried Draper to Pawnee City, and his final station was Gallagher Inn, another two miles west of Pawnee City. Whichever Draper boy was riding would head the roughly forty miles west one day, and turn around and come the forty miles east the next. When the route was changed, the last stop became David Butler's store in Pawnee City. Ira recalled enjoying listening to Mr. Butler speak about many interesting subjects. The riders were paid one dollar a day plus food and shelter. The job lasted for about seven months and not once was a delivery missed. Once the Union Pacific Railway reached Fort Kearny the need for carrying the mail dissipated. Although Ira Draper remembered putting on some

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<sup>73</sup> "Ira D. Draper and Family"; Ira Alexander Draper, biographical sketch written by Ira's daughter Grace D. Schlosser, Record Group 0963, Nebraska State Historical Society.

additional rides as stunts, the completed railroad made the need to carry mail in that manner obsolete.<sup>74</sup>

John Pilcher was born, probably near Council Bluffs in 1834. He was the son of Joshua Pilcher a fur trader, interpreter, and commissioner of Indian affairs and a woman named Poporine. John's mother was the daughter of Michel Barada and an Omaha woman named Po-po-pin. This union, although producing but one child, unknowingly created a link between future residents of Burt and Richardson counties. Michel Barada, or Michel de Baradat, as will be explored in the next chapter was also the father of legendary Richardson County strong man Antoine Barada. As Po-po-pin's daughter and Antoine were half-siblings, John Pilcher was the nephew of Antoine Barada. John's mother died soon after he was born; she was probably all of twenty-three years old at the time and succumbed to cholera. Joshua Pilcher did not raise the child. Instead, the infant was placed in the care of Omaha leader Big Elk. While Pilcher was always his family name, John had little contact with father Joshua for the next ten years, and practically no relationship with Joshua from that moment for the rest of his life.<sup>75</sup>

When Harriet Arlington married John Pilcher, the two bought property from Henry Fontenelle and moved to the Omaha Agency. John was employed by the government at the time, perhaps as an interpreter. They resided there for one year but also owned property in Burt County. About seven miles south of Decatur, the Pilchers maintained a farm for seven years. By this time, Harriet's father Aaron had sold his land on Logan Creek to John Oaks – the town that developed in the area could just as well

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<sup>74</sup> Draper, Record Group 0963, Nebraska State Historical Society; Arlington, *History of Humboldt*, 18.

<sup>75</sup> Joel Brink, *The Barada Story: Pioneers in a New Land* (Seattle: Reischling Press, Inc., 2005), 17, 34; John E. Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher, Fur Trader and Indian Agent* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 107-108; Miscellany, Record Group 1352, Series 5, Folder 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

have been named Arlington, but instead, it is known as Oakland. Aaron Arlington moved closer to the Missouri River, buying timberland at \$1.25 per acre just below Decatur, a bit north of the Pilcher's farm. Shortly before getting married, John Pilcher had purchased some land in Richardson County, adding just under eighty acres to his holdings on May 5, 1859. Whether Pilcher chose to make this purchase because of family connections to the Baradas in the vicinity is unknown, but seems like a strong possibility.<sup>76</sup>

After seven years of farming south of Decatur, Harriet and John sold their land at a good profit and moved back to the Burt County community Harriet had first settled in when her family moved north from Omaha. The Pilchers lived briefly at this location among the new wave of Swedish immigrants who had moved into the area. Aaron Arlington died in 1873, but her sick mother, who had been advised to move west for her health lived another thirty years before dying at age ninety-six. Harriet and John had ten children and in the 1870s moved back to the Omaha Reservation where John was issued a share of land and money. The couple and their children remained prominent members in the Omaha community for the rest of their lives.<sup>77</sup>

Living and working among the Pawnees created risks for the Norths and other residents of Columbus like Luther North's friend and neighbor German immigrant Adam Smith. Luther and Adam both worked on the Pawnee Reservation west of Columbus from time to time. In 1860 and 1861, Luther hauled wood for the government sawmill. Carl Reinke's wife worked for the agent at Genoa. Frank North worked as a clerk and interpreter on the Pawnee Reservation. The relationship between Columbus residents and

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<sup>76</sup> Pilcher, "My Pioneer Life"; United States General Land Office Tract Books, Volume 149, Record Group 509, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>77</sup> Pilcher, "My Pioneer Life"; Miscellany, Record Group 1352, Series 5, Folder 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

other native residents of the plains region however, was not so close. The Pawnees and their eastern neighbors the Omahas were supposed to be protected by the government from attacks by Lakotas and Dakotas yet by 1862, summer bison hunts and even simple farming was becoming a challenge. In June 1862, Luther North lost his hat and very nearly his life when a small band of Lakotas attacked Pawnees only a quarter mile from a trading post. A Pawnee woman working in the fields near Luther was caught and killed by one of the Lakota warriors who had pursued Luther. Neighbor Adam Smith later told Luther he saw a Lakota at Fort Kearny wearing Luther's straw hat.<sup>78</sup>

In December 1863, after serving in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Nebraska Cavalry for about thirteen months, Luther North returned home to Columbus. Brothers James and Frank had taken up adjoining lands a bit outside of town and continued farming as another source of income. Both older Norths were also working as part-time freighters, running loads between Omaha and Columbus, Columbus and Fort Kearny, and Omaha and Fort Kearny. Jane North, Sarah and Alphonsene all resided with Frank. When Frank went to work as a clerk for the trader at the Pawnee Reservation, Luther bought his wagon and four horses and took over the freighting jobs. Adam Smith worked with Luther from time to time. On his first trip, Luther recalled carrying 3,000 pounds of corn from Columbus to Fort Kearny for three and a half cents per pound. Smith brought about the same weight of corn on this trip. In what became a problematic journey, the two men suffered severe frostbite, nearly lost some horses, and had to work almost an entire day to free one of the wagons that fell through some ice within about one mile of the fort. The two Columbus residents, German immigrant and Ohio boy worked together to pull the wagon from the ice and help both their families out by making that corn delivery. Both

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<sup>78</sup> Danker, ed. *Man of the Plains*, 9-10.

men had to take a number of weeks off afterwards to “thaw out” and allow their faces and feet to heal. Adam Smith lost all the nails off his toes.<sup>79</sup>

In the summer of 1864, Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and Brulés attacked a number of stagecoaches, travelers, and ranches in the central and western reaches of the Platte Valley. The military was preoccupied with the Civil War and could not protect either the Pawnees or their white neighbors. Columbus resident Pat Murray had a government contract to cut hay for troops stationed at the Pawnee Agency. Adam Smith, also Pat’s brother-in-law, worked alongside several hired men on the project. Pat’s wife Bridget cooked meals for the workers as they lived in tents near the fields. On a night when Pat was back in Columbus a group of Lakotas came to the tents and asked for food. After they were done eating, a man in the work crew who spoke their language asked the Lakotas what their intentions were and the group responded that they were riding to take some ponies from the Pawnees. The Lakotas then decided to take the mules from the haying party and attacked a number of the crew, killing Adam Smith. Mrs. Murray, though pierced with five arrows, survived to tell the story. Rumor flew throughout the valley and some people fled while others consolidated in Columbus where a local militia was founded, of which Luther North played a part. General Samuel Curtis came west to Columbus in the fall and suggested the idea of recruiting Pawnees to join the army and help out against attacking western tribes. Frank North, who was originally asked to be an interpreter for this planned unit of Pawnee scouts was later commissioned a captain and asked to enlist 100 Pawnees to the cause. This process took until January 1865 and involved more Columbus residents like Scottish immigrant James Murie who was married to a Pawnee woman. Luther North initially remained at home with the family so

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<sup>79</sup> Danker, ed. *Man of the Plains*, 16-18.



as not to leave his sisters and mother alone on Frank's farm. Luther continued his pattern of freighting in the winter and farming in the spring and summer before finally joining big brother Frank and the Pawnee scout unit in 1866, shortly after Frank's marriage to Mary Louise Smith.<sup>80</sup>

Nebraskans in Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties were building relationships and institutions throughout the 1850s and 1860s. Not only were they beginning to see the value and necessity of cooperating with one another in efforts towards building churches or schools, but they often explored, somewhat tentatively in some cases, relations with the native communities that shared their borders. As David Wishart has observed however, the latter relations were often much to the detriment of the native people. In particular, tribes like the Pawnees and Omahas faced multiple threats from unscrupulous white neighbors who essentially wanted them out of the way and their traditional enemies the Dakotas and Lakotas who harried their every step while the women attempted to farm or the men attempted the summer and winter bison hunts.<sup>81</sup> Not every white neighbor would be like Luther and Frank North or Harriet Arlington. In Richardson County, as has been previously discussed and will be demonstrated in more detail in the following chapter, the "neighborliness" of whites and natives was strained at best. The Otoe-Missourias, Ioways, and "half-breeds" of Richardson County were largely not a desirable community with which whites wished to share. Nebraskans may have looked to God in

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<sup>80</sup> James C. Olson and Ronald Naugle, *History of Nebraska* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); Dank, ed. *Man of the Plains*, 28-33, 37; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1266, 1267.

<sup>81</sup> Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*, 174-185. Wishart accurately and heart-breakingly tells what happens to the Pawnees who, even by 1870, were still attempting to live a very traditional lifestyle while trapped between their white neighbors and traditional native foes who now viewed them even more negatively because of their work in Frank North's Pawnee scout units.

many ways while building up their spiritual lives in this period, but they did not always look to Him for lessons in how to treat their fellow human beings.

## CHAPTER FIVE: “DR. DUNN WITHOUT YOUR HELP, I AM DEAD;” DEMOCRACY AND POLITICS IN NEBRASKA

Around 1780 Michel Barada was born, probably in or near the French settlement of St. Louis. His father died when he was young, but he had other family members surrounding him including a brother Antoine (named for the deceased pater familias) a sister and his mother, Marguerite Derosiers. Several years prior to Michel’s birth a girl known as Tae-gle-ha was born among the Omahas. Tae-gle-ha and Michel would meet years later and their union produced a striking and important figure who would later reside in Richardson County.<sup>1</sup>

As Michel Barada grew to young adulthood he worked as a trapper, trader, and interpreter, having picked up several languages in the polyglot St. Louis community. Perhaps around 1801 or 1802, Michel journeyed up the Missouri River to the land of the Omahas. It was there he met Tae-gle-ha and by 1803, the two had been married according to the customs of her people. Later, the two would be wed by a Jesuit priest. In 1804, the couple had their first child, a daughter named for Michel’s mother, Margaret. Margaret was born around what became Thurston County, Nebraska. On August 22, 1807, their first son was born. Michel and Tae-gle-ha called him Antoine and Mu-shy-num-pa-she. Although the couple had a third child together in 1813, and Michel fathered at least six additional children, he was not maintaining an exclusive relationship with Tae-gle-ha. As has been discussed previously, Michel had at least one child by another Omaha woman named Poporine. This child, a girl, would become the mother of John

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<sup>1</sup> Joel Brink, *The Barada Story: Pioneers in a New Land* (Seattle: Reischling Press, Inc., 2005), 6-7, 9.

Pilcher, making Pilcher a nephew of Antoine Barada.<sup>2</sup>

Antoine Barada grew up along the Missouri River spending his early life between tribal lands and trading posts. He spoke Omaha and French initially and picked up English along the way. Antoine's social life was mostly based around native and white fur traders, although he apparently spent some "urban" time in St. Louis. When Antoine was about seven, he was captured by a group of Dakotas in an attack upon the Omahas. For two years, Barada lived as a prisoner among the Dakotas. The story went that even at that young age, Antoine's unusual physical development and strength caused the Dakotas to keep a close eye upon him. During a visit by a trading party, Antoine was able to make his escape by explaining his situation to the traders who secured his release for ten horses. At this point, Barada was either sent or taken to St. Louis to prevent a repeat occurrence of his captivity.<sup>3</sup>

When Antoine was about eighteen years old, Michel Barada worked as an interpreter for the Otoe-Missourias at the first Treaty of Prairie du Chien. The elder Barada also worked at the second Treaty of Prairie du Chien five years later, this time for the Omahas. For a French-Omaha half-breed like Antoine, who was then living in an increasingly American world, treaties like Prairie du Chien were important. By the 1820s and 1830s, people like Antoine were largely thought of as not belonging to either the white or native communities. As a result these individuals often lacked property rights in either society. In theory Prairie du Chien in 1830 resolved this question by creating the

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<sup>2</sup> Brink, *The Barada Story*, 8-9, 10, 17; "Miscellany", Record Group 1352, Series 5, Folder 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>3</sup> Brink, *The Barada Story*, 37; Nebraska State Historical Society, *Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska State Historical Society* volume II (Lincoln: State Journal Company, 1887), 344.

Half-Breed Tract of about 138,000 acres for those caught between worlds.<sup>4</sup>

Antoine Barada remained in St. Louis for several years, probably until about 1832. He may have traveled up and down the Missouri River during that time, perhaps working in a group of hunters, but that fact is uncertain. When Antoine was twenty-nine years old he married a French woman named Marcellite Josephine Vien. In 1837, a year after their marriage, their first of nine children was born. By this time in his life, Antoine's fame along the Missouri River was steadily growing. Always a robust youth, as Antoine matured the stories of his strength and daring became the stuff of legends. In one such tale, Antoine was employed as a crew leader in a quarry near St. Louis owned by Whitnell and Coats. The men who worked in the quarries were all strong, tough, and stubborn. In an argument with one crew member as to how most efficiently work the quarry, Antoine proposed a strength test. If he lost, the protesting worker's methods would be employed. Supposedly, the man could not even budge the rock Barada proposed lifting. After observing the straining man for awhile, Barada urged the man aside, and in one heave lifted what was believed to be 1,700 to 1,800 pounds clear of the ground.<sup>5</sup>

After Marcellite Barada's sixth child was born in 1849, Antoine headed west to California in search of the gold that had captured the American mind at the time. He remained there for six years, mostly working as a scout and while he did not strike it rich, he did return with two pairs of gold earrings for Marcellite. On this journey, another legend was born. In California while looking for some water near a campsite, Barada

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<sup>4</sup> Brink, *The Barada Story*, 40-41;

<sup>5</sup> Brink, *The Barada Story*, xi, 11, 96, 97, 101-102; Nebraska State Historical Society, *Transactions*, volume II, 344; Lewis C. Edwards, *History of Richardson County, Its People, Industries, and Institutions*, volume I (Indianapolis, B. F. Bowen and Co., Inc., 1919), 191-192.

came across a man treed by a grizzly bear. Barada quickly shot the bear and awaited the descent of the frightened man. When he would not move, Barada climbed up the tree, took the man in one arm and brought him back to his camp to cook him breakfast and calm his nerves. Barada's advice was to select a bigger tree to climb if the hair-raising event should take place again.<sup>6</sup>

By 1853, while Antoine was away in California, about sixty beneficiaries of the stipulations of the Half-Breed Tract settled on lands in what would shortly become Nebraska Territory. In the next year or so, large numbers of whites were moving in to this land as well, including Sarah Crook and her family. To deal with this challenge, some "half-breeds" began to demand individual land title. This idea was worked into the treaty signed by the Omahas, including Antoine's uncle Wah-no-ke-ga, in March 1854. That same year, Antoine's mother passed away. No later than 1856, Antoine was back in Nebraska. He and Marcellite had welcomed their seventh child and over the next two years, their final two were born. Antoine's older sister Margaret moved to her claim of the land by November 1856. She noted that her brother Antoine was not particularly sociable and that Joseph Sharp (who had been assigned to take roll of "half-breed" land recipients was not particularly scrupulous. Margaret believed that both Sharp and his son sought to cheat everyone as much as possible. She noted angrily that Sharp was charging people \$5 to locate claims and make sure that their name was placed on the proper list.<sup>7</sup> This could create problems with the wrong people getting access to the lands. "Those French have all proved up," wrote Margaret, "and they have no more right here than a man that never saw an Indian in his life for their wives are Sioux...that they brought from

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<sup>6</sup> Brink, *The Barada Story*, 12; Nebraska State Historical Society, *Transactions*, volume II, 344-345.

<sup>7</sup> Brink, *The Barada Story*, 43, 44.

the Rocky Mountains.”<sup>8</sup>

Antoine’s sister had a right to be angry. The potential for losing access to land that had been promised was all too real. Margaret noted that Sharp was telling “half-breed” claimants they would receive about ten acres each if they were on the list whereas treaties indicated the number of acres would be significantly higher. The final list showed names, ages, and tribal affiliations of “half-breeds” to whom lands were allotted. Ultimately, about 122,000 acres was divided among 389 individuals. Fifty-one of the recipients had affiliations with the Omahas and twenty of those people were descendants of Michel Barada. Antoine Barada, his sisters and brothers, their children, and Antoine’s nephew John Pilcher, received a total of about 6,400 acres of land.<sup>9</sup>

In 1835, Frank Welch was born in the shadow of Breeds Hill, Charlestown, Massachusetts. When he was two years of age, his father died and he and his mother, Mary E. A. C. Brown moved to Bath Maine where they resided for the following eight years. Upon their return to Boston, Frank was enrolled at what was then called Boston High School. The school was well regarded, particularly for its instruction in Latin and mathematics.

Welch embarked on a professional apprenticeship in engineering with Parker and Pelton a firm located in Charlestown. One of Welch’s first jobs in this capacity was as a surveyor for the New York Central Railroad. He briefly lived in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin and then arrived in Decatur, Burt County in either 1856 or 1857.<sup>10</sup>

Welch served as the postmaster in Decatur and was also involved in some mercantile pursuits, although he was not particularly successful at the latter. At the opening session of the

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<sup>8</sup> Margaret Sloan to Thomas Sloan, December 26, 1856 in Brink, *The Barada Story*, 44.

<sup>9</sup> Brink, *The Barada Story*, 44, 45, 51, 52.

<sup>10</sup> A. P. De Milt, *Story of an Old Town, with reminiscences of early Nebraska and biographies of pioneers* (Omaha: Douglas Printing Co., 1902), 41, 42.

Decatur City Common Council, held at the home of S. B. Griswold, Frank Welch served as the recorder while city ordinances were drawn up by newly appointed attorney, W. W. Wilson. Another surveyor, Silas T. Leaming, had been chosen as mayor for the young town. Enthusiastically entering in the political life, and well-liked by his fellow residents Welch stood for office several times over the next decade or so of his life, occasionally having success. In 1860, he lost out to Adam Kerns and Silas T. Leaming to serve as one of the two councilmen in the city of Decatur. In 1863, Frank returned to the east briefly to get married. His wife was Miss Elizabeth Butts of Hudson, New York. The two would have five children together. When he returned to Nebraska, Frank Welch's political career took a turn and he was elected to the territorial council in 1864. In 1865 and 1866, Welch was a member of the territorial house of representatives, serving as the presiding officer in 1865. In 1871, he was appointed register of the United States Land Office, located just outside of Burt County in West Point. This particular political position tied in closely to Frank Welch's truly successful business enterprises.<sup>11</sup>

In 1859, Adam Beckly of Decatur certified that a mortgage was made and executed by Frank Welch in the amount of \$315.50. Recorded in the office of the register of deeds of Burt County and witnessed by A. B. Fuller and J. M. Phillips, this transaction was the earliest reference to Frank Welch's career outside of politics. Partnering with fellow Bay Stater Frank Stevens, between 1859 and the mid 1870s, Frank Welch built a considerable investment portfolio in farms, land, and residential properties in Burt, Cuming, Dodge, Holt, and Madison counties. In 1860, Stevens and Welch were two twenty-five year old single men residing in A. B. Fuller's hotel in Decatur. Between the two of them, the two men had real estate holdings worth about \$750 and personal estate in the range of \$550. By 1870, both men were married, Stevens to

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<sup>11</sup> De Milt, *Story of an Old Town*, 27, 79; Record Group 4457, Box 1, biographical note, Nebraska State Historical Society.



Stephen Decatur's step-daughter Abigail. Together, the Welch and Stevens families were now worth between \$16,000 and \$26,000 including personal and real estate. Frank Welch's success with his business partner had a lot to do with what everyone observed was a strong personal charm and charisma. This career also could not have been hurt by Welch's political ties.<sup>12</sup>

Charles Speice and Katharina Becher became husband and wife in Columbus, Platte County on May 31, 1860. Charles was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania in 1830 attending public schools in that community as well as Altoona College. He came to Omaha late in 1856, moving to Columbus the following summer. He worked as a carpenter, having learned the trade, and contracted to construct buildings in the new town. By the time he married Katharina Becher Speice was clerking in a store and owned about \$150 worth of real estate.<sup>13</sup>

Katharina was born at Pilsen, Bohemia around 1838 and was one of six children. Her father Gustavus Becher, Sr. was also born in Bohemia, probably in 1809. Mr. Becher brought his family to America in 1847. Passing through the port of New Orleans, the family initially lived in St. Louis. In 1857, after Gustavus's wife Josephine died, he moved the family to Columbus, the same year Charles Speice arrived. Although Mr. Becher was a merchant and credited with being the first such businessman in Columbus, in 1860 the enumerator listed him as owning neither real estate nor personal property. He lived with Katharina's youngest brother next door to where Katharina's new life with Charles Speice was beginning. Katharina's older brother Francis Gustavus Becher was twenty-eight in 1860 and apparently lived on his own. Because Francis, like his father,

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<sup>12</sup> "Financial Records, Bills of Sale," Record Group 4457, Box 1, Series 2, Folder 5, Nebraska State Historical Society; United States Census Bureau, *Nebraska Territorial Census 1860*; United States Census Bureau, *Ninth Census, 1870*.

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Curry, *The History of Platte County* (Culver City, CA: Murray and Gee, 1950), 901; United States Census Bureau, *Nebraska Territorial Census 1860*.

was listed in the census as a merchant and had holdings worth \$250 in real estate and \$2,000 in personal estate, it might be surmised that the elder Becher's business was doing fairly well and was simply recorded under his son's name.<sup>14</sup>

Around 1860, Charles Speice began to study law. He was soon admitted to the bar and in 1861 was elected as one of the County Commissioners, a position his father-in-law had held in 1859. Charles held this position until 1867 and again in the 1890s. His brother-in-law Francis Becher was elected in 1867, serving again in 1868 and 1869. The first year Charles served as a County Commissioner, he was the only one on the board of three born in the United States. Joseph Russell and Edward Gerrard had both come to America from England. The year before Speice was elected County Commissioner, he helped organize Columbus' first school district. A community builder, Speice was also active in organizing the Congregational Church society in Columbus. By the mid 1860s, Charles and Katharina were also parents of two children.<sup>15</sup>

National political decisions such as the Kansas-Nebraska Act clearly changed the future of Nebraska and its citizens. Territorial government made its presence felt as well. For most residents of Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties however, it was the activities of the county government that made the biggest impact. The governments and individuals holding political office within these counties could make decisions about many important issues. By the early 1860s, Falls City, Tekamah, and Columbus were the county seats and were important communities within the counties. In all three counties, government officials levied and collected taxes, ran the courts, enforced local, territorial,

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<sup>14</sup> Curry, *History of Platte County*, 596, 597, 901; United States Census Bureau, *Nebraska Territorial Census 1860*.

<sup>15</sup> Curry, *History of Platte County*, 425, 901; United States Census Bureau, *Nebraska Territorial Census 1860*.

and eventually state laws, commissioned road construction, and helped build schools. For the most part, the citizens of these communities interacted more frequently with county governments than the territorial or state government in Omaha and later Lincoln. County and local government made an effort to keep as many residents involved in government as possible.<sup>16</sup> That being the case, any government was seen as an entity that could: a.) cost money and b.) interfere with a man's independence. Like Washington County in Oregon, these three Nebraska counties were not faced with a pre-existing government.

In Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties, local government actively borrowed ideas from other states, and saw change evolve frequently as a result of local interests or desires. Original settlers in all three counties were most often the first chosen to lead. Several locally elected offices were sought and won, for example county clerk, sheriff, county commissioner, surveyor, judge of elections, clerk of elections, assessor, road supervisors, justice of the peace, treasurer, and so on. In many cases, the counties were also sending representatives to the territorial house and senate. Certainly in the case of Richardson County, constables and a justice of the peace were very quickly in place. As early as December 1855, Samuel Howard and David Thompson were being paid for guarding prisoners John Dunn and John Henderson as they awaited trial. The county also paid out fees for jurors to hear their case.<sup>17</sup>

The following spring, only two years after the creation of the territory, Richardson

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Bourke and Donald DeBats, *Washington County: Politics and Community in Antebellum America* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 95-115. The organization and material covered in this section relies on the work of Bourke and DeBats in general, but specifically to the whole of Chapter 4 of *Washington County*.

<sup>17</sup> Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 23, Nebraska State Historical Society. Samuel Howard worked for four days and was paid \$3. David Thompson had charge of the two prisoners for 17 days and was paid \$12.75. Jurors were paid various fees, both for attendance, and for mileage.

County dealt with the case of Jacob Whitmer and Jacob Spring. James Davis swore out a complaint against the two men, stating that Spring and Whitmer came at him in a riotous manner and used threats towards him. Davis also accused the men of making attempts to strike him with their axes. The case is an interesting one in that its existence shows us a portrait of the complexity of the community in Richardson County and it demonstrates the need for a governing body of some type to keep order. Jacob Whitmer was from Switzerland and did not speak English particularly well. James Davis's feelings towards the two men reveal a level of prejudice: "a low chunky male, dark complexion...a dutchman Jacob Whitmer came upon me." Whitmer and Spring, both of whom lived along the Rattlesnake Creek, pled guilty in part. Whitmer pointed out that while Spring made some motions with his ax towards James Davis, he did not threaten to kill James Davis. "I said that if he did not quit cutting timber there that he would get himself in trouble. Then he said that if we come down there anymore that he would shoot them goddamned dutchmens." The men were held on \$500 bail and the case then disappears from the record.<sup>18</sup>

The county had to address this case, which indicates that a system of law was in place through which such issues could be resolved. The county spent money on this case and employed at least two individuals to address the concerns. Pharagus Pollard acted as justice of the peace, and received payment for his services. There was also a constable, some money for a witness (usually a mileage payment), and court fees. Platte and Burt counties had cases as well, although the records seem to indicate a lower number than occurred in Richardson.

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<sup>18</sup> Record Group 245, Sub 9, Subseries 7, Box One, Criminal Cases 1856-1860, Nebraska State Historical Society.

County commissioners had various responsibilities and were perhaps seen as having the most broad governmental influence over the daily lives of citizens.

Commissioners were essential to running successful elections (a task at which they were not always the most skilled), paying the fees to members of juries or other office holders, and helping build or maintain roads and bridges.

Local government was only a part-time affair of course and examining the fees paid to elected officials bears this out. Each county had their own method of dividing responsibilities in terms of creating precincts, road districts, and so forth.

Central institutions were created but they were not necessarily static. County seats were highly sought after, for they might mean a guarantee of success for a community. In the case of Burt and Platte counties, this was not a real problem. As will be discussed in chapter six, there was no guarantee in Richardson County that Falls City would be the seat.

Central to the success of a county government was establishing a fair and stable taxation process. Funding for government action depended on this fact. Assessments varied in the three counties, but generally consisted of a poll tax, a county tax on assessed property, a school tax, and a territorial tax.

In the first years, each of the three counties were developing, a major concern of the citizens was to keep government costs down. The goal in minimizing budgets was to minimize taxation. For example, in only its second year of existence, Burt County assessed property at \$13,006 and collected a grand total of \$91.04 or about seven mills. In theory, these funds would then be used to pay fees for the probate judge, sheriff,

treasurer, surveyor, register, and two justices of the peace.<sup>19</sup>

The 1860 social statistics do not indicate any tax levied or collected in the previous year, a fact which bears out as partially true upon closer examination. In 1859 on July 11, the commissioners of Burt County met to discuss levying taxes. They had wanted to commit to a levy on the first of July and had failed to do so, falling short again on the fifth of July when no quorum was reached. The levy, when raised, amounted to five mills to the county, three mills to the territory, two mills to schools. All taxes were to be based on assessed property values. George P. Thomas, a native of New York, and Fred E. Lange, a native of Saxony, were commissioners at the time, while Jonathan Graves served as county clerk. Lange had been first elected in 1855 an amazing accomplishment given that he had first arrived in America in 1852.<sup>20</sup>

The levying of the taxes was one thing, spending money was another, and collecting the taxes themselves was a completely different story. Having carefully laid out plans in July 1859, the commissioners met January 15, 1860 to discuss the fact that the taxes for 1858 were in delinquency. Jesse Spielman, of Pennsylvania, acted as Burt's first treasurer. He reported that \$1,474.80 had been assessed in taxes in 1858 and \$43.69 had been paid. This left a deficit of \$1,431! After hearing of the tax woes, Burt County's leading citizens went on to enumerate the county's newest expenses, including fees for the treasurer, clerk, jurors, and others.<sup>21</sup>

The following June and July, the commissioners met to review the assessment roll, choose new supervisors for the road districts, and levy taxes. On July 2, 1860 it was

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<sup>19</sup> A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska* volume 1 (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1882), 401.

<sup>20</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 1, 406, 409; Record Group 205, Subgroup 3, Series 1, Volume 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>21</sup> Record Group 205, Subgroup 3, Series 1, Volume 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

decided that three mills would go to the territory, four mills to the county, a poll tax of fifty cents would be enforced and six mills to the schools. In addition, roads would draw extra funding from a poll tax of \$1.50 and a land tax of \$3 would be placed on every 160 acres of land outside of towns. Finally, a special tax of three mills would defray the cost of locating two roads and three mills more would go to a newly created “special fund.” One can imagine the levels of frustration. People want roads of course, but those Decatur to DeSoto or Decatur to Columbus connections could not build themselves. This became a common theme, county to county, as costs went up, yet people remained less than enthused about paying taxes. Unlike their counterparts of Washington County in Oregon, the commissioners of Burt County in Nebraska had no such luxury as budgeting for a surplus.<sup>22</sup>

County commissioners’ records give us a sense of expenses incurred while running local government. Usually, most money was spent on various fees associated with running the government or the legal system. The tables on the following pages offer some generalizations about county expenditures from selected fiscal years in which the most information is known.

Budgets in other years and in other counties were similar. The shortage of funds for Burt County was not unusual, and as in other parts of the United States and the Nebraska Territory, resulted in limited success when engaging in big projects. Even something such as a county courthouse was often done without. In 1856, Richardson County court met at a rented property in Archer, the fee for which was \$15. Between 1857 and 1863, the commissioners and the Richardson County court met in a log house

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<sup>22</sup> Record Group 205, Subgroup 3, Series 1, Volume 1, Nebraska State Historical Society; Bourke and DeBats, *Washington County*, 98.

near the center of Falls City, which also served as a schoolhouse. In Burt County, county meetings often took place at Commissioner George Thomas' house or county clerk J. R. Conklin's office.<sup>23</sup>

So how did any of the counties survive financially? Each local government tried to keep costs down. All "employees" received money only if they carried out a task. For example, in June 1859, Jonathan Graves was scheduled to be paid \$5 by Burt County for his duties as clerk. In January 1858, Isaac Gibson was to receive \$6.20 for his time and mileage in serving on the grand jury for Burt County. In 1855 at Richardson County, Abel D. Kirk was paid \$2.90 for purchasing record books and paper he would use in duties for the county. Although the amount is not recorded, C. B. Stillman's request for funds serving as election judge at Platte County in 1859 was honored. These little fees showed up in almost all aspects of county government and in some years could amount to fairly sizable budget expenses.<sup>24</sup>

Criminal events were especially expensive. Some cases to be discussed in the following chapter proved very costly for Richardson County. Payments to the sheriff, jurors, guards, and so on all had to be honored. In 1867, as has been described already, Platte County chose to avoid some of this cost by immediately hanging a man upon conviction for murder.

Besides court expenses, the most important expense commissioners could undertake was building roads and bridges. All three counties were attempting to take part in what was increasingly a commercialized agricultural economy. With a focus on corn and livestock,

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<sup>23</sup> Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 23, Nebraska State Historical Society; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1309-1310; Record Group 205, Subgroup 3, Series 1, Volume 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>24</sup> Record Group 205, Subgroup 3, Series 1, Volume 1, Nebraska State Historical Society; Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 23, Nebraska State Historical Society; Record Group 267, Nebraska State Historical Society.



these citizens of territorial Nebraska needed to get their products to Omaha or St. Joseph in Missouri. Eventually Platte County would have the biggest boon of the three with the arrival of the Union Pacific Railroad in 1866. In the interim, road construction was viewed as an absolute necessity. Commissioners could choose road supervisor and coordinate construction efforts, but the money flow with which to pay for these jobs was another issue. Citizens had to put in time, effort, etc. in order to get roads, bridges, or ferries where they wanted. Supervisors were responsible in each road district. Men would provide the labor either for the good of their particular precinct in the county, or in place of paying certain taxes. None of the three counties absolutely required labor in a given year, but it was seen as an endeavor in everyone's best interest.

Road construction, as was the case in Washington County in Oregon, was a drawn out process. A petition would be brought before the board, considered, and a vote taken. In the case of Platte County, this process was followed by the assignment of surveyors, the notification of citizens whose land might be affected, and then the project could begin. The board, in each county, attempted to be very clear about funding. Platte County records indicate when major labor was undertaken, when animals were used, what the materials to be used were, and more.

By 1861, Platte County had some experience in dealing with road construction, ferries, and bridges. At a County Commissioner's meeting, if there were a full schedule, the board would consider road construction twelfth on the agenda.<sup>25</sup> When a road petition

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<sup>25</sup> Record Group 267, Nebraska State Historical Society; A complete schedule of Platte County Commissioner meetings went as follows: chairman declares meeting in order, clerk calls the roll, clerk reads the minutes of last meeting, minutes approved if there are no objections, unfinished business, correspondence, petitions, reports, accounts, county orders, licenses, roads, appointments, bonds, revenue, general business, adjournment. Revenue was always a touchy subject as there was rarely anything to discuss other than the fact that it did not exist.

was made, the board would appoint a surveyor of some kind and a road district supervisor or commissioner. Like other local government employees, elected or appointed, these men would be required to post a bond so as to assure the quality of their work. Each supervisor would be required to submit a report before the commissioners on the status of their various projects, including special difficulties that might occur. For their trouble, the supervisors could expect a small remuneration, which varied depending on their time and duties. Platte County was very particular about how these men were to be paid, often creating distinct road funds within each precinct in the county.

In addition to the supervisors, citizens offered time, labor, and materials, occasionally expecting compensation. In 1862, when the Columbus road district was constructed, quite a few people were involved. In April, John Rickly, owner of the large sawmill in Columbus, sold lumber and spikes to the road construction project at a cost of \$4.60. He also supplied the same materials to neighboring Centre Precinct for \$9.95. By July Michael Weaver and Jacob Ernst had rented scrapers to the Columbus road for a cost of \$6 and \$10 respectively. James North, who also served as sheriff and leader of the Pawnee Scouts during and after the Civil War, surveyed the road, charging \$6. The commissioners also voted in July to enact a land tax of \$3 on every 160 acres to pay for the roads. In June of 1863, another group of workers presented their bills to the commissioners. John Rickly and Jacob Ernst each provided a team of oxen, billed at \$3. Rickly also supplied the lumber for a bridge at a cost of \$5.31. J. P. Becker and J. C. Wolfel each worked on the road and used their teams for fees of \$20 and \$25.50 respectively. Finally, C. A. Speice assisted in the project for \$18.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Record Group 267, Nebraska State Historical Society.

**Table 5.1:** *Expense list Burt County: Fiscal Year 1859-1860*<sup>27</sup>

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Expenses of county court	\$306.75
Expenses of district court	\$134.84
County Clerk's fees	\$119.30
Sheriff's fees	\$89.15
Commissioner's fees	\$63.00
Miscellaneous/Unknown	\$62.29
Expenses of elections	\$61.55
Treasurer's fees	\$50.00
Land survey	\$24.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$910.88</b>

**Table 5.2:** *Expense list Platte County: Fiscal Year 1859-1860*<sup>28</sup>

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Election expenses & clerk fees	\$127.00
Treasurer's fees	\$50.00
County Books	\$42.50
Commissioner's fees	\$12.00
Road fees	\$10.00
Freight on county books	\$3.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$245.00</b>

**Table 5.3:** *Partial Expense list Richardson County: Fiscal Year 1855-1856*<sup>29</sup>

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Expenses of county court	\$98.60
Keeping prisoners	\$83.29
Assessment	\$52.00
Expenses of district court	\$30.00
Sheriff's fees	\$16.00
Expenses of elections	\$9.00
County clerk's fees	\$4.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$293.39</b>

<sup>27</sup> Record Group 205, Nebraska State Historical Society.<sup>28</sup> Record Group 267, Nebraska State Historical Society.<sup>29</sup> Record Group 245, Nebraska State Historical Society.

The road projects, generally speaking, seemed to work out well. At times a route might be altered slightly or a part of a project might require refinancing, but generally the roads appeared where necessary. Ferries, most common in Platte County, were a slightly different story. There were often disagreements about their location, investment, which company should run them and on and on.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the biggest challenge regarding any of these construction efforts was money. From the community's perspective, very few people objected to the construction of a road in their neighborhood, even if it meant losing land – the problem was whether these same people were willing to pay for the construction. Funding big county projects through taxation was not particularly viable. Small payments were given to supervisors and surveyors. The modern notion of a large federal, state, or county system, responsible for roads was non-existent. Roads, therefore, were not of the highest quality. Burt and Platte County were actually connected by a Decatur to Columbus road project. The main towns of Salem, Falls City, and Rulo in Richardson County were connected to one another, but not with many of their northern or western neighbors. Flooding and muddy conditions were perpetual problems.

What then was the purpose of county government? When one examines some of the expense accounts, it may appear that county governments existed simply to perpetuate some income for certain members of the community. In Platte County's early years certainly, it seems as though the same core group of leaders end up with money earned for various services rendered. Even though salaried jobs were minimal, some

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<sup>30</sup> Record Group 267, Nebraska State Historical Society; The case of Leander Gerrard illustrates this point. Originally applying for a ferry license, in April 1860, Gerrard's proposal was tabled on several occasions. One year later, his ferry was approved provided he met certain conditions. It should be noted that he did not have full success in seeking approval until his brother was on the Platte County Commissioner's Board.

people in various incarnations, from grand jury to judge of election, to surveyor, might earn money each year. So can one argue that county government existed largely to raise money to pay the people who organized the county government? While this fact was somewhat true one must also remember “the burden of government rested on the population.”<sup>31</sup> The fees may have been minimal at times, but there is a pattern of county government existing solely for the purpose of paying those citizens involved in its creation.

As in Washington County Oregon, the records in Nebraska indicate large numbers of the citizenry performing public functions. In Richardson County for example, eleven men had some office or duty while every six months, about sixty men were summoned for jury duty. Many of these men were appointed as election judges, replacement county officers, or clerks of election. One in every twenty-seven adult males served in public office in Platte County in the year 1860. Participation meant a cash income, but it also signified community.

As early as the fall of 1854, Nebraska residents were attempting to establish some kind of government for the territory as a whole. The territorial governor, Francis Burt, was a political appointee who died shortly after his arrival. Thomas Cuming became the acting governor and in addition to ordering the first territorial census, he called for representatives from the various precincts to meet as an elected body. There ensued some degree of controversy, as residents disagreed about the location for meetings. Cuming favored Omaha, and residents who lived south of the Platte River were displeased. Some motions were made to move the southern counties into a part of Kansas, and the first meetings were rife with conflict. This struggle on the territorial

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<sup>31</sup> Bourke and DeBats, *Washington County*, 106.

level was later mirrored in Richardson County, as citizens could not see eye to eye about the location of the county seat.<sup>32</sup>

In February 1855, Kentucky-born Mark W. Izard took command as governor, encouraging residents to adopt laws of neighboring Iowa. This was a common practice at the time. Izard also ordered the locating construction of ten roads, redefined the boundaries of the eight original counties, created sixteen new counties, organized courts, and enacted general laws throughout the territory. In essence, Izard headed the territory towards growth and stronger political organization. As the population grew, each corner of the territory faced new challenges. There were constant questions as to the legal residences of representatives, struggles as to how to deal with population growth, and the ever-present issue of land control.<sup>33</sup> Out of this chaos emerged interesting political and legal battles, many of which embroiled the communities in this study.

In the spring of 1858, criminal laws in Nebraska were briefly repealed. In Richardson County, old settlers reported that an increase in law breaking resulted, a problem dealt with by the community through the formation of vigilante groups. Wilson Maddox, the sheriff, faced an increase in the reports of horse thievery. An attempted solution was to enforce public lashing of criminals using pieces of hickory. If warranted, the criminal might also be tarred and feathered. In an extreme example of justice gone awry, Maddox was indirectly involved in the lynching of a recidivist horse thief named Leavitt. Maddox, while not the formal executioner, had apparently tied the knot on a

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<sup>32</sup> James C. Olson and Ronald C. Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 46-47, 80-85; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1300; James Byron Potts, "Nebraska Territory, 1854-1867: A Study of Frontier Politics" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1973).

<sup>33</sup> Olson and Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 46-47, 88-92, 87-100.

noose, before abandoning Leavitt's fate to the citizen vigilantes.<sup>34</sup>

A similar story of vigilantism occurred in Platte County in 1867. John Rickly, the sawmill operator, had employed Robert Wilson and Ransel Grant to haul wood for the use of the Union Pacific Railroad. Wilson argued with Grant as to how much wood had been hauled, accusing Grant of stealing wood from Wilson's pile. Apparently, Wilson then shot Grant, mortally wounding him. Wilson announced his crime to Rickly, hoping to go before a judge in Omaha. George Grant, brother of the deceased, called for a death warrant issued in Wilson's name. The law acted swiftly as Sheriff John Browner became involved and a coroner's inquest was held that afternoon. Wilson was found guilty of murder in the first degree the next morning. The crowds at court laid hold of the prisoner and hung him from a tree near the courtroom. Unlike Maddox, Sheriff Browner was not involved – the crowds overran him and his deputy. After Wilson was dead, and a hole dug in the ice, his body was put into the Loup River. Citizens apparently joked that now Wilson's body would get a trial in Omaha.<sup>35</sup>

As has been discussed, most counties in Nebraska formed governments that operated on bare bones and Richardson, Platte, and Burt counties were no exception. The organization of the counties into road districts, assessment of taxable properties, or creating booster clubs occupied quite a bit of the time of government. Holding elections and calling jurors to task were additional important functions of county government.

The county governments in Platte and Burt counties did not face the same political battles as Richardson County. Burt's county seat, Tekamah, was somewhat preordained by the location of the first large party of settlers. Platte County reveals a

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<sup>34</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1302.

<sup>35</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1265, 1266.

similar story, as Columbus became the county seat with no argument. Richardson County however, for which there are a larger set of data regarding politics and law, was burdened by political disagreements, that were sometimes violent in nature.

Richardson County was the scene of some of the more bizarre and violent actions in county government. Very early, towns of varying sizes vied for the privilege to become the county seat. The fate of these towns once they failed in their efforts was one of stunted growth. Driving through Richardson County, one can observe these failed efforts in the still existing communities of Salem and Rulo. The home of the original county seat, Archer, is no longer a factor. Archer had been a town of about twelve log houses. When the “Half Breed” tract was properly surveyed, it was discovered that the county did not own the land on which Archer stood. As a result, the county seat had to be moved, and settlers were required to pick up stakes. Salem, a small community to the south and west, became the new center of county politics and government.<sup>36</sup>

Justus C. Lincoln, Thomas Hare, and J. W. Roberts laid out the town of Salem in January 1855. A “West Salem” was organized in May 1857, a large portion of the land being reserved for use by the county. One month earlier, a vote had been held, confirming Salem as the county seat over its closest rival, Falls City. The seat had temporarily resided in Falls City after the failure at Archer, and before a move to Salem could take place, a second vote was held. The result was a tie. By the time a third election was held, Rulo had entered the fray as well, so three communities were competing. Falls City proved the victor, a fact that was hotly contested.<sup>37</sup>

Even with the votes confirmed, this battle was far from over. The territorial

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<sup>36</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1303, 1305.

<sup>37</sup> Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1303, 1329.



legislature approved an act in 1858 to permanently locate the county seat by yet another “vote of the people.” The county seat vote was to be organized by the county commissioners and held on the first Monday of December 1858. The county was expected to give at least twenty days public notice with postings in three different locations. Voters’ qualifications were to be clearly posted as well. While the citizens were expected to take advantage of their opportunity to vote, the county wanted to make certain that only legal voters were participating. Meanwhile, section six of the election statement made clear that Salem would remain the county seat until such time as the election results were confirmed. If a move should prove necessary, the county government would move within thirty days. This bill from the legislature went through debate and vote in Omaha City, signed by the territorial governor William Richardson and territorial secretary J. Sterling Morton.<sup>38</sup>

This was all well and good, but by February 1859, all hell had broken loose. The sheriff of Richardson County, Wilson Maddox, was commanded at this time to gather six witnesses before the county clerk on February 11, 1859 by 10:00 am. Each man was to testify on the subject of the recent election for county seat. Testimonies were heard on and on through 1859 and into 1860 as vote after vote was taken, contested, and retaken.

What follows in the record is a very detailed series of questions and answers aimed chiefly at attempting to discover what had happened in each vote. The central question was how to prove which city actually won the election. A secondary question, though crucial to resolving the first, asked whether legitimate voters took part in the elections. Charles Martin of Rulo gave testimony that illustrates the challenge. Martin

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<sup>38</sup> Richardson County Records, Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 23, Nebraska State Historical Society.

was specifically asked for information about Duiedan Marais, Antwoine Cabinet, Abram Bryen, R.G. Scovill, and Joseph Robideaux. Did he know these men? Were Marais and Cabinet half-breed Indians? Where did Scovill live? What about Bryen? Did any full-blooded Indians vote in December 1858 at Rulo? Eli Bedard was asked similar questions about Cabinet and Marais. All of this was aimed at trying to discover some example of election fraud.<sup>39</sup>

B.F. Cunningham and Alex St. Louis were asked about Issac L. Hamsby's impressions on one of the revotes in May 1860. Both men swore that Hamsby was "very well satisfied, that the election was conducted fare (sic)." J.V. Thomas revealed that there might have been some subterfuge taking place. One of the voters, a David Hooper, had informed Thomas that he lived in Missouri at the time of the election. Did he say he voted was the query. Yes, was the reply, for Falls City, in Falls City. This fact probably raised more than a few eyebrows.<sup>40</sup>

Hugh Boyd was brought to testify as a clerk of the election for May 22, 1860. Boyd, a contractor and builder by trade, was born in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania in 1833. Educated there, he learned carpentry, and later he moved to Iowa. Boyd settled at Rulo in 1857 and was responsible for constructing many of its buildings. In testimony, Boyd explained the oath required of each voter: "Do you solemnly sware (sic) that you are a sitezen (sic) of the United States and that you have resided in the County of Richardson twenty days and in the Territory for the last forty days and attained the age of twenty-one years?" When asked if anyone's right to vote that day was challenged, Boyd

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<sup>39</sup> Richardson County Records, Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 23, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>40</sup> Richardson County Records, Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 23, Nebraska State Historical Society.

responded in the negative.<sup>41</sup>

Other depositions indicated that there were justified suspicions related to these elections. Joshua Murray, a clerk of election for Muddy Precinct, swore that Antoine Barada's vote had been compromised. Barada was viewed by many, correctly as it happens, as a "half-breed," a fact that would have denied him the right to vote. Murray testified that Barada had been promised "the season of two mares to Isaac L. Hamsby's stud horse" if he voted for Falls City as county seat. A. P. Forney backed up popular sentiment that Barada was a "half-breed." Forney, another clerk of election in Muddy Precinct also called into question the votes of Isaac Cleveland because he resided in the Sac Reserve, as well as that of John Cook who had arrived in the territory only one week prior to the election.<sup>42</sup>

Felix Kitch came forward to call into question many votes in the Arago Precinct. He testified that Conrite Grab, William Boliman, and others were Germans, that Thomas Mullins was an Irishman, and he thought that something close to forty Germans had voted at Arago. Kitch's testimony resonated with other complaints that year in the election for territorial representative to the United States Congress. J. Sterling Morton ran versus Samuel Daily. The votes in Richardson County were viewed with the same suspicion held towards the county seat votes. Abel D. Kirk, the clerk, mayor, and census taker from Rulo, pointed out that Morton seemed to have the favor of Rulo and Richardson County in general. Daily supporters and the *Nebraska Advertiser* described Rulo as "a whiskey drinking sottish population – men or things whose god is the bottle,

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<sup>41</sup> Richardson County Records, Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 23, Nebraska State Historical Society; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, 1326.

<sup>42</sup> Richardson County Records, Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 23, Nebraska State Historical Society.

and whose aspirations ascend not above the most contemptible obscenity.”<sup>43</sup>

As in the fight for the county seat, fraud was charged in the Morton versus Daily contest, and fraud was proven. Elmer Dundy of Richardson County testified that the election in Rulo, St. Stephen, and Arago should be challenged. Dundy, born in Ohio and raised in Pennsylvania, was an attorney and resident of Nebraska since 1857. He was also both lawyer for Daily’s case and a witness testifying for Daily. While he admitted he was not in Rulo at the time of the election, Dundy insisted that was only because he had been threatened with physical violence.<sup>44</sup>

It was indeed proven that there were some problems with the vote totals of both candidates. Hannibal Nuckolls admitted to Morton that he used \$140 to help carry Arago. And whom did Nuckolls say he had bribed? The same Germans of whom Felix Kitch had complained in the county seat vote. For his part, Morton complained about illegal activity on the Daily side in Falls City. Apparently the ballot box was left unlocked overnight in the home of a Daily supporter. Morton’s partisan on the Falls City election board declared that many votes for Morton were disallowed for no reason.<sup>45</sup>

Daily continued his complaints about questionable voting, calling into question the vote in other parts of the territory. Specific targets of the Daily investigation were votes in Platte County (again a high number of Germans) and in the “Half-Breed Tract.” In the end, Daily was able to gain the seat because territorial Governor Samuel Black verified a certificate of election indicating Daily was the winner. When Morton appeared

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<sup>43</sup> Richardson County Records, Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 23, Nebraska State Historical Society; James C. Olson, *J. Sterling Morton*, 95-115; *Nebraska Advertiser*, September 27, 1860.

<sup>44</sup> James C. Olson, *J. Sterling Morton*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1942), 104; Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska*, volume 2, 1314; 37<sup>th</sup> Congress, First Session, House Miscellaneous Document No. 4, 42.

<sup>45</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Congress, First Session, House Miscellaneous Document No. 4, 135-137; Olson, *J. Sterling Morton*, 105.

before Congress he had a tougher argument as contestant of an election rather than Daily's position of delegate elect. This conflict did not fully resolve itself until after the Civil War began. By then, Morton, who was affiliated with the Democratic Party, had no chance. Daily called Morton a traitor, and eventually Congress ruled that Daily was the legitimate representative.<sup>46</sup>

The questionable votes in the Morton-Daily campaigns come as no surprise when one examines the continuing and every growing crisis of leadership in Richardson County. In Falls City, H. T. Potter testified that the judges and clerks of election refused to swear their propriety as officers of the election. David Dorrington, Potter swore, was intoxicated on the day of the vote. Potter swore that Falls City boosters sent two bottles of liquor in through the window at the polling place. Potter stated that at one point during the election, Dorrington offered to bet that Falls City would be county seat whether it received the most votes or not. Apparently Dorrington offered \$10 to \$5 that Falls City would win. The testimony of Addison Butt describes a separate incident also involving liquor in the election. Butt revealed that he was in the Speizer Precinct at the time of the vote. He saw men who said they were Rulo men produce whiskey they called "Rulo whiskey." He was at the polling place when the polls opened, noting that the whiskey distribution began around 9:00 am. Butt did not see anyone pay for the whiskey and as far as he could tell, people were still voting for Falls City. "They gave it saying that it was Rulo whiskey – gave some whiskey to some who said they were Rulo men who after drinking voted for Falls City." In Butt's estimation, a double cross had been pulled where it was made to appear that Rulo was buying votes with liquor, when in fact it was

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<sup>46</sup> 37<sup>th</sup> Congress, First Session, House Miscellaneous Document No. 4, 50-53; Olson, *J. Sterling Morton*, 108-115; Congressional Globe, 37<sup>th</sup> Congress, First Session, 1878.

Falls City taking such action.<sup>47</sup>

At issue throughout the county seat controversy, or the representative contest between Daily and Morton, was tampering with the vote in some manner. As can be seen in much of the testimony, this can be a difficult fact to prove one way or the other. There is discrepancy about who should vote, there is disagreement over who watched the ballot boxes, and there are accusations of bribery. In short, it was a pretty standard election process in a region of the country without much oversight.

A classic example of the “he said, he said” nature of these election controversies can be seen in the testimonies from July 1860 of George Bowker and Fred Dorrington. George Bowker lived in Rulo and owned land there, as well as near Falls City. By his own reckoning he believed the location of the county seat “would not change the value of my property” and he did not “lectioneer for any place at the last election.” He was, however, in the polling room throughout the day on May 22, 1860, excepting his time at dinner. On these points, he and Fred Dorrington agreed. Bowker identified James Buchanan, David Dorrington (Fred’s father), and Samuel Armstrong as the judges of election. William Buchanan and Fred Dorrington served as clerks. Bowker insisted that only Armstrong had sworn in for his duties that day. This is in keeping with the earlier testimony of H.T. Potter. Bowker commented that on a few occasions, voters were not sworn in prior to voting. In his testimony of July 1860, Bowker explained a somewhat confusing incident that landed him in disagreement with Fred Dorrington and others: “I erased Falls City on some tickets and wrote Rulo on them. That was before the polls opened. I gave them to voters at their request, gave Mr. Potter, James Buchanan, Charles

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<sup>47</sup> Richardson County Records, Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 23, Nebraska State Historical Society.

Ruleau. I did not erase Falls City off any tickets and write Rulo on them that evening, night, or next day.”<sup>48</sup>

Why would any of this matter? As was somewhat common in the nineteenth century, voting at Richardson County was being done on a pre-stamped or written ballot. As a voter, typically, the ticket one received offered no choices, as one’s vote was reserved on the ballot itself. What Bowker had been accused of was taking tickets and changing their intent. Additional testimony addressed this concern. Fred Dorrington stated that he saw Bowker with James Buchanan, who had taken charge of the ballot box. Bowker was present when the ballots were counted. This makes sense as Bowker was present to keep a tally of votes while they were counted. The box, “a common cigar (sic) box fastened with two strings,” had ninety-five or ninety-six votes for Falls City and thirty-six for Rulo, with one vote for Ruto. Several tickets with Rulo written on them were in the box. Dorrington singled out one of these tickets in his testimony: “...there were so many scratched with three or four multiplication marks on the word Falls City and the word Rulo written on them.” Dorrington went on to accuse Bowker of writing in Rulo, a fact which, frankly, Bowker admitted. The interpretation of when Rulo was written in was truly the focus of this debate. Wellington Northern swore that he knew Bowker and Bowker’s handwriting and that indeed it was Bowker’s hand that had written Rulo. Northern believed there were seventeen ballots erased and replaced with Rulo. Bowker’s response is clear: “I had no connection in abstracting Falls City tickets from the ballot box and inserting Rulo tickets in their stead.” Bowker remained adamant that he had done nothing more than prepare tickets in advance in case people wished to vote for

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<sup>48</sup> Richardson County Records, Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 23, Nebraska State Historical Society.

Rulo and not Falls City.<sup>49</sup>

Some testimony in this case went as that of Dorrington versus Bowker. Other testimony involved people coming forth, swearing they had voted for Rulo or Falls City. Some men offered very detailed stories. Some men seemed to barely know they had been there at all.

J. G. Adams gave evidence regarding his and other's votes at the May 22, 1860 election. His testimony is somewhat disjointed as he starts off saying he was at Falls City on May 22 but voted at Rulo. Up to this point, Adams' clarity is not much in question. Then he states that Hiram Brundage (probably actually Brinegar) voted at Falls City for Falls City. When asked for which town did he vote, Adams replied: "I can't say for what place I voted, being intoxicated. I intended to vote for Falls City – the tickets I had in my pocket were mostly Falls City." Adams went on to point out he was neither drunk nor sober when arriving at Rulo. He had a beer at the first grocery in Rulo with a man named McIntire. Adams then went to the polls alone with some Rulo tickets he got at the grocery. He testified that he was not given liquor with the two tickets but also, "I did not examine [the] ticket before voting." In the end, Adams wanted the investigators to understand that he was not influenced to vote one way or the other; he was just drunk.<sup>50</sup>

Capturing the county seat was of great value. In *The Social Order of a Frontier Community*, Don Harrison Doyle described how such a struggle could lead to desperate measures. A town that could attain county seat status could be, as Jacksonville, Illinois

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<sup>49</sup> Richardson County Records, Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 23, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>50</sup> Richardson County Records, Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 23, Nebraska State Historical Society.



residents hoped, bound for greatness.<sup>51</sup> Certainly when the dust settled, Falls City rose above the Rulos and Salems of Richardson County. Like any new community, Richardson County had dealt with basic problems of development and was now showing signs of progress. Community however, is not just about cooperation; sometimes it is about conflict.<sup>52</sup> Volatile social conflict even, as well as instability, can be an inherent part of building a new community. Before the voting conflict in Richardson County was over, that volatile social conflict was to serve notice of its existence.

The deaths of Richard Meeks and Dr. J. H. Davis were apparently tied to the county seat vote. Reportedly, Davis and Meeks scuffled near where the polls were open in Falls City as the result of an argument over which town should become the county seat. Meeks, a one-armed man, attacked Davis with a piece of lumber, striking the doctor. Davis, a native of Tennessee, grabbed for his opponent's gun, and shot Meeks in the thigh. The two men were separated. After Davis retired to his room at the Minnick Hotel, Meeks attacked the doctor as he lay in bed. What happened at this point is very unclear. What is clear, is that both Meeks and Davis were shot and died of their wounds.<sup>53</sup> What is less clear is by whose hand the two men died. Meeks had a gunshot wound through the body near the fourth or fifth rib. Most witnesses state that while they saw Dr. Davis shoot Meeks in the thigh, they have no idea who shot Meeks the second time. Unknown parties claim that a Dr. Thomas Dunn shot Meeks either at the same moment or shortly after Meeks shot Dr. Davis. William McFarland claimed that Davis himself shot Meeks, although the angle of Meeks's wound seems to suggest otherwise.

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<sup>51</sup> Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community, Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825-1870* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978)

<sup>52</sup> Allan G. Bogue, "Social Theory and the Pioneer," *Agricultural History* 34, no. 1 (January 1960): 21-34.

<sup>53</sup> Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860 Mortality Sheets, Record Group 513, Schedule 3, Nebraska State Historical Society.

The aforementioned unknown parties claim that Davis cried out, “Dr. Dunn, without your help I am dead.” Dunn allegedly looked in at Davis and then rode his horse out of town, not to be seen again. Dunn’s name only appears once in the records surrounding the investigation.<sup>54</sup>

With this incident and the testimony of many voters throughout the summer of 1860, the county seat conflict came to something resembling a conclusion. Falls City proved victorious in its quest for the county seat, although this fact did not bring urban development to the region. The volatility of the Richardson County community far exceeded that of the other counties in general – certainly in terms of elections this was true.

Who were the participants in county-wide politics? This becomes a somewhat more difficult question to answer. The counties in this study did not preserve their poll books. Poll books, used in other in depth looks into nineteenth century communities, not only recorded votes as they were cast, but also listed anyone participating in an election. As Kenneth Winkle has amply demonstrated, poll book data can be invaluable in revealing participation rates as well as a litany of community relations.<sup>55</sup> Winkle argued that poll books reveal more about how persistence and migration can affect the politics of an individual community. He found that many voters were in and out of Springfield between 1850 and 1860 without staying the entire ten years between census reports. Those individuals who won office tended to possess particular characteristics – they could afford to stay in their community and therefore often ended up representing these

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<sup>54</sup> Richardson County Records, Record Group 245, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 23, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>55</sup> Kenneth J. Winkle, *The Politics of Community* (Cambridge: University Press, 1982), 88-131; Winkle, “The Voters of Lincoln’s Springfield: Migration and Political Participation in an Antebellum City” *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 3 (1993), 597; Winkle, “Social Analysis of Voter Turnout in Ohio, 1850-1860” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 13, no. 3 (Winter 1983), 411-435.

locales politically. Winkle pointed to Merle Curti's inspirational *Making of An American Community* among other sources as works that explained American mobility and persistence. What is so amazing about the poll books is they can show exactly how many people voted at every election over a ten-year period. Alas, these records are apparently non-existent for Burt, Richardson, and Platte counties.<sup>56</sup>

There is some minimal data however that can perhaps reveal small details about the background of officeholders in certain counties. In general, nineteenth century officeholders were wealthier and possessed higher levels of occupation than the average citizen. Whereas the poll books Winkle studied revealed a wealth of information about persisters versus non-persisters across the voting population, the data for Richardson County is only able to compare winning campaigners and their competition. A study of the birthplace of officeholders attempts to draw conclusions based on work completed by Winkle. High levels of mobility may reveal problems in running for office.<sup>57</sup>

Some of the officeholders in Richardson County are recorded in an election book dated 1861-1867. In addition to storing names of the winners, the election book records canvassing officials and in some cases the names of additional candidates who lost the elections in question. Finally, for certain years the clerks recorded when and why votes might have been called into question.<sup>58</sup>

The first large scale recording of votes came in October 1862. Richardson County selected Isham Reavis as their delegate in councilman, S. S. Keiffer as coroner, and John Peyton as commissioner to name a few of the victorious candidates. John

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<sup>56</sup> Winkle, "The Voters of Lincoln's Springfield;" Curti, *The Making of An American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier County* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959).

<sup>57</sup> Winkle, "The Voters of Lincoln's Springfield," 602.

<sup>58</sup> Richardson County Records, Record Group 245, Series 6, Box 1, Volume 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

Peyton is an interesting case. Two years earlier, the 47 year-old illiterate from New York was listed as a boarder in G. H. McPherson's household. Both Peyton and McPherson were in construction, probably working together as the county grew in size. Peyton owned \$750 of real property, a figure placing him right around the county's mean of \$756.86.<sup>59</sup> Somewhat uncharacteristically, Peyton received more votes than old-time resident and farmer Stephen Story in this election. In addition to having resided chiefly in Nebraska for perhaps twenty years or more, and the existence of a post office bearing his name, Story also possessed far more in the way of real and personal property than Peyton. When adding together the real property owned by Story and his family, the figure rises above \$20,000, yet unlike in similar campaigns in other communities across America, he could not defeat the newcomer. One possible explanation for Story's loss lies in his heritage – in the 1860 census Story and his family were recorded as “mixed” or “natives.”<sup>60</sup> In the two years prior to the election one must assume a measure of success, however transitory, for Mr. Peyton to assure him electoral victory over such a well-established citizen. Perhaps McPherson shared Peyton's success as well.

The victor in the coroner's election, S. S. Keiffer was more like the winners reflected in Winkle's work. Keiffer, a farmer from Virginia, possessed \$4000 of real property, greatly exceeding the county mean. Keiffer's opponent was S. H. Roberts, a 32 year-old bachelor from Missouri with \$900 of real property. Among the 964 county residents with identified occupations in 1860, both men's state of origin placed them in the third most populous group (Southerners). When counting all 2,828 residents, the South remained second in the county, representing 25.5% of the population. The

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<sup>59</sup> Figure from database built based on *Nebraska Territorial Census*, 1860.

<sup>60</sup> United States Census Bureau, *Nebraska Territorial Census*, 1860.

relatively high numbers of Southerners in the region, in addition to his high economic status, may partially explain Keiffer's success in the election of 1862. In addition, Keiffer's family of a wife and five children may have appeared more established to the voters than the life of a bachelor from Missouri.

Isham Reavis' victory might be chalked up to the prevalence of midwesterners among the voters. The lawyer from Illinois lived with his brother in 1860 and possessed \$2500 in real property. Reavis was part of the 27.6% of eligible voters from the Midwest living in the county (see Table 6.4). Reavis was only 26 and still single at the time of the election. As has been discussed in an earlier chapter, Reavis went on to have a very successful career in politics, gaining an appointment as a supreme court justice for Arizona Territory.

While Antoine Barada and two of his sisters continued to live in Richardson County, they always traveled to northeast Nebraska above Burt County in order to maintain their connections with the Omahas. This also assured the families of collecting annuity payments owed them as tribal members. At some point during the 1860s, the Omaha membership roll was destroyed in a fire. When the new list appeared in 1871, Antoine Barada's name was not included. Antoine and his children had been disenfranchised.<sup>61</sup>

In 1930 before the Committee on Indian Affairs, one of Antoine's granddaughters, Josephine Peters Mitchell, offered the family's story of why the Baradas were wiped from the Omahas's rolls. While growing up, Antoine and Joseph La Flesche had known one another. By the 1860s when Antoine was living in Richardson County, both men had grown families. La Flesche apparently proposed a union between the

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<sup>61</sup> Brink, *The Barada Story*, 56; Nebraska State Historical Society, *Transactions*, volume II, 346.

families in the form of a marriage between one of Barada's sons and one of La Flesche's daughters. When Antoine did "see it that way" a quarrel began between the two men. From the Barada family perspective, that argument explains why their family disappeared from the rolls of the Omaha tribe.<sup>62</sup>

In Burt County, various records of deeds, transfers, and land at auction offered for payment of delinquent taxes reveal a fair amount about Frank Welch's business dealings, but perhaps just as much about the intertwined nature of business, law, and local relationships in a nineteenth-century frontier town. Even as early as 1859, only three years after Decatur was founded, the town's government had become organized to the point where officials no longer had to use land or deed blanks from the state Iowa (although occasionally they continued to do so) and town officers possessed their own stamping tools and recording books. The town's government and court system was organized enough by the late 1850s and early 1860s that orders to "make of goods and chattel" for debts owed were commonly recorded and carried out.<sup>63</sup>

The residents of Decatur had clearly moved forward in their frontier experience. Arguably, some residents like Frank Welch may have moved forward immediately or been planning to do so no matter what the risk. By "move forward" I am referring to that point when "the pioneer turned his attention from security to stability."<sup>64</sup> Decatur residents had satisfied most of their demands for proper amounts of food, adequate shelter, and physical safety by 1860. Men like Frank Stevens and Frank Welch were

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<sup>62</sup> Brink, *The Barada Story*, 58-59. Brink speculates that religion may have played a role in preventing the arranged marriage as well. La Flesche was Presbyterian, while the Baradas were Catholic.

<sup>63</sup> "Financial Records," Record Group 4457, Box 1, Series 2, Folder 6, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>64</sup> Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions 1775-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 41.

**Table 5.4:** Richardson County, Eligible Voters by Region, 1860 (males over age 21)<sup>65</sup>

<b>Region</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Immigrants</b>	223	28.5
<b>Midwest</b>	216	27.6
<b>South</b>	177	22.6
<b>North</b>	149	19.1
<b>West</b>	16	2.0
<b>Unknown</b>	1	0.2
<b>Total</b>	782	100

Mean age = 34, Median age = 31

**Table 5.5:** Richardson County, Potential Eligible Voters by Region, 1862 (males aged 19 and 20 in 1860)<sup>66</sup>

<b>Region</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Midwest</b>	28	34.6
<b>South</b>	24	29.6
<b>North</b>	14	17.3
<b>Immigrants</b>	13	16.0
<b>West</b>	2	2.5
<b>Total</b>	81	100

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<sup>65</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*.

<sup>66</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*.

moving beyond these basic demands and in some cases were making use of the nascent local government in order to gain not just economic stability but riches. As Malcolm Rohrbough observed, the frontier did not make for clear distinctions between security and stability and indeed there was often an overlap, a condition definitely observed in Decatur. Rohrbough further noted that to achieve economic stability and more than that, prosperity, a “more complicated economic life was necessary, and the organization of government, law, and social institutions” had to take place. The economic success of men such as Stevens and Welch could make certain as to the survival and growth of a new town or farming community. It was through the use of government then that an order and rules were established. This fact encouraged not only a trust that development could continue, but an interest in the kind of risk taking engaged in by Stevens and Welch.<sup>67</sup>

Welch and Stevens were not always successful in every venture. The order established by the government of Decatur could certainly work for them or against them. A piece of land in which Welch was invested in 1858 included legal language limiting Welch as to the time allowed to come up with the necessary funds to gain full ownership of the land. Duly recorded in a county register, the original owner, William Wilson, was allowed to sell the land with ten days notice should Welch not come up with the required \$280. Apparently in this case, Welch failed to make good on the land deal as by 1860 the original document indicated a cancellation and possession changing to Augustus Christie. All the material was written up on legal forms, recorded by government officials and marked by Jefferson P. Casady, a notary public. The growing economic prosperity of the region required that the merchants and businessmen of the community operated within a

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<sup>67</sup> Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier*, 41.



legal framework. While everybody could have ignored law and order if they so chose, the end result would not have provided the stable environment which encouraged men like Stevens and Welch to take risks with capital investment.<sup>68</sup>

By 1870, the Speices of Platte County had been married ten years and Katharina was just over thirty years of age. A daughter seven years of age, Josephine Fredericka whom they called Fredy, was their oldest surviving child. A son named Thomas Stuart, perhaps Fredy's twin or at the least very close in age, had died in infancy in 1863.

Gustavus, named for Katharina's father was five in 1870. John Milton and Charles Bordman, aged three and one respectively rounded out the immediate family. The two oldest children had attended school within the year of the enumerator's arrival, a fact befitting the offspring of their father's position at the time as Platte County Superintendent of Public Schools. Perhaps partly because of the number of children, or Charles's station in Columbus or a combination of these factors, the Speices had a domestic servant in their house as well. Augusta Schriber, born in Hamburg was but sixteen. She may have been a both a welcome help and companion to Katharina, despite their very different regions of origin in what was about to become Germany. Charles, listed as a lawyer in the record disclosed real estate valued at \$3,000.<sup>69</sup>

One year before the census, Charles had entered into a business partnership with James North. The two men sold real estate, distributed loans, and in particular worked at selling land that had been distributed to railroad companies. This is an interesting partnership to consider, especially in light of the fact that the two younger brothers of

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<sup>68</sup> "Financial Records," Record Group 4457, Box 1, Series 2, Folder 6, Nebraska State Historical Society; Rohrbough, *The Trans-Appalachian Frontier*, 41-43.

<sup>69</sup> Curry, *History of Platte County*, 901; United States Census Bureau, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*.

James North were employed by the United States army to use their Pawnee Scouts to protect railroad land in Nebraska and elsewhere. Soon, North and Speice engaged in another business, forming the Union Pacific Coal Company which they ran as partners until 1892 when James North was appointed as an internal revenue collector. Speice continued this company's existence until his death in 1909.<sup>70</sup>

In 1870, the family lived in a vibrant and varied neighborhood next door on one side to the German shoemaker Louis Phillipp, his Swiss wife Eliza and their three children, and on the other side, Irish butcher Martin Ragen and his wife Josephine, also of Eire, and their three children. The Ragens also boarded an Irish farm laborer and a Swiss cooper. A few doors away from the Speice family, early resident and town doctor and druggist Charles B. Stillmann lived. Also on that part of the block lived the English immigrants, Charles Wake and his wife Emma. Converts to Mormonism, the family come through Nebraska around 1859 when their middle son Charles was born and returned from Utah sometime after their last son Thomas's birth in 1867. The neighborhood represented the immigrant and native nature of Columbus very well with citizens from Switzerland, Baden, Hesse-Darmstadt, England, Ireland, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania residing there.<sup>71</sup>

Politics and democracy in Nebraska, while not as combative as was the case to the south in Kansas, had their share of adventurous moments. In Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties, as elsewhere in Nebraska, practicing politics and enlisting the law were often tools used to gain wealth and power. In the first years of settlement, the Democratic Party was the main source of power. A Democratic president and a Democratic congress

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<sup>70</sup> Curry, *History of Platte County*, 901.

<sup>71</sup> United States Census Bureau, *Nebraska Territorial Census, 1860*.

had created the Nebraska territory. In the first six to seven years after the territory was born, Democratic officials were appointed as governors, judges, and government land agents among other positions. Both Burt and Richardson counties were named for Democratic politicians.<sup>72</sup>

In the early days of the territory, as was true in other regions, politics was often more about community connections and personality than anything else. In *History of Nebraska*, Olson and Naugle suggested that political contests were often determined by sectional biases (at that time typically meaning those who lived south or north of the Platte River) and the local nature of politics as well. Each local community wanted to build itself up, so within counties, struggles emerged that revealed local rivalries. While everyone might wish a county well during its development, there were also moments of definite delight in the failures of rival towns and very serious fights for control of county government, as was the case in Richardson County.<sup>73</sup>

In terms of unity among territorial Nebraska's counties there was some, but it was also a time marked by competitive interests regarding the location of the capital and disagreements over the extent of territorial power over local government. Platte and Burt counties shared political interest in keeping territorial and later state government in Omaha, as both counties were located north of the Platte River, barely in the case of the former. Richardson County, while logically supporting the side locating the capital to the south of the Platte River, had residents with mixed feelings on the topic. Some residents were concerned about having the capital so close to Falls City and Salem. These individuals believed that the closer the capital the more likely that Richardson County

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<sup>72</sup> Olson and Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 131.

<sup>73</sup> Olson and Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 131.

would lose residents and influence. Residents wondered whether people would remain in the county with the seat of real power so close by (approximately 100 miles).<sup>74</sup>

In some ways, county politics were also a struggle for independence against an outside authority. Although county residents might depend on the territorial governor, (e.g., Burt and Platte counties requesting militia from the territorial authority in 1855 and 1859 respectively), they also viewed that same office not altogether unlike the way in which colonists had viewed the king of England. While the legislature might act in interests it believed made sense, these actions were sometimes at odds with the governor's views of what was best. In addition, a provision in the Kansas-Nebraska act allowed territorial laws to be legal without prior submission to the United States Congress for approval. This fact made the territorial legislature independent of the federal authorities to a certain degree. One could make the argument that there was a corresponding sense of independence between the counties and the territorial legislature.<sup>75</sup>

Such feelings notwithstanding, early Nebraskans desired some sense of law and order. From the first moments of settling, residents organized themselves in companies,

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<sup>74</sup> Olson and Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 132.

<sup>75</sup> Olson and Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 132; Jack Ericson Eblen, *The First and Second United States Empires; Governors and Territorial Government, 1784-1912* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968); D. R. Burleigh, "Burt County Notes," unnumbered folder, Nebraska State Historical Society; A good example of the territorial governor taking actions opposite the desires of the territorial legislature was Samuel Black's veto of an act declaring slavery illegal in Nebraska Territory. Black's veto was explained thoroughly noting that while Black was not in favor of slavery, he was in favor of law, and he found that the legislature had acted inappropriately and without regard for the "true intent and meaning of the organic law." The people were to decide the issue, argued Black, neither he nor the legislature were truly "the people." Black believed he, as an appointee of the president was certainly not "the people" and noted that while the legislators were elected by "the people" "they [the people] did not form the system under which you were elected." Black argued forcefully that in the fourteenth section of the organic act creating the government of Territorial Nebraska, "the people" were not the assembly, but literally the citizens, so when the state constitution was made, that would be the proper place to face the slavery question. This kind of argument dove into the core of problems faced by territorial leaders and the citizens they led. "Text of Governor's Vetoing the Slavery Bill, January 9, 1860," Record Group 515, Box 37, Series 267, Folder 1, Nebraska State Historical Society

held votes, or at least took suggestions when naming communities, and applied to the territorial legislature for official recognition of certain businesses and locations of county seats. Nevertheless, local governments were also clearly focused on themselves and their interests. County residents who attended or organized county commissioners were not necessarily meeting to address broader territorial concerns. Residents might construct roads that affected neighboring counties as a result of such meetings, but first and foremost, the county commissioners, whether in Richardson, Burt, or Platte counties were figuring the taxes needed to build their own schools, local roads, and to correct any nefarious business.<sup>76</sup>

Despite what has been said about local focus on county activities of course, all residents of Nebraska were still part of a larger territory-wide or national legal and political scene as well. How this fact influenced residents can be observed in a number of ways, but in particular over how people reacted to the introduction of politics other than those sponsored by the dominant Democratic Party. In 1860, a number of articles appeared in *The Omaha Nebraskan* concerning issues of local politics with a national impact. “We are well aware,” wrote residents of Platte County “that there has never been a Republican ticket run in this country.” The authors of the piece were responding to accusations aimed at Columbus resident John Reck which identified him as a Republican. The writers had “no reason...to suppose that Mr. Reck intends to desert the principles of the party [Democratic] who have so often shown their confidence in him.” Reck, stood

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<sup>76</sup> Nebraska, *Laws Resolutions, and Memorials Passed at the Sessions of the Territorial and State Legislatures of Nebraska, Together with the Organic Law, and the Proclamations Issued in the Organization of the Territorial Government; the Enabling Act Admitting Nebraska to the Union; and the Revised Statutes of 1866* (Lincoln: Journal Company, State printers, 1886-1887), 185, 208, 295-296, 311, 388, 422, 430, 438, 575, 576, 577, 684. These pages contain just a few examples of how counties turned to the territorial legislature to “legitimize” some of their decisions and actions ranging from road construction to regulation of bridges and ferries.

accused of falling from grace but was believed by “K” to still “stand by the Democracy.” On another note, the letter went on to discuss the independent economic spirit of Columbus and Platte County residents being stifled by territorial and national officials. “K” was concerned about residents accused of cutting timber on United States government lands. “K” argued that residents could not settle without timber and it was the government’s fault for not having surveyed the land and sold the timber. Therefore, it came down to “we must have timber, or not settle, *and we shall settle* [emphasis by “K”].” “K” argued against the right of the federal government to fine the residents of Platte County, calling it an injustice and noting that residents will take action to eradicate such attitudes. In a truly ironic conclusion, the letter stated that though the residents were angry about federal government policy, nearly to the point of taking the law into their own hands, they insisted that either the territorial or federal government should prevent Pawnees from cutting timber not on their reservation. This paradox appeared throughout territorial politics and law – enforcing some laws was desired by the people, but at other times the preference was to be left alone.<sup>77</sup>

In the late summer and early fall of 1860, issues concerning the Democratic Party in Platte County revealed that particular party’s power. W. G. Hollins was elected to represent Platte County in the Territorial Convention held at Omaha, August 15, 1860. Democrats in Platte County asked for increased representation at the convention to reflect their larger population and desired that the Convention nominate for president of the United States, “the man who has so nobly defended our rights...Stephen A. Douglas.” In September, Platte County Democrats met and endorsed the national platform laid out that

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<sup>77</sup> K, “Platte County,” *The Omaha Nebraskan*, 14 April 1860; Incidentally, John Reck did become a Republican. Curry, *History of Platte County*, 862.

year in Baltimore and selected its various local officers. The names of many of Platte County's early residents appeared on the list as nominated for positions of authority.<sup>78</sup>

Democrats dominated local politics in Richardson County as well. The party organized in March 1858 at Rulo and Charles Martin and Abel D. Kirk were prominent leaders. Additional important figures included Justus C. Lincoln of Salem and Ambrose Shelley from Archer. The meeting concerned itself almost exclusively with national questions. Attendants noted that there was a great political crisis on the horizon and that "the doctrines advocated by Black Republicans throughout the country are dangerous to the Union and in direct opposition to the interest of the people of Nebraska." The Richardson County Democrats went on to express absolute confidence in President Buchanan and Democrats in general. Further, they stated that they were "entirely opposed to the agitation of the slavery question in the halls of Congress." Finally, the meeting concluded by expressing the opinion that Kansas should be immediately admitted to the Union under the Lecompton Constitution. Such action, believed men like Martin and Kirk, would lead to an end to hostilities in the territory south of Nebraska.<sup>79</sup>

The previously discussed contest between J. Sterling Morton and Samuel G. Daily illustrated the fact that though territorial residents might express opinions about national issues such as presidential elections, their more intense focus was often on matters of a more immediate local concern such as who would represent Nebraska in Congress. Such focus was helped along by the fact that territorial residents had no vote in national presidential elections, their support of national platforms or candidates notwithstanding.

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<sup>78</sup> C. B. Stillman, "Platte County Convention," *The Daily Omaha Nebraskian*, 2 October 1860. Charles Speice was listed as nominated to be a territorial representative and his brother-in-law Francis Becher was nominated to serve as county clerk.

<sup>79</sup> "Democratic Meeting," *The Omaha Nebraskian*, 7 April 1858.

The evolving Republican Party chose Samuel G. Daily as their candidate while the Democrats, reeling from the national split of their party selected Morton. Elmer S. Dundy's involvement in the ensuing maelstrom is made more interesting by the fact that he had become a member of the territorial legislature only after a hotly contested election in which votes had to be recounted and fraud accusations flew.<sup>80</sup>

As mentioned, Dundy's rise to territorial political power was associated with some shady political questions both in his initial victory in 1858 and the reelection campaign of 1860. During the second campaign, a number of legitimate voters living in the Half Breed Tract were disenfranchised, thereby leading to the defeat of Democratic candidate William Fleming. The arguments put forth by Fleming were defeated and Dundy's seat was confirmed largely due to a firm stance of party loyalty. Only Republican John M. Thayer did not stand by Dundy in the fight to keep his seat. Dundy would repay that favor in the 1870s.<sup>81</sup>

Ultimately it was partisan voting in the House of Representatives that settled the Daily-Morton contest nearly two years after the initial arguments began. In 1860 and 1861, Elmer Dundy traveled throughout Nebraska and his home county of Richardson, gathering evidence on behalf of Samuel Daily. Dundy's actions were probably buoyed by a combination of partisan loyalty to the Republicans and a personal dislike of Morton. With Daily's victory, the political fortunes of Richardson County's Elmer Dundy were assured. Thus, local action transformed to a national level was made manifest in political appointments gained by Dundy. Recommended for a territorial position he did not

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<sup>80</sup> David H. Price, "The Public Life of Elmer S. Dundy, 1857-1896," (M.A. Thesis, University of Nebraska-Omaha, 1971), 12-15; Olson and Naugle, *The History of Nebraska*, 135-136.

<sup>81</sup> Price, "Public Life," 44-45, 50-52; "Richardson and Pawnee Counties," *The Omaha Nebraskian*, 11 August 1858; "Councilman from Richardson and Pawnee," *The Omaha Nebraskian*, 13 October 1858; "Illegal Voting in Pawnee and Richardson Counties," *The Omaha Nebraskian*, 29 October 1859.



receive in 1862, Dundy's name nevertheless was still on the right lists and he was appointed presiding United States judge for the second district June 2, 1863. His district encompassed the whole region in Nebraska south of the Platte River. About half of this land was as yet unorganized. Dundy's popularity was not broadly shared and the local jealousies that emerged after his appointment created a ripple effect on national politics. As a federal judge, Dundy had to be confirmed by the Senate. His political and personal friends sought to speed this process along. His personal enemies did quite the opposite, briefly blocking his confirmation.<sup>82</sup>

One of Dundy's first cases after gaining his appointment connected a local issue in Platte County to federal legal proceedings. Edward McMurty was murdered near Columbus in 1869. The four Pawnees accused of the crime were ultimately convicted despite highly circumstantial evidence. Dundy did not sentence the convicted men immediately. Dundy sat with the Iowa Supreme Court chief justice, John F. Dillon, on issues for the eighth circuit court. When reviewing the case of the four Pawnees, Dillon decided and Dundy concurred that because the Pawnees were at peace with the United States when the alleged crime took place, the federal court had no jurisdiction in the matter. Therefore, the Nebraska state courts had to take the case. Ultimately, the Pawnees were released in October 1871 as the state did not pursue the matter.<sup>83</sup>

In politics and law, helping one's county and town was always of great importance. In Dundy's case, this resulted in a difficult decision in 1870 when Nebraska's governor, David Butler, stood for re-election. Richardson County senator Ebenezer E. Cunningham and Elmer Dundy were unsure as to with whom to place their

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<sup>82</sup> Price, "Public Life," 49, 56, 57, 59, 60, 61.

<sup>83</sup> Price, "Public Life," 75-77.

ballots at the Republican Convention in 1870. Richardson County was attempting to get a railroad and Butler's rival, Robert Furnas, was sure to place or support a railroad in Nemaha County, the region immediately to Richardson County's north. This possibility caused Dundy and Cunningham to cast their support with Butler despite some valid concerns about corruption charges. Butler won the election but by the end of January 1871, the state senate was calling for an investigation into Butler's financial affairs. Apparently, Dundy himself drew up a version of the resolution which became the basis for impeachment proceedings. Butler was ultimately impeached and convicted, though later the legislature voted to expunge his conviction.<sup>84</sup>

Dundy's actions in this case stand as a good example of what might happen in certain scenarios. In order to maintain political influence and assure a good result for his home county, Dundy made certain that Furnas lost the nomination for the governor's position. A local issue, in this case the placement of the railroad was the driving factor, yet when faced with the knowledge that corruption charges could stick Dundy turned around and made sure the investigation got underway. It was an interesting strategy. By eliminating the known enemy (Furnas) and then manipulating the investigation of Butler, Dundy was able to effect political action in Richardson County. Any of the members of the study counties would have done likewise. The state may be important to a degree, but home mattered most.

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<sup>84</sup> Price, "Public Life," 78, 79; Olson and Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 151-155; "Articles of Impeachment," Record Group 1, Subgroup 8, Box2, Series 3, Folder 1, Nebraska State Historical Society.

## CONCLUSION

In fall 1919, the *Falls City Journal* published a supplement to its regular edition that aimed to show the roughly 20,000 residents of Richardson County their history. Articles in the issue discussed trips to see the state boundary marker on the Kansas line (originally established in 1855), interviews with older members of the community, lists of former postal or government officials, and roundups of the old Civil War soldiers.

The *Journal* reported how the older soldiers had “made up a goodly portion of this county’s population.” Some of these men had come out to Nebraska at the close of the Civil War and built homes and community. The *Journal* also asserted that these men “exerted an influence that made for good government, a wholesome state of society, and a sure foundation upon which to build the business interests of the county.”<sup>1</sup> The veterans, men like Illinois native James R. Wilhite (Sarah Crook’s second husband), came to Richardson County and became community builders and leaders. By 1919, there were about twelve of these older gentlemen residing at Falls City and the county was a markedly different place than it had been in the 1850s and 1860s.

A 1907 handbill revealed plans for a reunion of the pioneers and old settlers of Burt County. The fifth annual reunion and picnic of the pioneers and old settlers association was held at Tekamah on Friday, August 30 1907. Advertised as a picnic, the aim was to bring together the remaining residents from those early days and to celebrate their accomplishments. “One by one the pioneers are rapidly passing away to their eternal home, and this may be your last opportunity of ever meeting with all of them again on earth,” the handbill declared. Association president, John P. Latta, originally of

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<sup>1</sup> *Illustrated Richardson County* supplement to *Falls City Journal* October 15, 1919 located in a manila folder in an unnumbered hanging folder, Nebraska State Historical Society, 22.

Ohio, had resided in the county over forty years and hoped to introduce current residents to friends who would think about the “pleasant, happy day of by-gone years.”<sup>2</sup>

By the 1900s, Burt County had moved beyond the days of dugout general stores and frostbitten feet. Benjamin Folsom’s son Niles, long removed to California, was still in contact with Burt County residents. Niles wrote reminiscing about those first settlement years and his family’s role in building community in Burt County.

The county was truly a different place but with feet firmly planted in the past. In 1921, Clarence Linton completed his Master’s thesis in education at the University of Nebraska using Lyons as his subject of study. Linton’s work was, in some ways, a miniature community study of Decatur in the 1910s with a specific focus on small town and rural education systems. Linton emphasized how Lyons’ students needed to be tested in order to draw baselines on student achievement. He wished to combine such testing with surveys of class, nationality, occupations, social conditions, religious affiliations, and community aims. Linton believed that “a community is what it is by virtue of a process of growth of many factors.”<sup>3</sup> To examine that community in some detail, Linton surveyed 400 students as to the descent of their great-grandparents.<sup>4</sup> Linton’s work, completed largely in conjunction with his responsibilities as a superintendent revealed the evolution of a portion of Burt County’s community in the years since the frontier and pioneer days had passed.

In the summer 1900, former Platte County commissioner and justice of the peace Guy C. Barnum, who had accumulated some 1,400 acres of land during his lifetime,

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<sup>2</sup> Pioneers and Old Settlers’ Association Handbill, Record Group 0854, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>3</sup> Clarence Linton, “Survey of the Lyons Public Schools,” M.A. Thesis (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1921), 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Linton, “Survey of the Lyons Public Schools,” 145.

made the news once more. A former member of the lower house in the territorial legislature and a one term state senator, Barnum had been an important part of community development in Platte County. Now, in a very public battle, Guy Barnum and his son were in the courts at Columbus struggling over land.

Six years earlier, Guy Barnum had leased his land to his son George and two other men. In 1897, the elder Barnum was declared insane and sent to the asylum at Norfolk, Nebraska. After leaving Nebraska and ending up in a California asylum, Guy Barnum, a widower, returned to Platte County in May 1900. He had remarried and soon brought suit against his son to regain control of his land. Meanwhile, George Barnum was attempting to get a guardian assigned to Guy and suggested that his father was of unsound mind and should not have been permitted to remarry.<sup>5</sup>

At the heart of this sensational case was the collapse or perceived collapse of an important county builder. George Barnum was afraid that his father had been manipulated by his new wife. The case featured five attorneys over a score of witnesses and half a dozen doctors. Tearing apart the family was the fact that George's son Loran took the side of Guy, his grandfather. In the end the court, in place since Platte County's earliest days, found that Guy C. Barnum required a guardian to care for his vast properties. By late July, the sensational trial was over though animosity remained. Guy Barnum was briefly detained by county officials after showing up at George's house carrying a revolver. The elder Barnum claimed he intended to shoot rabbits the following day. Understandably, given the family tension, George Barnum wondered whether rabbits were all Guy was intending to aim at.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Platte County scrapbooks, 978.2 sb 71 Number 2, Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>6</sup> Platte County scrapbooks.

Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties had much more growing yet ahead after 1870. The tales just related all took place years after the close of this study, though they each reveal something of the importance of these county's past community building efforts. This dissertation established the stage on which white settlement in Nebraska was established. In addition, it revealed the general background of the Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties within Nebraska. Because these three counties numbered among the more established ones in the territory of Nebraska by 1860, they provided interesting community histories and separate pieces of the settlement mosaic that made up territorial Nebraska.

While many settlers in territorial Nebraska encountered a somewhat unfamiliar environment in the Great Plains, they were still able to achieve success in farming and community construction. While the nature of life on the Great Plains had an impact on settlers, it did not cause as many alterations or changes to people's life plans as has been suggested in the past. The prairie, whether viewed as beautiful or blank and desolate by some visitors, provided for these new residents. It provided shelter when necessary in the form of sod homes and rich soils on which to produce a wide array of agricultural products. What was perhaps a physically challenging place could still be developed and tamed by these new residents, many of whom arrived from the "smaller" prairies of Illinois or the forested regions of the upper Midwest and Southeast. In addition to battling the environment, the communities in Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties evolved despite (or in some ways because of) being home to people with different political backgrounds, different ethnicities, and different regional backgrounds. Whether

they were New Englanders, Tennesseans, Ohioans, or immigrants, these farmers, lawyers, and skilled artisans found a way to create community.

As the stories of residents across the counties demonstrated, there were several possible points of origin for new Nebraskans after that region was officially opened to white settlement in 1854. Migrants generally followed two routes into the territory, entering either along the Missouri border or near Omaha. After arriving, these settlers quickly set about establishing their personal homes as well as their community homes. In some instances, their cultural backgrounds were carried alongside their personal possessions. Their background added individual stamps on the development of communities in Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties.

In an agricultural world, these three counties maintained close ties to the soil. New residents were more often than not dependent on at least personal success for farming in order to be able to survive in their new homes. As was discussed in chapter three, in the years between 1854 and 1870, there was little to no hope that the farmers would become part of a larger, more national market economy. They were almost exclusively farming for themselves with small forays into money-making opportunities by selling crops to the military at Fort Kearney or perhaps taking a chance on hauling produce to places like Denver.

Quickly, and with purpose, Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties developed institutions like churches and schools. Christian denominations of various degrees and public common schools were both viewed as essential ways to bring some measure of home to this new challenging environment.

Political and legal discussion of the Nebraska territory has been somewhat limited. As part of the old territorial system, Nebraska faced serious challenges through its movement to statehood, including arguments in favor of lengthening the number of years the region remained a territory. A Richardson County newspaper, *The Rulo Western Guide*, opined in favor of remaining a territory for a longer period of time. People in favor of statehood were told that residents in the counties faced serious challenges should approval occur at an early time. The opinion piece feared that the money to run state government would then come from the people – as residents were already paying their own government costs, did they truly wish to pay additionally for the state?<sup>7</sup> As part of the territorial system, Nebraska's political situation has been discussed by the likes of Clarence Carter, and with more detail, James Potts.<sup>8</sup> Carter covered the idea of the territories in general serving a colonial purpose. Whether the colonial nature of territorial status was good or bad is not necessary to debate at this point. The fact remains that Nebraska's politics and law, as described in chapter five, were extant relatively early in their history, and these institutions were often tied to the important purpose of improving quality of life.<sup>9</sup> Whether this attempt was ultimately successful is a point for debate, but it would appear that Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties were able to utilize political systems in an effort to construct and improve community.

Nebraska, and specifically Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties may have grown and expanded but the law that came with this expansion was not a guarantee of broad

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<sup>7</sup> *The Rulo Western Guide* September 10, 1858, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Clarence E. Carter, "Colonialism in the Continental United States," *South Atlantic Quarterly* XLVII (January 1948), 17-28; Clarence E. Carter, "The Territorial Papers of the United States: A Review and Commentary," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 42, No. 3 (December 1955), 510-524; James Byron Potts, "Nebraska Territory, 1854-1867: A Study of Frontier Politics" dissertation, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1973.

<sup>9</sup> James Willard Hurst, *Law and the Conditions of Freedom in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1956).



prosperity.<sup>10</sup> By 1870, only Platte County had successfully joined the transportation revolution with the Union Pacific railroad running near Columbus. All other economic and political developments were typically focused on laws related to ferries, bridges, or perhaps school construction/regulation and then the development of state institutions including the capital, penitentiary, university, etc. In the ensuing ten years, various efforts by state and local government officials would aid the extension of economic boons such as railroad construction to additional counties like Richardson and Burt. The population grew quickly between 1867 and 1870 (perhaps from 50,000 to just under 123,000) and greatly expanded by 1880 (reaching over 452,000).<sup>11</sup>

Political systems and law then were not ignored in frontier Nebraska. While one might question their effectiveness from time to time, they certainly played a role in development if not full contribution on the economic front.<sup>12</sup> By 1870, on the edge of large scale expansion, the residents of Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties were focused largely on their own agricultural concerns with limited success (or, arguably, interest) in industrial matters. The laws and local county governments were mostly concerned with issues related to agricultural pursuits (ferries for getting goods and livestock across creeks and rivers, dam or mill construction, grading of roads, etc.). The salient point is that the laws in question focused on the issue of engaging or allowing economic success for individuals which would add up to aggregate success for the community.<sup>13</sup>

Despite these existing political systems, James Potts argued that Nebraska and its counties were “political frontiers” even beyond statehood in 1867. Potts contended that

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<sup>10</sup> Potts, “Nebraska Territory,” 314, 315.

<sup>11</sup> James C. Olson and Ronald C. Naugle, *The History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 156, 157.

<sup>12</sup> Potts, “Nebraska Territory,” 316.

<sup>13</sup> Hurst, *Law and the Conditions*, especially chapter one.

Nebraska's government was not necessarily "responsible or efficient."<sup>14</sup> Potts described how once established, political entities sometimes used government in their own best interest rather than for the good of the community as a whole. At times "a network of factional arrangements among politicians and businessmen" was established "for the promotion of local economic projects."<sup>15</sup> While such projects may have benefited certain locales, the arguments between Democrats and Republicans created problems as well. Potts described important disagreements on the statewide level that demonstrated the somewhat uneven situation of politics.<sup>16</sup>

Potts suggested that Nebraskans were victims of the "low level of political morality that characterized the rest of the country during the postwar period of Reconstruction."<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Nebraska politics was described as being run by rascals only slightly more dirty than those at New York.<sup>18</sup> With state-level officials incompetent, corrupt, and lacking experience Nebraska politics may have qualified as a "frontier region" in Potts's interpretation. But nevertheless, these officials did exist.

Potts argued that Kansas and Nebraska settlement represented the first attempt by Americans and immigrants to conquer the Great Plains. Further, he held that these new residents used an eastern territorial system and settlement pattern that was different from moving into new land in the east. Potts described the regions as host to "an unfamiliar and inhospitable environment," and one in which Nebraskans had to come up with new methods to conquer. He concluded that the Great Plains possessed a physiography that

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<sup>14</sup> Potts, "Nebraska Territory," 317.

<sup>15</sup> Potts, "Nebraska Territory," 318.

<sup>16</sup> Potts, "Nebraska Territory," 319-322. Potts discussed problems ranging from the disagreements over apportionment in terms of representation to the very controversial question of capital removal.

<sup>17</sup> Potts, "Nebraska Territory," 322,323.

<sup>18</sup> Potts, "Nebraska Territory," 326.

“not only affected the rate and pattern of population and economic growth, but also altered traditional pioneer views of government and politics.”<sup>19</sup>

Like many assertions of this type, there are observations that help it ring both true and false. The settlers in Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties looked to government to provide order and law. Whether this meant dealing with land claims, stray livestock, or violent crime, these counties insisted on swift organization and sometimes even efficient action.

Potts suggested that in Nebraska, pioneering was not simply due to agricultural expansion. He believed that the territory was truly the work of land speculators and railroad expansionists.<sup>20</sup> These individuals wanted to open the land because of low prices, not because land was unavailable in places like Minnesota, Iowa, or Wisconsin. While this may be true to a degree, one cannot conclude, as Potts did, that the agricultural motivation was minimal because no proven farming had been accomplished in Nebraska prior to 1854.<sup>21</sup> Also, a lack of white settlement did not necessarily mean government and federal authority should not be expanded to the region.

Yes, Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties attracted land speculators like Frank Welch and ambitious attorneys like Elmer Dundy. But that fact itself does not obviate the need for establishing some firm hold on law and politics or government in a region. Potts believed that farm making was largely ignored in the first year of the territory. This of course made sense given that most residents did not arrive for permanent settlement until after summer had begun in 1854, far too late in the year to actively pursue farming.

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<sup>19</sup> Potts, “Nebraska Territory,” 320.

<sup>20</sup> Paul W. Gates, *Fifty Million Acres*, 50.

<sup>21</sup> Potts, “Nebraska Territory,” 329, 330.

Sarah Crook's family in Richardson County prepared land in 1854 for 1855 agricultural season. While farming may have been delayed it was not "ignored."

In that interim year, while farm making may have been delayed, politicking was not. The residents of Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties sought to be counted and organized themselves to have local officials and representations in territorial legislature. While settlement may have focused along the Missouri River initially, Platte County residents pushed westward and went through the same paces of government establishment. Yes, as Potts concluded, towns had higher economic and political power, but this is a logical end result as early farmers pursued land ownership and survival, not profitable farming on some levels.<sup>22</sup> Towns were natural communities. Tekamah, Decatur, Rulo, Falls City, and Columbus were all locales in which the residents promoted businesses. Sometimes these residents utilized the government to accomplish this. These businesses, sponsored perhaps through legal venues, however, represented opportunities for town dwellers and farmers alike.

When the territorial or state legislature approved projects like ferry or bridge construction this was pushing the possibility of government involvement in a positive business construction. A ferry or bridge would certainly provide profit for its constructors. In addition, it would allow farmers like Sarah Crook's father to at least have the possibility of an easier journey to take crops to market. The same could be said of county and state government efforts to push the evolution of road systems that better connected town sites. I fail to see how this type of government involvement is any different from that which evolved in the "Eastern Woods." Government in the nineteenth

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<sup>22</sup> Potts, "Nebraska Territory," 331.

century United States sought to aid the creative enterprise of humans.<sup>23</sup> As a result, there is no lawless frontier. Settlers created order and a framework early on in the government and political structure was a very important component in establishing Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties. To argue that the environment in which settlers found themselves altered the importance of government so as to make it weaker or nonexistent rings false. If anything, the environment, harsh and unforgiving as it could be, may have done more to spark community development through legal, political, frameworks. Arguably, the need for some sort of order was so strong that it explains why the town sites, even primitive ones, established rules so quickly.

Potts argued that Nebraska's government was strongly connected to its eastern roots and western environment.<sup>24</sup> But the government existed regardless, and if the settlements connected to the eastern regions because of the majority of settlers being from that region, why should that be an issue? Does that fact adequately address the question of environment impacting these settlers? The issue of whether politics was useful initially to only a small number of settlers in newly settled regions is largely immaterial.<sup>25</sup> If anything, it revealed that again, regardless of environment, Nebraskans in Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties looked to politics to aid the expansion of economic possibilities. The promotion of these projects may indeed have benefited individuals but ultimately as I have pointed out, it aided the whole community as well. Did this mean that at times there were factional problems as Democrats and Republicans struggled for dominance – in most cases, yes. The county seat fight in Richardson County demonstrated that factionalism was alive and well but that was what government

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<sup>23</sup> Hurst, *Law and the Conditions*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Potts, "Nebraska Territory," 333.

<sup>25</sup> Potts, "Nebraska Territory," 336.

was partially about anyway. People did strive to “alter their section’s competitive advantage” as Potts argued, but this fact was not necessarily a negative point.<sup>26</sup> The law, generally in the Nebraska territory and specifically in counties and towns, was often used for this very purpose. This fact would appear to place community development Nebraska squarely in the mainstream when compared to other communities in nineteenth-century United States, despite its location on the Great Plains.

Potts ended his study with the observation that “government and politics continued as an important facet of Nebraska economic thought.”<sup>27</sup> I would concur. Even in the short time frame of Nebraska history I examined, the nascent phase of the frontier, and the beginning of the frontier’s end, the territory and state continually turned to government and politics for order and economic growth. This fact suggests that the counties and territorial government were dependent on establishing order to experience success. For many white Americans and immigrants, the Great Plains and Nebraska represented an open space of abundance. This abundance could be utilized to increase community and human liberty. By building political, economic, religious, and educational communities, Nebraskans in Richardson, Burt, and Platte counties were able to use choices (liberty) and creativity to strengthen economy and other values.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Potts, “Nebraska Territory,” 337, 338.

<sup>27</sup> Potts, “Nebraska Territory,” 341.

<sup>28</sup> Hurst, *Law and the Conditions*, 5.

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