

Out of Old Nebraska —

Lancaster Looked Nothing Like a Capitol City in 1867

By James C. Olson
State Historical Society

The first problem facing the legislature when Nebraska was admitted to the Union in 1867 was that of locating the state capitol. Against much opposition, particularly from the South Platte region, the territorial capitol had been located at Omaha. Omaha's opponents (and they were many) were determined that the state capitol should not be there.

So, in order to find a new location a committee of three men was appointed to look over the state and select the most desirable spot. After a long search this committee decided upon the little village of Lancaster, about 60 miles southwest of Omaha.

Lancaster in 1867 looked like anything but a capital city. It consisted of a tiny cluster of unkempt little buildings huddled along the banks of a small stream known as Salt creek. The total population was approximately 30, and prior to the location of the capitol it appeared doubtful that Lancaster would ever be anything more than a wide place in the road (had there been a road).

Lancaster had been established a number of years earlier by men who had dreams of building great empires on the basis of salt deposits found

in the basin. The Lancaster salt works, however, never produced anything except law suits.

Named for President

The new capital city was platted early in September and lots were offered for sale at prices ranging from \$15 to \$150. The name of the village was changed to Lincoln in honor of the martyred president.

As soon as possible work was started on the capitol building itself and by December, 1868, the new capitol was ready for occupancy. The state's records, furniture and stationery were transferred from Omaha in six wagons. One of the wagons was fairly empty so the United States marshal at Omaha tossed on a barrel of cider to be delivered to one of his friends in Lincoln.

Businessmen had not been particularly enthusiastic about investing in the new capital city until the capitol itself actually was completed. They were afraid the legislature might change its mind. With the capitol well under way, however, men and money began to flow into the little town.

The legislature met for the first time in Lincoln in 1869. One of its acts was to further enhance the importance of the

little town by locating the state university there.

By 1870 a railroad had reached the town and the population had increased to 2,500. The onetime village of Lancaster was well on its way to becoming a city, although as late as 1872, deer, coyotes and other wild animals were killed within the capital city's limits.

Grasshopper Plagues

Favorite Conversation Piece

When old settlers got together a few years back one of their favorite arguments had to do with which was the worst grasshopper year in the state's history. This usually was settled by agreement on 1874. The hoppers had plagued Nebraska as early as 1857 and continued to plague it after 1874, but it was that year, however, when they swept down upon the state in all their fury and virtually ate it off the map.

The grasshoppers came suddenly, filling the air like the driving snow, and their alighting on the roofs and sides of the houses sounded like a continuous hail storm. At times they were four- to six-inches deep on the ground. The chickens, it is reported, almost drove themselves crazy trying to gobble up the hoppers as fast as they alighted. Soon though they came to realize that they could eat all they wanted with hardly any movement.

Stalled Trains

In the cool of the evening, so another story goes, grasshoppers alighted on the warm rails of the Union Pacific in such numbers as to literally stop the trains. At one time section men were called to a spot near Kearney to shovel grasshoppers from the tracks so the trains could get through.

They ate almost every green thing except castor beans, cane, native grass and the leaves of certain native trees. Onions evidently were a particular delicacy.

The grasshoppers usually stayed for only a few days or at most a week. When they left, though, they left desolation and ruin. The results of their visitation in 1874 were so bad that a good many Nebraskans left the state. Others, far too poor to leave, had to be supported by relief from the outside.

Hopper Constitution Adopted

The Nebraska constitution of 1875 has often been called the grasshopper constitution because it was adopted when the effects of the plague were being most seriously felt. Later the state legislature even passed a bill authorizing the supervisors of each road district to call all men from 16 to 60 years to work at exterminating the pests.

Many attempts were made to devise means of destroying the grasshopper. At Nebraska City a man invented a machine called the "grasshopper extirminator" which he proposed to sell at \$15. Still another resourceful citizen argued that grasshoppers could be destroyed by concussion. He declared that a 100-pound charge of gun powder placed in the ground and exploded shortly after a heavy rain would kill all the hoppers within an area of 25 miles. There is no record that his plan was given a trial, indeed there is little evidence that any of the devices developed to kill off the hoppers during the 1870's were particularly successful and the farmers of Nebraska for a number of years lived in constant dread of a return of the grasshopper plague.



OH, THE SHAME OF IT

Given a choice by stern-fingered Patrolman Joseph H. Dries (right) as to whether he wanted to serve five days in the cooler or drive for one month with prominent "Traffic Violator" sticker on his windshield, Michael O'Donnell

wept quietly into a hankie as he made his decision—and it wasn't the jail sentence. He was one of 90 Los Angeles, Calif., traffic violators to whom officials posed the same question. All 90 chose the sticker.



ALL IN A LATHER

Find a dog, even if he is a blueblood with a pedigree longer than an elephant's memory like "Mr. Mac," shown here, who doesn't get that lost-soul expression on his face when he gets dunked for a bath.



SAMARITAN

The Rev. Clarence Golla, of St. Jude's church in Chicago, Ill., who happened to be driving by after John Collins was hurled from his car to the pavement, administers last rites after giving first aid.

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Real Estate Transfers

(Editor's note: A glossary of the abbreviations follows: WD—warranty deed; QCD—quit claim deed. The instruments filed at the Holt county courthouse are listed from whom to whom, date consideration, legal description.)

August 4
REAL EST—WD-Bea Gallagher to Bridget Swanson 4-5-45 \$2000-Lot 14- Blk 51- McCafferty's Add- O'N

August 5
REAL EST—QCD - Frederick Beck to Ernest L. Norwood & wf- no date- \$1- Lot 1- Blk 10- Kimball & Blair Add- Ewing
WD—Bessie Klingler to Joseph M Langan & wf 8-2-47 \$2500- Lots 23 & 24- Blk G- Fahys Park Add- O'Neill

August 6
REAL EST—WD-Lloyd K Brittel to Merle Sparks 8-5-47 \$600- Part Outlot 1- Inman

August 7
REAL EST—WD-Faye Cronin to Ramon H Bright 8-7-47 \$6500- Lots 9-10-11 & 12- Blk C- Fahys 2nd Add- O'Neill

WD—John B McGrew to Leo Vandernick & wf 8-6-47 \$1000- Lots 1-2 & 3-Blk 7- Ewing

WD—John W Hickey to Frank L Burival 4-1-46 \$3200- NW¼ 9-29-11
QCD—Fred J Witousek et al

to Fred Jansen & wf 8-2-47 \$1500- S¼NW¼- N¼SW¼- 6-30-14

August 8
REAL EST—WD-Ivan D Baker to Ethel v Bouska 8-6-47 \$2500-Part NE¼NW¼ 32-30-14

August 9
REAL EST—WD-E W Merrill to D A Schafer 7-7-47 \$500- NW ¼NEM¼ 8-32-15
WD—Merrill M Smith to E W Merrill 7-3-47 \$400- SW¼NW¼ 11-32-15

WD—Lloyd W Bergstrom to Roy J Stewart & wf 5-26-47 \$800-Lots 1 & 2-Blk 22- Page ADM DEED — Martha Stull Adm to Ralph E Stowell & wf 3-13-47 \$4500-NW¼ 33-30-13

PAGE NEWS

Mr. and Mrs. Edward Matschullat and three children and Mrs. Matschullat's father, Lewis Lichty, all of Lincoln, spent from Friday until Monday morning visiting Mr. and Mrs. Albert Anthony and Dale Matschullat.

Mr. and Mrs. Newell Moffat, of California, are visiting at the home of Mr. Moffat's sister, Mrs. Wallace French and family.

WHEN YOU no longer receive The Frontier regularly, your subscription has expired. adv

Personals

Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Bowen returned Monday night after spending a week in Chicago, Ill.

Mrs. Albert Derickson and son, Gregory, of Star, spent last Thursday and Friday in O'Neill at the home of Mrs. Derickson's aunt, Mrs. Georgia Butterfield.

Mr. and Mrs. Roy Hansing, of Indianapolis, Ind., arrived Sunday. They will spend the next two weeks in O'Neill at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Booth and at Lake Andes, S. D.

Miss Marvel Bore attended a camp meeting at Pine Creek on Monday.

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Borland, of Absarokee, Mont., spent the weekend in O'Neill visiting Mr. and Mrs. Frank Clements and Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Bazelman.

Mr. and Mrs. Roland Coil and family spent Thursday and Friday in Sioux City visiting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Rex Boyle.

Miss Beckwith Honoree

Miss Vernice Beckwith was guest-of-honor at a dinner party given at her home last Thursday evening celebrating her 13th birthday anniversary.

Among the guests were Miss Rita Waller, Miss Carol and Miss Janet Seger, Miss Barbara Bennett, Miss Beverly Norman, Miss Carolyn Hiatt, Miss Shirley and Miss Bonnie Keeney, of Norfolk, and Miss Elizabeth Dailey.

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PHONE 22

FARM AT PUBLIC AUCTION

Because of poor health and in order to settle the affairs of my late wife, I will offer for sale for cash to the highest bidder in the main lobby of the Court House in O'Neill, Nebraska, on

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 20, 1947

AT 1 O'CLOCK P.M.

the following described real estate:

NW¼ of Section 24, and SW¼ and W¼ of the SE¼ of Section 13, All in Township 29, North, Range 10, Holt County, Nebraska.

This is a good farm, approximately 10 miles east of O'Neill and one mile north of the O'Neill-Page highway, and 6 miles west of Page.

Good sandy-loam soil of which approximately 220 acres are under cultivation, 50 acres in good hay land, and balance pasture, shelter-belt and buildings. The place is well-improved with 7 buildings, all in good condition. It has a 6-room house, with full basement; a barn 22x40 with hay-mow; a cattle or hog shed 20x30; a corn crib and granary 10x24; a chicken house with cement floor 10x12; a steel work shop with cement floor 10x14. The place is all fenced and cross-fenced and has a good well and windmill.

The sale will be subject to a reservation of one-half of the oil, gas and mineral rights which were reserved by the previous owner and which reservation extends to September 26, 1962, or as long as oil, gas or minerals continue to be produced or the property is being developed.

Abstracts of title extended to date will be furnished.

TERMS: The sale of the premises will be subject to the approval of the owner. Purchaser will be required to pay 25 percent of the bid price on the day of sale and the balance upon delivery of deed within 60 days from date of sale. If sale is not approved by owner, the down-payment of the successful bidder will be returned.

Possession will be delivered November 1, 1947.

GEORGE E. BOWEN, Owner

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