

1869 Legislature supports students, lunatics

by Bill Smitherman
Nebraska Staff Writer

It was Feb. 15, 1869.

After four days of debate the Nebraska legislature passed a bill providing funds for "the erection of a State University, Agriculture college, and State lunatic asylum." Gov. David Butler signed the bill immediately and the chartered University was born.

THE UNIVERSITY'S financial problems began almost as soon as the bill was passed. The Legislature had allowed \$100,000 for the construction of a University, but the contract for the first building was let for \$128,480, according to Frank Partsch in a historical series done for the Daily Nebraskan in 1964.

University Hall's cornerstone was laid on Sept. 23, 1869. It was a day of festivities in Lincoln, then a town of about 1000. A brass band was imported from Omaha to celebrate the event.

The hall was completed in 1871 and stood about where Ferguson Hall stands today, Partsch said. It contained 26 classrooms and offices, an assembly room that seated 600, two "society halls" and a chapel.

ALMOST AS soon as it was completed, the building was condemned for faulty construction. Its sandstone foundation deteriorated rather than hardened with age and several newspaper editors called for the closing of the school.

However, after a series of tests, \$25,000 was appropriated to repair the building. As a result of this expense, the University was hampered financially for many years.

The University opened its doors Sept. 7, 1871 with a student body of five freshmen, two sophomores, one junior, and twelve "irregulars." Since high schools were almost unheard of in the young state, 110 students were enrolled in the preparatory "Latin School."

STUDENTS PAID a tuition of five dollars per semester, eight dollars for non-residents, according to Partsch. There were no dormitories until the 1930's and most students lived with local families.

In the University's early years almost all faculty members were ministers. The fact that the curriculum included a program of required chapel and Sunday worship created a problem as to which denomination would dominate. Religious quarrels were frequent and resulted in the resignations of the first two chancellors.

Other problems besetting the University during its early years were the question as to what subjects should be taught and whether military training should be compulsory on campus. Neither of these questions were finally resolved in the school's first 20 years.

THE CHANCELLOR'S salary was first set at \$5,000 by the Board of

Regents. However, the body soon reconsidered its "rash action" and lowered the salary to \$4,000. Professors were paid \$2,000, Partsch said.

In 1881 the University had grown to 284 students, only 67 of whom were in "Latin" school.

The 1880's marked both physical and intellectual growth for the University. Professors from the East brought ideas of a more extensive and liberal curriculum. These were incorporated in the late 80's by new emphasis on modern language and science.

AT THIS time the University had three colleges — the College of Literature, Science and Art, the Industrial College (including agricultural students) and the College of Medicine. All were located in Lincoln.

Financial problems and community suspicion of grave robbing forced the closing of the Medical College in 1887, according to Partsch. It was reopened in 1902 in Omaha.

In the late 80's four new buildings were added. The chemistry building was completed in 1886. It was followed closely by Grant Memorial Hall (1888), Nebraska Hall (1889) and a boilerhouse.

WHEN THE lands near the city campus were found unfit for agricultural instruction, the farm of Moses Culver, two and one half miles away, was purchased for this purpose. The agriculture campus soon gained

statewide notice for its scholarship and natural beauty.

Early student social life centered around literary societies. The societies held weekly meetings which were "social functions as well as literary programs," Partsch said.

These societies played an important role in the development of the individual, he continued. Many of the students had been raised in frontier homesteads and had no training in social graces.

GREEK LETTER fraternities began to arrive on campus in 1883. They were quickly condemned as undemocratic by the literary societies, but continued to grow in popularity.

The student paper, The Hesperian Student, fiercely criticized the Greeks and a contest for control of the paper ensued. In 1892 the "Nebraskan" was founded by Greeks to oppose the Hesperian. In 1901 the two publications merged to form the Daily Nebraskan.

In the early 1890's Nebraska was paralyzed with droughts and the worst depression experienced by the state to that time. Still, University enrollment flourished and rose from 500 in 1889 to about 1500 in 1895.

NOTABLE PERSONALITIES emerged on the University campus during the 90's. Roscoe Pound, Willa Cather and John Pershing were all familiar faces on campus in these years.

A library was completed in 1895 to house books stored in University Hall. It stands today as Architecture Hall.

Football was introduced to the NU campus in the 1880's by faculty members from the East. The game caught on quickly and became a Nebraska tradition.

BASEBALL ALSO became a popular sport and, in 1891, an athletic department was added to the University.

Partsch lists the major problems of the University between 1900 and 1915 as the efficiency of the physical plant, the quality of the faculty and the necessity for student discipline.

Problems of the physical plant were brought to light in the spring of 1914 when the question was raised whether the city campus was spacious enough for further building. Proposals were made to move the whole University to the agriculture campus.

AFTER A SPIRITED debate, the



Big Red, hale and hearty as ever, are shown in this 1903 line up looking eager as always, but a bit unprotected compared with today's powerhouse.

question was put before the people in a referendum. They voted to keep the University at its original site. At the same time, the legislature voted to fund a large scale program of building for University expansion.

Student behavior came under tough scrutiny in 1912. The problems culminated when the 1912 Cornhusker was called back to have an "offensive" section removed.

During World War I the University operated on a greatly reduced level. Many students and faculty members were called to serve in the armed forces. Chancellor Samuel Avery, himself, became a major in the Chemical Corps.

The 1920's saw another surge of building. Morrill Hall, Bessey Hall, Andrews Hall, Social Sciences Hall, Avery Lab, Teachers College, the Coliseum and the Stadium were all products of this era.

In 1925 University Hall was again condemned as unsafe. The Regents ordered the building razed to the first floor and it remained in this condition until it was razed completely in 1948.

CARRIE BELLE Raymond Hall was completed in 1933 as the first dormitory for undergraduate women. It was later expanded with the addition of Hepner, Love, and Piper Halls. The first men's dorm was not constructed until 1948.

War once again bit into the University faculty and students in

1941. However, some expansion continued during the war years.

Love Memorial Library was completed in 1943. The building was constructed with funds from the estate of Don L. Love, former Lincoln mayor and lawyer.

IT WAS immediately converted into barracks for 2600 soldiers who attended classes as part of their special training, according to Partsch. The building was reconverted and dedicated after the war.

The number of students on campus increased from 2200 in 1945 to 10,000 in 1947. By 1950 enrollment dropped to 8000 but has increased steadily ever since. Enrollment today is around 30,000 including NU at Omaha.

After the war, building boomed once again on campus. Burnett and Ferguson Halls were added in 1948. The Ralph Mueller Carillon tower was also constructed at this time.

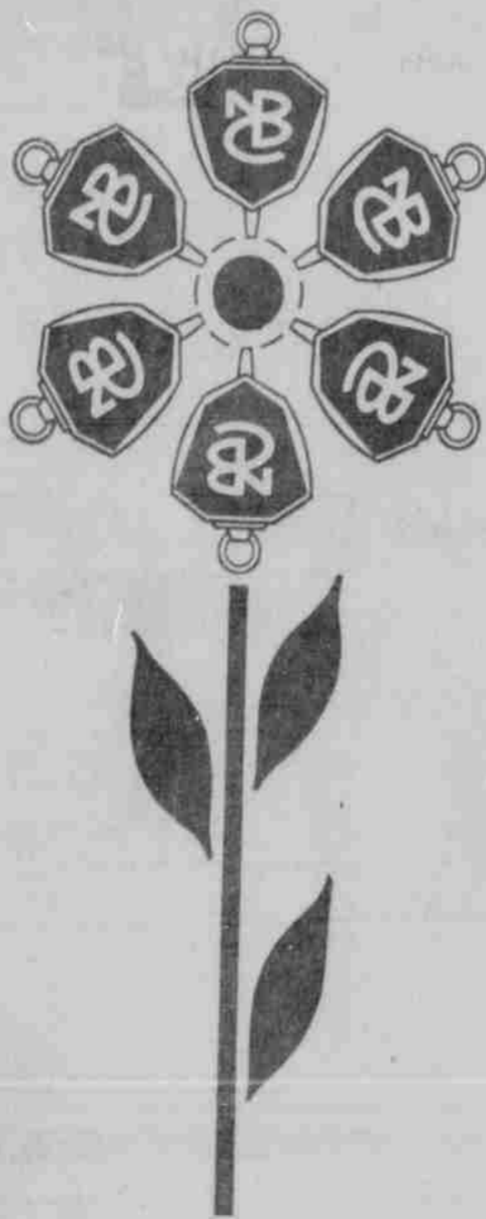
THE 60's saw huge construction programs of dormitories, class, and student buildings on the city campus.

In its 100-year history the University has grown from a four block campus worth a few hundred thousand dollars to a four campus plant worth almost \$146 million according to University figures. The faculty has grown from a handful to well over a thousand. And the students, once a few high school students and freshmen from Nebraska and neighboring states, now number over 30,000 from all over the world.



The University in 1873 as seen looking upward from 11th Street. The main structure at the end of the road, University Hall, was the center of controversy revolving around the contention that the foundation was insecure.

**THE
UNIVERSITY
IS
GROWING**



... AND SO ARE WE

We have grown along with the University for 53 of its first 100 years. We've modernized and expanded many times to better serve you, the student.

Congratulations to the University on its 100th Anniversary

There is no place like Nebraska Book Store!

nebraska book store • 1135 R. St.

STORE HOURS: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
MONDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

CONGRATULATIONS

*on your 100 Year Anniversary
from*

LINCOLN SCHOOL OF COMMERCE

*Quality Business Training
for Over 85 Years*

Computer Programming—Accounting—Secretarial

WESTERN DIVISION
LEAR SIEGLER EDUCATION COMPANY / A DIVISION OF LEAR SIEGLER, INC.



- Denver, Colorado
- Sioux Falls, South Dakota
- Sioux City, Iowa
- Mason City, Iowa
- San Bernardino, California
- Lincoln, Nebraska
- Omaha, Nebraska
- Columbus, Nebraska
- Wichita, Kansas
- Lafayette, Louisiana