



## Nebraska's third capitol marks 50th anniversary

The 50th anniversary of the completion of the state capitol was marked with several events this weekend. Saturday, NU football Coach Tom Osborne was awarded the first annual Nebraskalander Award.

Sunday, the Nebraskaland Foundation and the Nebraska Hall of Fame Commission sponsored several events in the capitol's rotunda.

Among them were remarks by Gov. Charles Thone, a slide presentation of the capitol's history, the cutting of a birthday cake and recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

The longer of the stories below records how the capitol building developed and explains how Lincoln came to be the state capital.

By Melinda Norris

The 50th anniversary of the Nebraska State Capitol Building this year celebrates more than the completion of a building. It marks the end of a statewide dispute which began in the mid-1880s.

The capitol building, towering 400 feet in the air, is the third one in the state's history, and Lincoln is the third capital city.

Disagreement had been increasing between the settlers in the southern and northern Nebraska Territory. Separated by the Platte River, some pioneers came from Kansas on the Oregon Trail passing through Nebraska on the south side of the Platte. On the Mormon Trail, the pioneers traveled along the northern side of the river. Most of these settlers were forced to make Nebraska their home when a broken wagon, sickness or weather veered them off the trail.

As more settlers arrived, a territorial capital needed to be named.

In 1854, Francis Burt, Nebraska's first territorial governor, arrived in Nebraska via the Missouri River to name the new capital. Greeted by representatives from both the south and north side of the Platte River who requested the title, Burt took refuge in a Bellevue mission home, sick from his journey, where he died a few days later.

Because Burt died in Bellevue, many believe that is the site of the state's first capital.

However, following Burt's death, the executive power was passed to the territorial secretary of state, Thomas B. Cuming, who picked Omaha as the temporary seat of the state government.

Angry about the loss of the capitol,

Bellevue legislators joined legislators south of the Platte River in passing a bill locating the capital in "the town of Douglas in Lancaster County."

But because there was no town of Douglas, or any other town in Lancaster County, the bill was vetoed by the third territorial governor, Mark W. Izard, and the state capital stayed in Omaha.

The Civil War delayed the dispute about the location of the capital. But in 1866, the state constitution and first state officers were elected, putting the dispute in the spotlight again.

In 1867, the Legislature chose three members to form the Capitol Commission. These members were to choose the site of the capital within the southern half of Saunders, the northern section of Lancaster, Seward and Butler counties.

Also stipulated by the Legislature, the commission was to locate a state university, agriculture college and state penitentiary.

As a bill neared passage naming Lancaster County as the seat of the Legislature, Douglas County-Omaha senators made a final effort for the capital.

The city that was to house the relocated capital was to be appropriately named "Capital City." However, the Omaha legislators, knowing the democrats south of the Platte River had sympathized with the South during the Civil War, amended the bill changing the name of the future capital city to Lincoln.

However, the southerners didn't mind that name, and voted to move the capital to Lincoln.

Fearing a renewed effort to move the capital back to Omaha would arise with the convening of the 1869 Legislature, Lincoln commissioners quickly hired an architect, who constructed a building in Lincoln one month before the Legislature met.

Eventually, the capitol building was reconstructed, and some additions were made on the original plans.

In 1920, state officials decided to build a third capitol building.

Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue of New York City was given the contract to build the revolutionary building.

The Legislature allotted \$5 million to construct the building, but by the time the final bill arrived, the cost had increased to \$10 million.

During the construction phase Goodhue died. However, all his plans were completed and the task was finished by Goodhue's associates.

On April 24, 1930, the 8½-ton Sower was hoisted to the top of the capitol.



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