

# Nebraska State Historical Society

At a meeting at the Commercial hotel in Lincoln September 25, 1878, the Nebraska State Historical society was started and on the following day its organization was perfected and officers elected. On September 25, 1901, twenty-two years will have passed over the struggles of this society to accomplish something toward collecting and publishing the annals of Nebraska and founding a historical library. It is somewhat interesting to look back over this period to see what was done and how the work has been accomplished.

There was nothing very unusual about the constitution under which the society worked from 1878 to 1885. It may be mentioned that it had a board of directors which was more cumbersome than useful and which was dispersed with in 1885. Prof. Samuel Aughey, whose duties in the university embraced the teaching of nearly everything that could be in any way construed as a science and many things that could not,

various lines of saving material are many. The society publishes such material as is presented to it at the annual meeting and such other historical records as can be secured as often as its funds justify. Under the name of "Transactions and Proceedings" five volumes were issued from 1885 to 1893. The name was then altered to "Proceedings and Collections" and three volumes of this second series have been published.

The library of the society is thus an historical library primarily. Prof. Howard very wisely spent some of the surplus funds for sets of very valuable colonial records, which now cannot be duplicated for much greater amounts and some of them are not to be had at all. The total number of books will not fall far below 13,000.

It should be a matter of rejoicing with all lovers of local history that the society has been endeavoring for the last seven years to collect and bind all files of papers published in the state. This is a gigantic task and the society could only begin as it had



CORNER OF NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL COLLECTION—Photo by U. G. Cornell.

found time to write a few scraps of record in the secretary's book. Robert W. Furnas, D. H. Wheeler, Moses Stocking and a few others donated numerous papers, books and letters and the society may be said to have had a beginning at any rate. Fees and dues made the duty of treasurer one of many small burdens. It was seen that a change was necessary and thus came a reorganization in 1885, on a basis of a law of the legislature of 1883. This made the society a state institution, allowing \$500 per year for expenses. The new constitution dispensed with the board of directors and corresponding secretary. Ex-Governor Furnas, Prof. Aughey and W. W. Wilson served faithfully as president, secretary and treasurer, respectively, until 1885, when their places were filled by J. Sterling Morton, Prof. G. E. Howard and Charles H. Gere. From that time to this, fourteen years, the society has kept these men at their posts, only putting Prof. H. W. Caldwell in Prof. Howard's place when the latter went to California. A change was made in 1893 which placed the work of the society in the hands of one officer, called the assistant secretary and librarian. This office is not elective as the others, but appointive, the appointive power being vested in the board of officers. In July, 1893, I took up the work of the society under this name and have continued it to the present time.

### Scant Quarters.

Contemporary with the change of the work from secretary to assistant secretary and librarian was another change of quarters. The society had, from Prof. Howard's time, at any rate, a small room on the second floor of the main university building, adjoining Prof. Howard's lecture room. In 1892 an additional small room was obtained for the purpose of storing a few new papers, which had begun coming to the society, to be preserved. Through the efforts of Prof. Howard and Prof. Little a portion of the library building of the State university was designed for the State Historical society in the plans. When, therefore, the north wing of the library building was finished so far as the first appropriation would allow the Historical society gladly took possession of the rooms designed for it. After the north wing was put up and roofed there remained only enough of the appropriation to put the tiling between the ground floor and the second and rough plaster the room on the ground floor and lay a pine floor. Even so, this room presented wonderful advantages for the work of the society. Here was a room with over 3,000 square feet of floor space, fireproof and furnished, in addition, with a vault twenty feet square. Things were possible immediately which were not hoped for before. The society quickly had collection cases made for displaying such relics of Nebraska or other states as might be brought in and enlarged the shelving for library and newspapers. For two years the society occupied the unfinished wing of the library building before the building was completed.

### Work of the Society.

The activities of the society along the

facilities and continue in the same way. Along with the saving of current papers has been carried on a constant hunt for old files of papers. About 500 papers are filed regularly.

Relics that are significant of anything in Nebraska history are laid away in the cases or placed upon the walls. Many things relating to Nebraska find their way into the rooms either as gifts or loans.

Some of the early Nebraska relics are these from old Fort Atkinson, which was established about eighteen miles north of Omaha in 1819. These are old pieces of cannon, bricks, buttons, nails and even a piece of tombstone with the date 1820 on it.

The society is getting, as fast as possible, portraits of Nebraskans. Of all prominent public men who have labored for the good of Nebraska it is worth while to hang portraits on the walls of the collection room, as well as to print biographies.

For coming time the work of the society will undoubtedly ask and receive greater recognition. The last legislature gave to the society nearly double the amount it had received before and yet this \$2,500 per annum is barely enough to carry the work. When binding, printing, postage, express and the



GENERAL VIEW OF THE NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S MUSEUM—Photo by U. G. Cornell.



CURATOR JAY AMOS BARRETT AT HIS DESK—Photo by U. G. Cornell.

librarian's salary are taken out of it scarcely enough remains to hire some work done by the hour. Perhaps I may be allowed to suggest here for the first time publicly what it is possible to do for this and kindred work.

This state cannot, certainly, do for its society what Wisconsin has done. That enterprising state began planning for the Wisconsin Historical society a \$400,000 building, which should also contain the State university library. It is not yet completed and the cost will be double that. But Nebraska can begin in a modest way to build, a little at a time, a Nebraska museum, which shall contain perpetual exhibits of the agriculture, horticulture, geology and history of Nebraska. If a two weeks' exhibit of cereals is a good thing, why is it not a good thing to have a display of Nebraska products always where the traveling world may see it? A moment's thought will show that a Nebraska museum is a necessity, once it is thought of.

JAY AMOS BARRETT, Assistant Secretary and Librarian.

## The American Way

An Englishman hailing from the north went into the Chatham hotel in Paris recently and cautiously asked the price of a whisky, relates the London Chronicle. "One franc, sir," replied the bartender. "And a whisky and soda?" "One franc, sir. All drinks are the same price." The Englishman sat down and, to his astonishment, found that the place was run on American lines and that the customers helped themselves at their own discretion. He punished that bottle of whisky till it was nearly empty. As he went out he paid his franc, but the manager called him back and said: "You have forgotten your change." "I thought that the drink was a franc." "That is so, sir," was the reply; "that is the retail price, but there is a reduction when you buy wholesale." And he handed back five sous.

# President State Historical Society---

## J. Sterling Morton

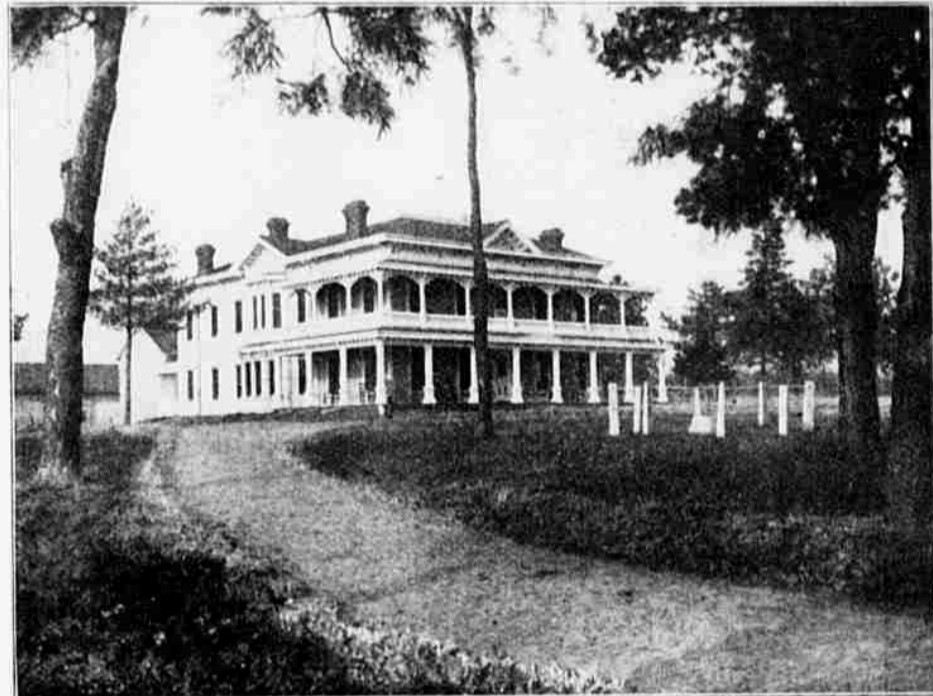
No one person is identified with so many phases of Nebraska history as J. Sterling Morton, president of the State Historical society. Intrinsic qualities and extrinsic circumstances have made him one of the most conspicuous characters in early settlement, pioneer events, Indian affairs, territorial and state organization, legislation, politics, transportation, education, manufactures, finances, economics and reform.

He is not only one of the earliest pioneers, but also the one who has the most to show in results. His trail in Nebraska, forty-five years long, is "blazed" on either hand with unmistakable records of his passage. While demonstrating what the industrious homesteader, aided by climate and soil, may produce in fruit and cereal crops, he has not neglected the "decent-man" crop nor failed to show what a well-ordered

staunch, earnest advocate of tariff reform, sound money, economy, individual self-reliance and integrity.

"A friend to truth, of soul sincere, In action faithful and in honor clear, Who broke no promise, served no private end."

With truth and courage as a basis, his frank veracity has commanded the respect of many who do not accept his views. The scope of his information and the accuracy of his judgment on financial and economic subjects are nationally recognized. The opportunity afforded by a cabinet position to test his ability along these lines astonished some of the "natives," who marveled that a "farmer could know so much." As a cabinet officer, without marring the efficiency of the department or unduly limiting its scope, he covered back into the national treasury over \$2,000,000. In political



ARBOR LODGE—THE HOME OF FORMER SECRETARY MORTON AT NEBRASKA CITY.—Photo by Louis R. Bostwick.

home, aided by education and discipline, may produce in citizens and successful business men. His love of home, wife and children has not been eclipsed by the glamor of a flat publicity. He has not bartered the responsibility, honor and duty of a private citizen for political office—not even at a ratio of 16 to 1. His example as a home-builder is more elevating and dignifying than official prefixes and suffixes to names of politicians who get offices for money rather than honor, as evidenced by the balance of their accounts. His public and private benefactions are investments whose benefits accrue to the recipient. His attitude on important public questions as tariff, money, paternalism, imperialism is determined by fundamental principles and not by the location of the hand-wagon. The public offices he has filled from secretary of the territory to secretary of agriculture have sought him on account of his merit and equipment for such positions of trust. His victories are not the result of phenomenal master strokes, but the continuance of noble, manly struggle toward the best. In the democratic party he was both hero and oracle until he refused to put on the "Nessus-shirt of demagogism." As a statesman he has been the outspoken and bitter opponent of all "wildcat" schemes, paternalism, imperialism and demagogism; the

or economic emergencies he is without a peer, and the severer the test the grander the response.

### Touch of Grim Humor.

His conversations and writings have a touch of grim humor often said to be the surest sign of a great character. His shrewdness to perceive vulnerable or salient points, his ready logic, his ability to marshal facts, his unerring sagacity, his eloquent utterances, his apt illustrations, make him a skillful debater and an invincible opponent. The fugitive anecdotes, terse sayings, comments and quotations of his which frequently appear in eastern and western periodicals are evidences of an interest and a recognition of his national reputation.

By means of the information which has become a part of the observance of "Arbor day" the main incidents in the life of its originator are well known. The impetus of youthful imagination has in some instances outstripped fact, as in the cases of juvenile patriots who wrote "J. Sterling Morton is the man who drove out the Indians and set up stores." "He plants trees in the night." "If he keeps on, I am afraid he will be president."

Mr. Morton is fortunate in being well born. His father was a man of marked ability, fine business capacity and sound judgment; his mother, Emeline Sterling, a woman of rare virtues and attainments, of cheerful disposition and very clever and original. As proof of the statement that "the child is father to the man," the following incidents foreshadow some of the traits of later years: One evening, when about 3 years old, he rose abruptly from his devotional attitude beside his mother's knee, saying, "Please, Lord, excuse me a minute," and proceeded "vi et armis" to settle an account with his teasing young uncle who had just come into the room, then quietly resumed his petitions, "God bless papa and bring him safely home. Please give him good coffee while he is gone." Before retiring he was accustomed to place his small shoes against the wall with their toes diverging at the proper angle, explaining that he wanted them to get used to that position, in order that it might not be so difficult for him to keep his "toes turned out."

When a little older he accompanied his mother on a visit to an aunt who was dangerously ill. The doctor ordered her hair cut off and the young lad was in the room when the tresses were severed. In his opinion the hair was very beautiful. When the lady was cut of danger some one asked about the hair. It could not be found and finally small Sterling was made aware of the facts. "Why, I took it," he said. "I gave it to the robins to build their nest; they didn't have anything but sticks and I knew they'd be mighty glad to get it. It's a beautiful nest and will soon have little birds in it." After the robins had surrendered their life the wretched red nest was for years preserved by the future author of Arbor day.

When he reached the dignity of 8 years

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