

# Historic Capitol Square in Omaha



NEBRASKA'S FIRST CAPITOL BUILDING.

The new Omaha High school building, now in process of construction on Capitol square, will be the third building erected in whole or in part on that ground by the people of the city of Omaha.

The Capitol square has been one of the places around which the general interest of the inhabitants of the city has centered ever since the Omaha Town company first projected the town which was destined to be the gateway to the richest agricultural, grazing and mining region of the United States.

When the original survey of the town site was made in 1854 Capitol square was laid out with its present boundaries. The city limits made a departure at the corner of Twentieth and Dodge streets, ran 600 feet west, 600 feet north and then back to the line of Twentieth street. The ground thus added to the territory of the town was officially designated on the plat of the first survey as Capitol square and the street which led up the grass-covered hill to the center was named Capitol avenue, although at that time the capitol existed only in the minds of the sanguine men who hoped to see Omaha city successful in securing the capital of the territory which at that time did not exist. The struggle of the contending cities for the location of the capital of the territory has been told until it is familiar in a general way to every resident of the state and men are still alive who took leading parts in the contest.

At one time it appeared that Capitol square would be nothing but a name, for when Governor Burt came to the territory he landed on Nebraska soil first at Bellevue, then a strong rival of Omaha for the location of the capital. It is said on very good authority that Governor Burt had decided to locate the capital on the site of the first Presbyterian mission in the territory. He died before the order was promulgated and Acting Governor Cuming, who came to the territory as Burt's private secretary, called the first legislature to meet in the city of Omaha. Capitol square was still but a name.

### Locate the Capital.

When the next congress met, however, it appropriated the sum of \$60,000 for the erection of a capitol building for the territory of Nebraska. James C. Mitchell was ap-

change, but the small appropriation was no doubt the cause. The construction of the capitol was slow, for in January, 1857, over a year after the laying of the foundation, the legislature, which met at Omaha, adopted a bill changing the location of the capital from Omaha. Governor Izard vetoed the bill, giving as his reason that "a costly and substantial building sufficient to meet the demands of the territory for many years is now in course of erection at the present location and will be completed during the year."

Governor Izard was a friend to Omaha, but he was not a prophet, for the building was not only uncompleted at the end of the year, but it was never finished.

### Governor's Prediction Unfulfilled.

Shortly after the prediction of the governor the capitol fund became exhausted and work was suspended. The city of Omaha was vitally interested in its construction and the city council took steps to have the work completed. The governor stated that if the city would advance the money the federal government would undoubtedly refund their advance. With this understanding the matter was taken up by Councillman Bovey, who introduced an ordinance instructing the mayor to proceed with the erection of the building, using any available funds in the treasury and increasing those funds by the sale of land set apart for the purpose, or by using the credit of the city and borrowing money. Plans were perfected by which the city issued \$50,000 in city scrip for a period of nine months at 10 per cent interest. The payment of this scrip to the amount of \$25,000 was guaranteed by eight banks and bankers of the territory. This money was added to the \$50,000 appropriated by congress, making the total cost of the original territorial capitol \$110,000.

Speaking of the building as it stood Lewis S. Reed says:

"When I came to Omaha thirty-seven years ago Omaha was still the capital of the territory and the capitol was occupied by



OMAHA HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING—TO BE REPLACED BY NEW BUILDING IN COURSE OF CONSTRUCTION.

the old capitol building for High school purposes, but a board of survey condemned it as faulty in material and workmanship. A. C. Dort was employed to demolish the old building.

The first High school building was begun in 1870. Speaking of the history of Capitol square from that time Mr. Reed says:

"The regents employed George P. Randall as architect and the High school building with the mansard roof was constructed from Randall's plans. The Omaha Bricklayers' association did the mason work, while the carpenter work was done by Visscher & Wilson. Henry H. Visscher recently died at Pasadena, Cal. Orson Wilson built the barracks at Fort Omaha and afterwards was a member of the legislature from Douglas county.

"When the act was passed at the first meeting of the state legislature granting Capitol square to the city of Omaha for High school purposes the deed, if made, was never placed upon the records of Douglas county. Some eighteen or twenty years later when it was proposed by the school board of the city to locate ward school buildings upon the square some residents of the neighborhood objected, contending that the grounds had been granted by the state for High school purposes only and not for common school purposes. A committee of these citizens went to Lincoln at the session of the legislature of 1889 and had a law passed directing the governor at that time to make a deed in accordance with the provisions of the original act. This new act was passed and a deed was then made by John M. Thayer, governor, to the city of Omaha. This deed was recorded and may be found in the office of the register of deeds.

"Later the school board proposed to erect a new High school building and decided that in order to have proper grounds it would be necessary to lower the grade of the square. Mr. Ulrich, a landscape gardener who had met with much success in managing the grounds of the Transmississippi Exposition, was called into consultation. He submitted a scheme for grading and beautifying the square which contemplated cutting away the hill until the northwest corner of the grounds would be seven feet below the grade of Davenport street. This plan apparently met with the approval of some of the members of the school board. The citizens were indignant. A public meeting was held at which the plan was denounced, and upon a change in the office of architect for the school board it was abandoned and the plans for the present building were adopted."

The cornerstone of this building was laid November 16, 1900, and an accompanying photograph shows its present state.

### Short

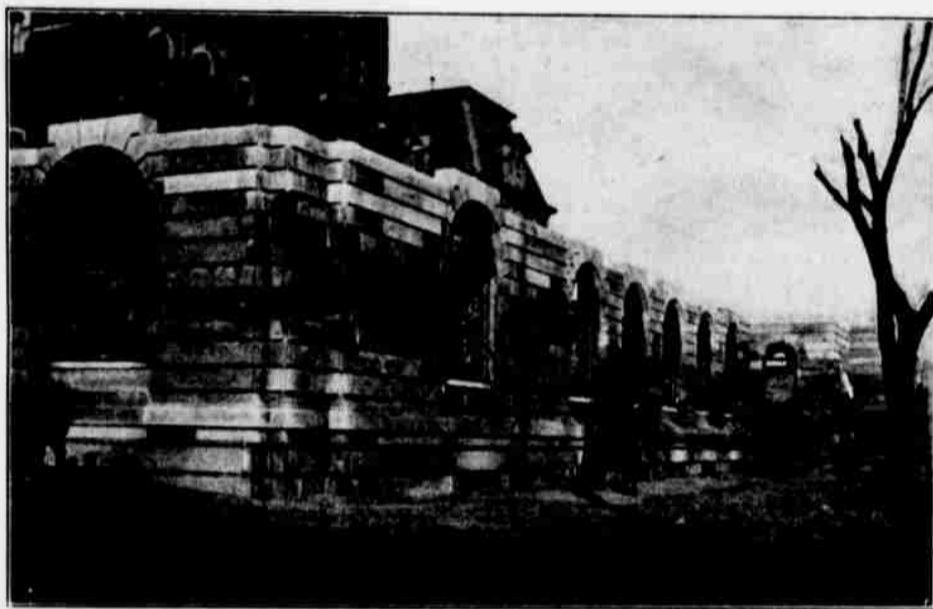
Detroit Journal: Janice lingered beneath the mistletoe.

"A kiss!" cried Clifford, gaily.

"Not on such a short acquaintance!" replied the beautiful girl, with a melodious laugh.

For Clifford, understand, was only 5 feet 2, while Janice was 5 feet 10; and moreover, her gown set perfectly lovely, by reason of which it was no pudding stooping down.

All this the merry company saw at a glance, and roared again.



NEW OMAHA HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING IN COURSE OF ERECTION.

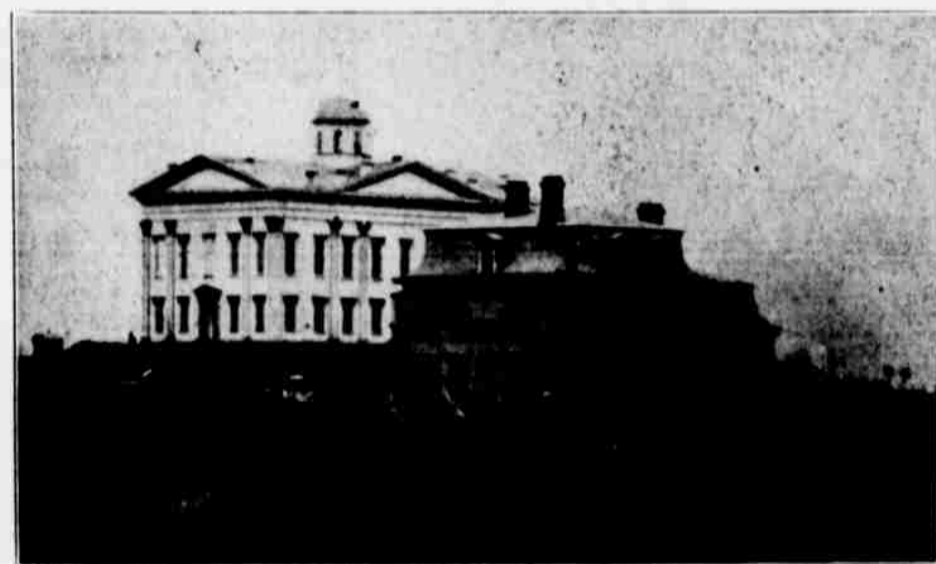
the city council never ceased its efforts to have congress appropriate money to pay the debt incurred by the city in the construction of the capitol. As early as 1858 Dr. Miller was appointed as a commissioner of the city to collect the money. In 1859 P. W. Hitchcock made a proposition to collect the money, but was turned down in favor of J. M. Woolworth, "who was to be in Washington on legal business." Samuel Clinton of Iowa was then authorized to secure the funds and the effort was finally abandoned while David L. Collier had charge of the matter. About this time A. D. Richardson and John H. Sahler reported that it would require \$20,000 to complete the capitol building, but the funds were never raised.

"In the winter of 1857-8 some party or parties announced their intention of opening a saloon in one of the rooms in the basement of the building, but the city council made a protest in an ordinance, in which it declared that the saloon located in the building would be an insult to the legislators, and empowered the mayor and city marshal to assist the territorial authorities in keeping the liquor dealers out of the basement.

### First School on the Square.

In 1861 the first school was held on Capitol square. The building was still the capitol, but Prof. S. D. Beals made arrangements whereby he secured the north half of the building for what was known as the Omaha High school. Upon the meeting of the legislature this school was moved to the old Hamilton house, which stood on the south side of Douglas street between Fourteenth and Fifteenth.

The act which made Nebraska a state in 1867 established the capital at Lincoln. The legislature of 1869 ordered the governor to deed Capitol square to the city of Omaha for High school purposes. David Butler was then governor. The act deeding the square to the city carried with it a provision by which a board of regents for the Omaha High school was appointed. When the regents took charge the school board of Omaha turned over \$20,000, and the city voted bonds to the amount of \$100,000 for the purpose of erecting a High school building. It was at first thought possible to use



MEREDITH HOUSE AND OLD CAPITOL BUILDING.

pointed commissioner to locate the capitol building. In a previous legislature Mitchell had been classed as an opponent of Omaha for the territorial capital, but at the next session he reported that he had decided upon the center of Capitol square in the city of Omaha as the place for the erection of the building. This report was made March 7, 1855, and at the meeting of the second legislature, December 13, 1855, he reported that the foundation of the capitol had been laid. The contract for the building was let to Orson Wilson and the brick which went into the building was among the first burned in the territory. They were made by Bovey & Armstrong.

The first plan of the building was designed in the colonial style, with large columns around the main structure, the intention being to erect a balcony on the level of the second story. These columns were of brick, to be covered with cement in imitation of stone. During the construction of the building a storm arose, which demolished the columns, and they were removed, the original plans being altered. No reason was assigned for the

the governor, the secretary of state, the territorial auditor and the superintendent of the territorial schools. The legislature, which at that time met annually, held its sessions in the building. The council, corresponding to the senate, occupied the room at the southeast corner of the building, while the room at the northwest corner was occupied by the house of representatives.

"The larger rooms in the building were on great occasions used for balls and public gatherings, being the largest assembly rooms in the city in the territorial days.

"The building was of brick and the material was made in Omaha by Bovey & Armstrong. Mr. Robert S. Knox was territorial librarian and custodian of building and grounds. He took great pains to get trees planted and started to growing on what was then considered a bleak and barren hill. Some of these trees, cottonwood and maple, are still standing, not having been destroyed by subsequent grading of the grounds. At a later period Prof. S. D. Beals had charge of the building and lived in it with his family."

From the time the building was occupied until the admission of Nebraska as a state

## PROSPERITY BEGINS AT HOME

Nebraska People Are Showing a Spirit of Loyalty to Home Institutions.

### THE STATE OF IOWA SETS A GOOD EXAMPLE

The Enormous Drain of Premiums Sent from Nebraska to Eastern Life Insurance Companies Exceeds \$1,500,000 Annually.

Many urgent and logical pleas for the patronizing of home institutions have been published in the newspapers of Omaha during the past year and most gratifying results have been produced. It was with the assistance of the press that the Home Patronage bureau was so successfully established by Omaha manufacturers and merchants. A spirit of loyalty to home affairs has thus been infused into the people of Nebraska, who are consequently beginning to believe that money kept at home will be much more beneficial than if sent out of the state.

What is true of manufactured products is equally true of life insurance. Are the bankers of Nebraska aware of the fact that the sum of \$1,500,000 for life insurance is annually taken out of Nebraska by alien companies? Such is the fact, and this immense sum is withdrawn from the banks of Nebraska to swell the coffers of eastern bankers. The banks of Nebraska are the commercial arteries through which flows the income from all the resources of the state. Our bankers are interested in securing customers who will deposit their funds, not only for current business, but for permanent investment. Every dollar sent east for life insurance premiums is a permanent withdrawal of the deposit of the customer and a draft on the banks that in the aggregate amount exceeds \$1,500,000 annually withdrawn from the banking channels of Nebraska. Only about one-third of this sum returns in death claims and settlements by the companies in the state.

The Iowa bankers, becoming aware of the enormous drain upon the cash resources of their state, decided some ten years ago to lend their hands to the upbuilding of Iowa insurance companies. The result is that Iowa has securities on deposit with the auditor of state amounting to about \$6,000,000, saved to the state largely through the efforts of the Iowa bankers, whose work along this line began only a decade ago. Similar results, on a larger scale, have been secured to Connecticut, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New York and other states largely through the influence and co-operation of their bankers and financial institutions.

Nebraska being an agricultural state, with limited manufactures as yet, is interested far more than the above mentioned states in promoting and maintaining savings institutions. This can be done by retaining at home the moneys sent east for life insurance premiums. In bringing about such a result the bankers of Nebraska are doubtless interested or should be more than any other class. They should endeavor to keep all moneys at home not only for deposit, but for permanent investment through their customers.

The farmers are likewise interested in this matter. If there is plenty of money in the banks they will be enabled to secure loans at cheap rates when they are in need of ready cash.

We wonder if the bankers of Nebraska have ever taken note of the number of drafts drawn in favor of customers to be sent east to settle life insurance premiums, never to be returned here. Let us stop this enormous drain. It can be done by patronizing home institutions, one of which is the Bankers Reserve Life association of Omaha, which, under the management of its president and founder, Mr. B. H. Robison, a man of unimpeachable integrity and lifelong experience in life insurance, is meeting with phenomenal success. In the active management of this company Mr. Robison has the assistance of eminent business and professional men, including the well-known banker and capitalist, J. P. Latta, vice president and treasurer; the prominent physician, Dr. W. O. Bridges, medical director, and other men of high standing.

The Bankers Reserve Life association is one of the home institutions that is doing much towards saving to the people of Nebraska a large portion of the immense sum of money that has heretofore been sent out of the state to eastern companies.

Bankers of Nebraska will consider that every dollar paid the Bankers Reserve for life insurance premiums will be deposited in the banks of the state, and its permanent funds will be invested in the securities of the state designated by law.

The Bankers Reserve Life association has been doing business for only about three years, yet in that brief period it has written approximately \$3,500,000 of insurance. In the last eleven months it has written policies to the amount of \$2,552,000. It sustained and promptly paid \$10,000 for death claims during the first fifteen months of its existence and has had only three death claims, each for \$1,000, during the past twenty-eight months, which were promptly paid upon receipt of proofs. The testimonials of its claimants are the strongest possible endorsement of the stability of the company.