

Builders of Nebraska and Their Achievements

FROM May 23, 1854, when Nebraska became a territory, to May 23, 1904, covers its history as a territory and state. The tract of land of which Nebraska forms a part passed by sale from Napoleon Bonaparte to the United States in 1803. From its territorial organization to its admission as a state of the union in 1867, Nebraska made rapid progress, notwithstanding it had been placed on the early maps as a part of "The Great American Desert," which was detrimental to immigration.

Being a bone of contention during the slavery agitation in ante-bellum days and the consideration of Senator Douglas' "Kansas Nebraska Bill," the tide of immigration was checked for a time, but was speedily resumed and increased at the close of the civil war. As population expanded and commerce and agriculture increased, the Missouri river ceased to be an adequate means of carrying its commerce and the demand for railroads became imperative, and they are now running to every accessible part of the state, furnishing adequate transportation. But I cannot enter into the history of Nebraska, being enjoined to confine my remarks to the state as I know its representation in congress.

Among the distinguished men I have personally known who represented the state in the United States senate and in the house of representatives and who added to its name and fame are General Charles F. Manderson of Omaha, Algernon S. Paddock of Beatrice, John M. Thurston of Omaha, William J. Bryan of Lincoln, William A. McKeighan of Red Cloud, Omer M. Kern of Broken Bow, Eugene J. Halmer of Aurora, David H. Mercer of Omaha, George D. Meiklejohn of Fullerton, William L. Stark of Aurora, Rhoderick D. Southerland of Nelson, Elmer J. Burkett of Lincoln, William L. Greene of Kearney, William Neville of North Platte and John S. Robinson of Madison.

To an intelligent constituency as The Bee possesses, it would be superfluous to speak in detail of these gentlemen and the services they have rendered to the state. Politically, I had nothing in common with Senators Manderson, Paddock and Thurston; nor with Representatives Halmer, Mercer, Meiklejohn or Burkett, although our personal relations were always pleasant, while the other gentlemen were my political associates and friends.

The Nebraska delegation in both houses during my services sustained kindly relations and worked in harmony to serve the interests of the state. I take pleasure in saying that Nebraska was ably represented in the senate by that brilliant statesman and scholarly gentleman, General Charles F. Manderson; by Hon. John M. Thurston, an orator of signal power and my lovable friend; that splendid gentleman and good business man, Senator Paddock. It was well represented by Messrs. Halmer, Mercer, Meiklejohn and Burkett in the house, and, it would be needless to add, that among my colleagues, Messrs. Bryan, McKeighan, Kern, Greene, Stark, Southerland, Neville and Robinson, it was in my judgment represented with superior ability and statesmanship and by men of rare oratorical gifts.

All these gentlemen, regardless of their political faith, worked honestly and intelligently for the upbuilding of the state, the outgrowth of which is found in the construction of many public buildings, the appropriation of many acres of land and much money for schools and the improvement of the navigation of the Missouri river and the Transmississippi International exposition of 1898.

It is difficult to speak of those with whom we have been associated in terms of adequate praise without being regarded as attempting to flatter, but all I have said of these gentlemen, and more too, is true, and they are entitled to the gratitude of the people of this state for their eminent services.

It is not so difficult to speak of the good whose virtues and worth should be borne in constant remembrance. But the monument of those who contributed to the making of this commonwealth and have passed from the scenes of life to those of eternity, that their history is written not only in their deeds, but in the current literature of the day, and time and space forbid me to speak of them further.

I think I ought to be permitted to deflect from my subject far enough to say that among the living who have been powerful factors in the upbuilding of this state, the names of Edward Rosewater, Dr. Miller, Governor Furnas and John M. Thayer should not be overlooked.

But let me speak of Nebraska herself, the peerless queen, crowned with the affection of her sons and daughters. Fifty years ago she was an almost trackless waste, inhabited by nomadic races of savage men and wild beasts, her eastern border had scattering and feeble settlements, but from that time to this she has grown to be one of the brightest jewels in the diadem of the union. I have no doubt that fifty years hence will see her stand well at the head of the sisterhood of states.

Through the introduction of Arbor day,

which is indigenous to Nebraska, but which, like a beautiful rose, has found root in other soils, trees have been planted on barren plains until now vast forests grow on what was waste land, and herbage and crops of all kinds are produced in abundance.

Schools and churches innumerable have been erected and are maintained by an intelligent, thrifty and Christian people, and the educational institutions of the state stand well to the front at this time, and being inhabited by a sober, intelligent,

progressive, God-fearing people, Nebraska has made marvelous progress during the years of her existence, and her sons and daughters love her with an affection beyond the power of description.

In her agricultural and grazing pursuits she has few equals and no superiors, and while her storms seem at times inhospitable, her breezes are laden with health-giving qualities.

In the professions she is represented by eminent jurists, great physicians and surgeons and equally great editors, all of

whom have contributed in a large measure to her development.

I do not possess the language to enable me to speak in fitting terms of my love of Nebraska, a state that has so signally honored me and on whose soil I have lived for many years and in whose bosom I hope finally to rest.

W. A. Poynter

Good Cause for Pardonable Pride

STANDING at this fiftieth milestone of Nebraska's progress we may, I think, view the work of our hands with pardonable pride. Fifty years in the life of an individual is a long time, but in the existence of a state is brief indeed. The great natural advantages which so materially assisted in the building up of the other states, such as navigable rivers, large bodies of timber and great mineral deposits, were entirely wanting in Nebraska. As a farther impediment, the early explorers represented this state as a part of the Great American Desert, and of course worthless. It seems when God made Nebraska He just gave it two talents, which those who might come into possession might occupy. He mixed up for it the very best kind of soil and gave it a climate unequalled for its health-giving and energizing qualities. Upon these two talents the people in Nebraska have been trading during the past fifty years, and in their use have made them many talents more, the increase being in homes and schools, railroads and cities, churches and colleges, and a citizenship of a million and a quarter, representing the best educated, most advanced and up-to-date of this, the most advanced nation in the world.

It seems difficult to realize the wealth accumulation of this first half century. The grand assessment roll of the state for the year 1903 was one hundred eighty-eight and one-half millions of dollars. That was supposed to have been made upon the basis of one-fifth of the actual valuation. But we are all very well convinced, from the amount of complaint now going up over the assessment under the new revenue law, that really that roll represents less than one-tenth of the actual value of Nebraska property. So we are safe in saying that Nebraska holds more than one billion eight hundred and eighty-eight millions of dollars of actual property. The report went abroad last year that our crops were

short; and yet there were produced one hundred and seventy million bushels of corn, and forty-four million bushels of wheat. Nebraska's agricultural production of all kinds last year goes well towards the one hundred million dollar mark. All this vast production in agriculture has been built up from a strip of the great desert in the brief space of fifty years. And while this growth in production was being made, thousands of rich farms and beautiful homes, surrounded with groves and orchards, and showing and possessing taste and refinement of their owners, sprung up as by magic upon the treeless plains. Cities and towns have kept pace with agricultural development, using every appliance of the most advanced civilization, far beyond the older states.

A prophet fifty years ago that would have dared to picture Nebraska as it is today would have been considered a visionary dreamer. Even those who have witnessed this rapid development can scarcely believe their own senses.

The splendid advance made by Nebraska in this first half century is due largely to the character of its people. Many of the pioneers were veterans of '61-'65, who were given the privilege of accepting the task of creating a new state under the guise of the donation of 160 acres of land was generally thought to be desert land. To this work they brought the same heroic bravery and untiring energy which characterized their work of saving the union. About this time many young men from the east, who wished larger opportunities than could be afforded them there, came to try their fortunes in the new west. They all brought with them hope and brains. They began the building of the new state at the point the older states had already attained, so the first public work to receive attention was the school. Neither lumber nor timber for making it was to be had, but building material in unlimited quantities abounded in the native sod, and this became the first

material for the school house as it had been in most instances of the residences. Many churches were erected from the same material. From the very beginning, then, though crudely housed it may be, Nebraska has had those things which marked the best civilization of the older states. Today the neat white school house in more than 8,000 school districts, 400 city and village high schools, many seminaries and colleges and our grand state university are the evolution upward from the little sod school house on the prairie.

One most important factor in Nebraska's development must not be overlooked. Of all to whom credit is due, there are none entitled to more honor than the pioneer women of our state. The great majority of these came from cultured homes, accustomed to the association of the most refined surroundings; they bravely assumed the task of creating like conditions in a region having none of them. Who may know the long days of loneliness, the hunger and longing for even a sight of the cool, shady groves to rest the tired eyes from the monotony of the endless plain? "Men must work, but women must wait," and the waiting is often much harder to endure than the working. We lift our hats and pay homage to the pioneer women who by their heroic helpfulness and patience made possible the beautiful Nebraska of today.

Every Nebraskan should be proud of his state and its splendid progress. Any young man owning a quarter section of this rich soil and leaving one of Nebraska's fair daughters for a wife is a king over a realm that will yield him perpetual revenue and happiness. It is the common lot of humanity to want, but such a one will never need.

W. A. Poynter

Years of Adventure and Conquest

BETTER fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay," sang England's choicest modern poet, expressing an idea truly Anglo-Saxon and held in common by all progressive races, that activity is preferable to passivity, work is more desirable than play, that it is better to wear out than to rust out.

The half century that has elapsed since May 30, 1854, when the signing of the Kansas-Nebraska bill by the president of the United States opened virgin fields for conquest, by calling into existence new territories for exploration and settlement, has been a period when the restless activities of those who took up the burden of life in the transmississippi country has had full opportunity for display and ample chance afforded for the efforts of tireless energy and the accomplishments of virile labor.

Those who entered this land, then so little known, were possessed of "hearts of oak and spirits bold."

Whether life could be sustained upon these wind-swept plains was a serious problem. The geographers had proclaimed it a great desert. Those who had traversed the broad expanse between the muddy river and the lofty peaks of the Rockies, having no thought to stay until they came to where gold would reward their search for the new El Dorado, spoke of the stifling heat and scorching winds of the dry summer, the freezing cold and fierce blasts of the terrible winter, of the absence of trees to afford grateful shade for protection from the summer's sun and needful fuel for the winter's cold, and declared it fit only for the sneaking coyote, the shaggy buffalo and their fit companion—the wild Indian.

The tomahawk and the scalping knife were better fitted to the environment than the shovel and the hoe.

Truly the outlook was most discouraging, the prospect most uninviting.

But the spirit of the adventurer and the nerve of the conqueror are ever present. They actuated LaSalle and Marquette in the palmy days of New France as they prompted Lewis and Clarke in the time of Jefferson.

The fascination of exploration is only equaled by the satisfaction of subjugation and the glorious results of the last fifty

years in Kansas and Nebraska need no detailed recital.

Since the great day when the Declaration of Independence was read from the front step of the old state house in Philadelphia, while the bell "proclaimed liberty throughout the land and to all the people thereof," no event in American history was fraught with greater importance than the passage of the bill signed by the chief executive on May 30, 1854. Its repeal of the Missouri compromise measure that for over thirty years had held the sections apart, was the beginning of that oft predicted "irrepressible conflict" that, starting on the prairies of Kansas, led by tragic succession to the hanging of John Brown in Virginia, the firing upon the flag in South Carolina, the arming of the indignant north, the four years of bloody war with the sacrifices upon over 2,000 battle fields, the emancipation of millions of slaves and finally the culmination at Appomattox and the birth of a puissant nation, mighty because by war's dread arbitrament it was decided that this union of states is indestructible. The day whose semi-centennial we are

soon to celebrate brought forth Lincoln and Grant from obscurity and placed, the emancipator and the conqueror in the most prominent niches of the temple of fame.

The battle for the preservation, won by the wisdom of the one and the genius of the other over the disbanded hosts of freedom, seeking homes in a new land, turned naturally to the transmississippi country, opening great opportunities by the building of the Union Pacific railroad, constructed through government aid as a war necessity.

The gallant hosts spread from the river to the mountain slope and entering every branch of industry carved out, with invincible hands and creative brains, the two magnificent commonwealths that exult in the event of the 30th day of May.

"God uncovered the land,
That he hid long time in the west,
As the sculptor uncovers his statue,
When he has wrought his best."

Charles F. Manderson

Story of Nebraska as Written by Nature and Man

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sanitary inspection, but most of all in the vastly increased outlay for educational (both primary and higher), forming from one-third to one-half of the total public expense, has created a floating state debt of \$2,000,000 and brought the people face to face with its latest problem—more revenue or fewer functions.

Fifty years ago there were less than a thousand white people in Nebraska territory, today more than a million. The total wealth then was probably not \$100,000, now between one and two billions. Then there was not a single cultivated farm—today there are 125,000, with crops worth \$152,000,000. Then not a factory or mill of railroad. Today 5,434 manufacturing establishments, with a product worth \$144,000,000 each year, and 5,700 miles of railroad. Fifty years ago this summer a single newspaper, the Palladium, at Bellevue. Today 600 newspapers and magazines. Fifty years ago not a school in active operation. Today 10,000 common schools and higher ones by the hundred. Fifty years ago an unfenced buffalo pasture, with no rank in civilized society,

Today—in the union of forty-five sister states, which forms the strongest nation in the world—her rank is tenth in total value of farm products, eighth in production of wheat, fourth in production of corn, fourth in number of cattle and swine, third in manufacture of meat products, and first of all in education qualification of her people. In fifty years Nebraska has given the world its central battle ground for the settlement of the most pressing world problems, from slavery to monopoly; she has given national leadership to both sides in these struggles; she has given the nation twice a leading candidate for president, she has given the world an Arbor day. Highest of all, her broad prairies and lofty table lands, have given birth to a race of clear visioned, independent minded, progressive men and women. Unfettered by the dogmatism of the past in politics, in religion, in economics, in human sympathy and aspiration, may Nebraska never fall in her leadership. Nor heed the sceptic's puny hands. While near her school the church spire stands. Nor fear the blinded bigot's rule. While near her church spire stands the school.