

## Omaha and Nebraska Folks Prominent on Big Canal Zone



Pres. Tilt and Col. Goethals at Ancon



Panamanians from the States on a picnic



HARRY BORTIN  
Asst. Engineer  
U.P.



G. L. Campen

**T**HE Nebraska Government was the unofficial title of the Panamanian canal zone from 1904 to 1909. During that time the supervising staffs, from Governor Charles E. Magoon to Assistant Fire Chief C. E. Waldman, were native born or resident Nebraskans. Not less than 100 minor officials and skilled laborers have also been contributed to the army of 20,000 men with which Uncle Sam has undertaken and is rapidly completing one of the most colossal tasks of modern times.

In 1907 Governor Magoon was sent as minister of affairs to Cuba. Promotions and changes followed and several Omahans and many Nebraskans were officially recognized as leaders in the work and advanced to positions of greater authority and higher salary. However, an exodus started the following year and the Panamanian zone lost gradually the title of "Nebraska Government."

George L. Campen, assistant city engineer of Omaha, began in Panama in 1905 as water commissioner, but when he left in 1909 he had been promoted to superintendent of public works for the entire canal zone. Harry Bortin, now appraisal engineer for the Union Pacific, was on the isthmus from 1907 to 1909. He was in charge of a party that made a complete survey of the city of Panama in July, 1907. When this was completed he surveyed and laid out the town of San Miguel, completed a topographical survey of Ancon hill and vicinity and a watershed survey of the Pedro Miguel valley. Camping with his men in the jungle, Bortin began the location of a wagon road between Panama and Culebra. In July, 1908, he was placed in charge of the department of hydraulics and meteorology on the Rio Chagres and its tributaries. Later he was at the Culebra cut making surveys and estimates of steam shovel performance. Here he worked until he returned to Omaha in December, 1909, to take his present position with the Union Pacific.

Many dangers tend to service on the canal a hazardous aspect. But few Nebraskans have met with serious accidents. H. P. Warren, once a resident of Omaha and now an inmate of Mercy hospital in Chicago, was engineer of construction in the canal zone until a year ago, when both his legs were broken and he was rushed by boat and special train to Chicago for treatment. The shattered bones of one leg have been removed and grafted into the other and his recovery is now certain, although he is probably destined always to be an invalid. Dr. J. B. Murphy, an expert in this branch of surgery, performed the delicate operation of removing and grafting the splintered bones. This accident was the sad climax of a most promising career, for Warren went to the isthmus as a rodder and worked his way up until he stood at the head of his department, a recognized authority, signally honored by the government for a series of unusually brilliant services.

Tom M. Cooke, formerly of Lincoln, is now director of posts in Panama. Other Nebraskans now serving in the canal zone are: C. E. Weidman, chief of the fire department; Charles Logasa, draftsman for the Panama railroad, formerly in the city engineer's office in Omaha; M. B. Connelly of Seward, superintendent of construction on the Panama railroad; L. K. Needham, assistant engineer; E. Zook of Nebraska City, once in the employ of the Burlington, engineer of maintenance; Charles F. Koerner, assistant fire chief; William Dotson, superintendent of masonry.

A. K. Stone, master of construction on the isthmus, was formerly an employe of the street railway of this city. John Whitmore, now residing at Los Angeles, was formerly traveling auditor for the Panama railroad. Alfred Larson, an Omaha lad, was foreman on the Gatun locks for a year. J. J. Jeffries, once a quartermaster in the canal zone, now with the Guayaquil & Quito railroad.



Native "Mammy"

used to live in Omaha. Another Nebraskan, L. W. Huntington, spent a year on the isthmus, but left there for Haiti, where he now resides.

Charles Sargent and Charles Borg, two Nebraska boys, took a post-graduate course in the canal zone. They are now in Washington in partnership in law and interested in banks in the capital. While on the isthmus Mr. Sargent was Engineer Campen's chief clerk. Mr. Borg is a graduate of the Omaha High school and the University of Nebraska.

Prof. David O'Connor and his family, consisting of a wife, two sons and two daughters, were on the canal for over a year. Prof. O'Connor was superintendent of schools in Panama and his sons were employed in the mechanical department. The two daughters taught school. They were married in Panama and shortly afterwards returned to Nebraska with their parents and settled at Randolph, where the family now lives.

Omaha families have contributed at least three school teachers to the army of useful workers now engaged in leading the Panamanians to the front. They are Jessie Pontius, formerly of the Beals school, whose mother resides at 1119 South Twenty-eighth street; Edith Anderson, whose Omaha home is at 608 North Forty-first street, and Helena Nason, daughter of Dr. A. W. Nason, whose office is in The Bee building. These young women have stuck to their task without faltering, and in letters home express themselves quite happy and well placed in their new field of labor. The two first named had teaching experience in the Omaha schools, while Miss Nason received her training at the University of Nebraska.

Ed Burmester, a brother of Councilman Louis Burmester of Omaha, has been an officer of the fire department at Gorgona for the last five years. He was chosen for the job on the isthmus through the friendship of Senator Millard and has made a fine record for efficiency. He is the baby of his branch of the Omaha Burmesters. His elder brother, William Burmester, was killed at the time of the destruction of Allen Bros. wholesale house, November 26, 1903. Other Omaha firemen now doing duty in Panama are Olof Olson, Albert P. Livingston, Charles Peterson and August Schaefer.



ED BURMESTER  
Fire Dept. Gorgona

"The greatest thing about this canal you are building across the Isthmus of Panama is the spirit with which every man, to the least of them, co-operates and fights indomitably for its completion," an English visitor said to an Omaha audience recently. "When I was there we were standing on the banks of the ditch watching a steam shovel in operation. One of the men waved his hand to Colonel Goethals. 'Don't worry, boss,' he seemed to say, 'we'll finish the job on time.'"

Five thousand directors, supervisors, foremen and men skilled in engineering, directing the efforts of 20,000 laborers, educated for every department of construction work, are united as one man by this spirit. Nebraskans who have returned from the isthmus express emphatic faith in the government and the men in authority on the canal. The number of natives working on the big ditch is comparatively small. Naturally indolent, 85 per cent of the population are colored and disapprove of all manual labor. The other 15 per cent are of English, German, French, Spanish or Italian descent and the majority of them speak several languages. However, they are not enthusiastic about this huge trench being excavated through the territory of Panama, and crowds of peons will lounge for hours in the vicinity of the workmen, scornfully watching the toiling "gringos."

Machinery has displaced hand labor and machinists, architects, engineers and builders are doing in hours what the old French Canal company could not do in months. Many of the laborers are from the United States, Gallagos from southern Spain, Sicilians and Italians, all now thoroughly Americanized and vitally interested in the completion of the canal.

Life in the canal zone is quick-moving and the tenderfoot must become rapidly inured to its hardships or turn his face homeward. Engineers Campen and Bortin were at times called to every part of the zone and experienced every unpleasantness. For weeks they camped in the jungle, laboring from dawn to dusk, shorn of all luxuries and sometimes thankful for bare necessities.

However, as Campen says, Uncle Sam wisely provided for play as well as for labor. All work ceases on Sunday. The forenoon is spent at church and the afternoon is given over to entertainments of divers and sundry kinds, including picnics to the secluded haunts of the jungle, boating excursions and base ball games. These games attract the largest crowds, for major league material is often found in the lineups, and wandering outlaws are gladly welcomed by the amateur managers. Games of fifteen innings, with scores standing 3 to 2, are recorded in the base ball annals of the isthmus.

A fine band, made up of men from all parts of the isthmus, plays all day Sunday to attentive



Geo. L. Campen and his Panama bungalow



Geo. L. Campen and his Panama bungalow

audiences. The players are given an extra stipend of \$25 per month for their services as musicians, and this adds to their natural zest for good music and has resulted in a very creditable musical organization.

When the rainy season comes the work of the northerners is impeded by floods and stifling humidity, say the Nebraska veterans, but so well have the sanitation authorities coped with this problem that today Panama's death rate is lower than many of the cities in the United States. Upon the arrival of the Americans in the cities on the isthmus they found a loathsome neglect of the simplest sanitary rules. The sewage system bred disease, the streets were rivers of mud and there was an aggravating attitude of indifference to be overcome.

Streets were paved and entire cities were, in instances, raised as much as eighteen inches above their original levels. Cleanliness was made compulsory and a stricter discipline and newer methods wrought wonders among the people. These precautions and a careful regard for sanitary rules destroyed the old fear that had existed since the French abandoned work on the isthmus and proved that the white man could live and work in Panama with as much immunity as on the plains of the west. Even in the camps in the jungles few contagions occurred and malaria became less and less a spectre of death as the work progressed.

"Colonel Goethals and the men who are making his dreams and the dreams of the United States

come true believe the Panama canal will be completed in January of 1915," said Mr. Campen. "Nebraskans can join in the chorus of celebration with greater ardor, perhaps, than the people of any other state, for many of them have known the difficulties of the undertaking, faced the dangers and participated in the work to a greater proportionate extent than the people of any sister state."

"The west will derive a direct and immediate benefit from the opening of the canal," said John Barrett of Washington, president of the Pan-American Union, during his visit to Omaha in February. "And I would have the great business organizations of Omaha, Chicago, Kansas City, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Memphis and New Orleans send special representatives of keen capacity of observation to study every phase of the new commercial field which will be reached by the canal."

Months before this advice was given it had been heeded and dozens of Nebraskans had made from one to three trips to Central America and studied the situation. Preparations are now incubating to continue these studies at the exposition to be given in San Francisco upon the completion of the canal. In the meantime everything affecting the canal, from the smallest landslide in any of the huge cuts to the legislation fixing the tolls, is of a peculiar personal interest to a small army of Nebraskans who are veterans of this contest being fought out in the tropics to open a wonderful new avenue of commerce to the world.