

HISTORICAL

No 2.

The departure of the capital commission to hunt a site for Lincoln was a subject of merriment to the newspapers of the old capital. Not until after much travelling to and fro, looking at the sites through the length and breadth of the territory defined by the act, the commissioners on the 29th of July 1867 having issued their order locating Lincoln, in Lancaster county, on and about the site of Lancaster, its county seat, and commenced to survey the same into blocks, lots, reservations, streets and alleys, did the press of Omaha wake to the realities of the situation.

There was music in the air. The act provided that within ten days after its passage the commissioners should qualify and give bonds to be approved by a judge of the supreme court. The bonds were to be filed with the state treasurer. Now it had been ascertained that though the commissioners had sent in their bonds to the chief justice, and he had approved them in the stipulated time, they had not been filed with the treasurer inside of the ten days. It was announced, therefore, that they had no authority to do anything under the law, and that if they sold what purported to be lots in the town site of Lincoln, the treasurer, Hon. Augustus Kountze of Omaha, would receive the money and hold it for future disposition, but he wouldn't pay out any of it as a capitol building fund. At any rate an injunction would be applied for to prevent him. The announcement was calculated to discourage those intending to become purchasers of Lincoln lots. It did have a depressing effect.

The sale of lots opened on the new site in October. The commissioners were on the spot with quite a number of possible purchasers. The auctioneer was a handsome man and had a good voice. There was a band of music in attendance, and it played as well as any band ought to play so far away from civilization. But not a bid could be coaxed from a single soul. The commissioners had decided, upon consideration, that they would not personally invest. It was deemed proper to observe the proprieties very strictly, and to avoid future scandals they would keep out. But this was a matter of suspicion to the crowd present. If the commissioners haven't enough confidence in the new city to purchase a residence or a business lot, why should we venture any investment? Night came on and not a lot had been sold.

A council of war was summoned in the evening in the Donovan House, and the commissioners and certain gentlemen from Nebraska City were in attendance. The Nebraska City capitalists said that the commissioners ought to bid on lots, and the commissioners said that the Nebraska City men who were so much responsible for the scheme ought to bid. Finally it was conceded that both ought to bid. The Nebraska City men formed a syndicate that agreed to bid the appraised value on every lot as it was offered and as much more in case of competition as they thought safe, until they had taken ten thousand dollars worth of lots. But there was a proviso that in case the sales did not amount in five days to twenty-five thousand dollars, including the syndicate's ten thousand, the whole business should be declared "off," the enterprise abandoned, and no money paid in. The commissioners also rescinded their compact against becoming personal bidders, for they saw that matters were in a very precarious condition and they had to imbue the people present with some confidence in Lincoln.

The next day business began in earnest. When the five days had passed \$44,000 had been realized, and the prospects considered certain for the erection of a capitol building. By the time the sales at Nebraska City and Omaha had been finished \$53,000 had been taken in, and no supplementary sales at Plattsmouth and Brownville were held, though comparatively few lots had been disposed of to realize the necessary amount.

Lancaster, the site of which had been swallowed up by Lincoln after the proprietors had deeded it to the state in consideration of the location of the capitol, was a hamlet of five dwellings a part of one being used as a store, and the stone walls of a building commenced as a seminary by the Methodist church, but which had partly burned before completion and had been temporarily abandoned. The residents on the original plat of Lincoln were Captain W. T. Donovan, whose house stood on the corner of Ninth and Q, on the site now occupied by the Peoria house; Jacob Dawson, whose log dwelling was on the south side of O, between Seventh and Eighth, and who had commenced the foundation of a residence on the corner of Tenth and O, where the State National bank now stands; Milton Langdon, who lived in a small stone house east of Dawson's between O and P; Luke Lavender, whose log cabin stood in Fourteenth, just south of O, and John McKesson who was constructing a frame cottage two or three blocks north of the university. Scattered about just outside the city limits as then established on premises that have since been brought in in the shape of additions, were the residences of Rev. J. M. Young, Wm. Guy, Philip Humerick, E. T. Hudson, E. Warnes and John Giles. Between the date of the location and the first sale of lots a number of buildings were erected on the site, the owners taking their chances at the sales of securing their titles by purchase. There were two frame stores, one occupied by Pflug Brothers and another by Rich & Co., a law office by S. B. Galey a shoe shop by Robert and John Monteith, a stone building, afterwards rented to the Commonwealth, the predecessor of the State Journal, by Jacob Drum, a hotel called the "Pioneer House," by Col. Donovan. These buildings were located on or in the vicinity of the public square and fixed the business center of Lincoln.

As soon as the sale was finished the commissioners proceeded to advertise plans for a capitol building. John Morris was the successful architect, and Joseph Ward secured the contract for its construction on his bid of forty-nine thousand dollars.

The excavation was commenced in November, and by the first of December of the following year, 1868, was sufficiently completed for occupancy, and the governor issued his proclamation transferring the seat of government to Lincoln and for the removal of the state offices and archives to the new building. The first capitol was constructed of sandstone, quarried at various points within Lancaster county, with a facing of magnesian limestone from a quarry near Beatrice. This stone was hauled the forty miles over roads and bridges in part constructed by the contractor.

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