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Article Title: “The Prairie Plow was at Work”: J Sterling Morton’s 1859 Address on Nebraska Agriculture

Full Citation: James E Potter, ed., ““The Prairie Plow was at Work’: J Sterling Morton’s 1859 Address on Nebraska Agriculture,” *Nebraska History* 84 (2003): 206-213

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH2003Morton.pdf>

Date: 9/12/2012

Article Summary: At Nebraska’s first fair J Sterling Morton provided a personal view of the Territory’s agricultural history. He condemned the financial speculation in town lots that had led to the panic of 1857 but proudly recounted the bountiful harvests that followed.

Cataloging Information:

Names: J Sterling Morton, Mark W Izard, John Thompson

Place Names: Nebraska City, DeSoto, Tekamah

Keywords: J Sterling Morton, Arbor Lodge, “Manifest Destiny,” banks of issue (“wildcat” banks), Mark W Izard, John Thompson, Ohio Life and Trust Company, panic of 1857

Photographs / Images: J Sterling Morton about 1858; “Life in Nebraska—Pre-emption Improvements According to the Spirit of the Law” (Frank Leslie’s *Illustrated Newspaper*, May 21, 1859; Missouri River steamboat

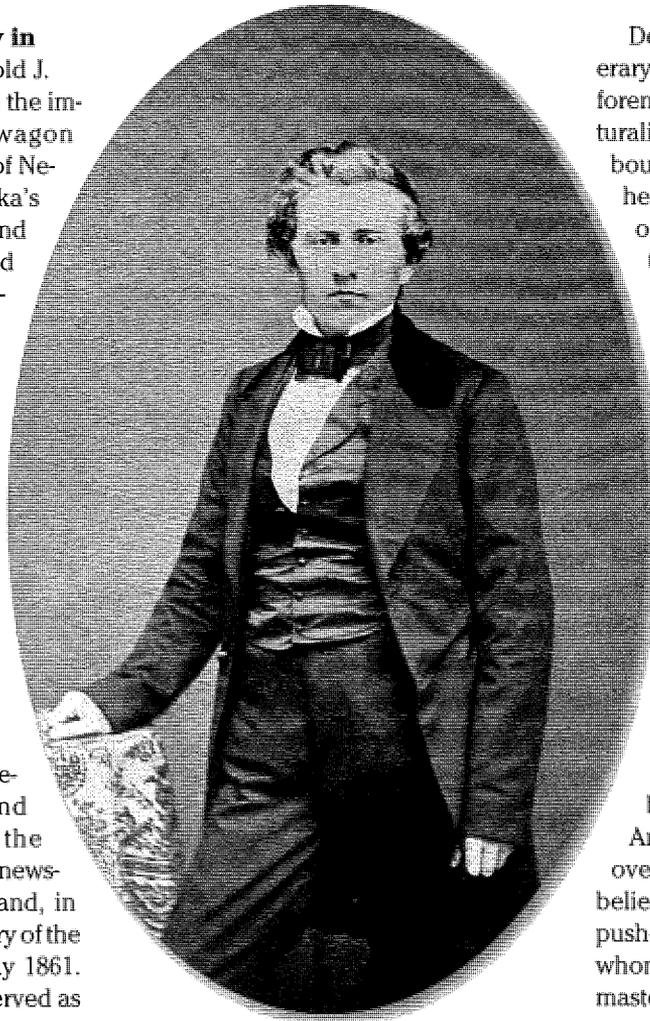
"The Prairie Plow was at Work"

J. STERLING MORTON'S 1859 ADDRESS ON NEBRASKA AGRICULTURE

Edited by James E. Potter

On a late September day in 1859, twenty-seven-year-old J. Sterling Morton mounted the improvised rostrum a farm wagon provided to address the farmers of Nebraska. The occasion was Nebraska's first fair, held in Nebraska City, and Morton's topic was the history and development of Nebraska agriculture since 1854. Most of what he had to say came from memory or experience, since he readily admitted that no records or statistics had been kept. To give context to his review, Morton also offered a broader glimpse of Nebraska Territory's eventful first five years. The subsequent publication of the speech in the report of the territorial board of agriculture may represent the earliest attempt to record Nebraska's history in any formal way.

J. Sterling Morton arrived in Nebraska in the fall of 1854 and immediately plunged into the territory's political life. He edited a newspaper, served in the legislature and, in April 1858, was appointed secretary of the territory, a post he held until May 1861. During part of this time, he also served as acting governor of Nebraska.



Despite his political ambitions and literary accomplishments Morton, first and foremost, considered himself an agriculturalist and practical farmer. In 1855 he bought a farm near Nebraska City, which he named Arbor Lodge. Though he was often away on business or political trips, leaving the day-to-day management of the farm to others, Morton's thoughts were never far from his fields and orchards. Today he is remembered primarily as the father of Arbor Day, and for Arbor Lodge at Nebraska City, now a Nebraska State Park.¹

Morton's address reflects his considerable skills as an orator in an era when oratory was highly regarded, his superior education, and his unbounded enthusiasm for the future of Nebraska agriculture. As a product of his time, Morton subscribed to the notion of America's "Manifest Destiny," and believed God had anointed the American people to have dominion over the continent. The Indians, he believed, would soon become extinct, pushed aside by his admired farmers, whom he regarded as the architects and master workmen of the nation's future.

J. Sterling Morton's 1859 Address

The Address²

Mr. President and Gentlemen:

Called upon to address you, the farmers of Nebraska, you whose calling I so much honor and love, I was flattered, and in a moment of self-reliant enthusiasm I accepted the call, and have undertaken the duty which it imposes.

It had been my intention at first thought to gather together accurate and reliable statistics concerning the agricultural interests and capacities of the territory; but having made a trial at collecting data of that description, I have given it up as impracticable from the fact that no regular accounts nor correct statements relative to the products and exports have been kept in any county in the territory. Even the returns of the assessors of taxes in the various counties as sent up to the auditor of the territory are very inaccurate and convey no well-defined idea of the amount of land in cultivation, nor any information upon which a reliable estimate of the capital employed in agriculture can be based. I have, then, only my own observation, dating from November 1854, together with a somewhat limited experience, to draw upon and can assure you that such information is far less satisfactory to me (and probably will be to you) than statistical facts and figures. But such knowledge as I have concerning the beginning and the success of farming in this territory, I give to you with pleasure.

The Indian title to the Omaha and Otoe lands, which comprised respectively the land lying along the Missouri River north of the great Platte, and that similarly situated south of the last mentioned stream, was not extinguished until late in the spring of 1854, and the Kansas-Nebraska bill did not pass the House of Representatives until the 24th of May of the same year, so that the season was too far advanced for the emigrants of that summer to put in crops, except in a very few instances, and I think it safe to say that not more than a single section of land was tilled in the whole Territory of Nebraska in 1854; in fact the only considerable patches of corn that I remember seeing that fall were raised by the Mission at Bellevue and by the town proprietors of Nebraska City on the town site. I remember that we commenced the winter of 1854–5, a little colony of hopeful boarders, purchasing everything that we ate, and even feed for our horses and cattle, in the neighboring states of Iowa and Missouri, and they, even, had very little to spare.

The winter was exceedingly mild, and with the early spring-time came the farmers with their breaking teams and the big plows, and the sturdy hand of industry was for the first

time bronzing in the sunlight that gladdened the beautiful prairies of our new-found homes. Yet what did they know of the rich soils of this untried land? Its productiveness was, to them, a sealed book.³ No human test had ever demonstrated their worth, and yet the farmer turned the heavy sod and planted his corn for the first time with an abiding faith that his labors would be rewarded, and all that he had invested in the experiment would be returned to him tenfold, and that his wife and little ones, whose very lives were staked upon the soil and its capacities, would be fed, clothed, and cared for by the generous returns of the earth.

The man who builds the first house, gathers his family around the first home fire-side, and plants the first seed, and risks his all upon the first crop, in a country whose lands have been forever untried, and upon which the slumberers of barrenness have rested down for unnumbered centuries, must needs be, and is braver and grander in his heart than he who leads an army into battle, and moves unawed amid the emissaries of Death himself.

The spring and summer of 1855 were seasons of intense anxiety to the first tillers of this soil, but the harvest sun shone propitiously, and the benignant rains and the growth-giving dews were plenteous, and when the autumn came with its sear and yellow leaf, the great experiment had been successful; and to the questions—Can Nebraska ever be settled up? Can she ever sustain any considerable population?—the joyous fields of golden grain nodded an indisputable affirmative and gracefully beckoned the weary emigrant to a home of healthfulness and abundance.

The glad tidings of our first success in agriculture were heralded far and near through the medium of our pioneer press, and a new impetus was thus given to the emigration of that fall and the following spring. But here came also a spirit of evil among us, a spirit of reckless speculation and a seeking for some new method to acquire wealth—some method which required neither mental nor manual labor.

The legislative assembly in January 1856, deeming it necessary to have more money in the country, had very unwisely concluded that the creation of banks of issue, by special charter, would accomplish that much desired object. And so six banks were created, or one bank for every five hundred men in the territory, and each bank had power to issue as many dollars of indebtedness as the circumstances of its individual stock-holders might demand for their own pecuniary necessities or ambition; and what were the consequences? Rag money was plenty, everybody had credit, and it was no heavy undertaking to secure discounts. Town property, though very plenty—as many, very many thousand acres of land had been planted with small oak stakes—was not so amazingly abundant as “Fontenelle,” Nemaha Valley, and Western Exchange bank bills and, as is always the case in commercial matters, the scarcer article went up in price, and the plentier went down; that is to say, money was plentier than town lots, and

Photo, left: J. Sterling Morton, about 1858. This image captures the self-assurance of the youthful Morton, who had been appointed secretary of Nebraska Territory when he was only twenty-six. He also served as acting governor for several months after Governor William A. Richardson resigned in December 1858. *Forty Years of Nebraska, at Home and in Congress*, by Thomas Weston Tipton (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1902)

consequently, cheaper. And now, indeed, did the unsophisticated and enthusiastic believe that the method of making money without either mental or manual labor had most certainly been invented and patented in and for the Territory of Nebraska. So far did this idea diffuse itself throughout the community that it reached and took entire possession of the executive head of the territory, insomuch that in a message to the legislative assembly of the territory, Gov. [Mark W.] Izard mentioned as an evidence of our flush prosperity, the fact that town lots had advanced in price, in a few months, from \$300 to \$3,000 apiece.

Unfortunately for the wise constructors of those patent mills for money making, there was no reality nor soundness in the prosperity of that day. It did not arise as all wealth and true capital must arise, from that great substratum of prosperity which underlies and supports the whole civilized world, and is called agricultural development. Yet the popular mind was apparently satisfied, and lulled itself into the belief that the honest arts of industry and economy belonged to a former generation and that here, indeed, they were certainly useless and obsolete. Who would bend the back, nerve the arm to labor, and sweat the brow in cultivating the soil, when by the aid of a lithographer and the flatulent adulation of some ephemeral newspaper a half section of land could be made to yield three thousand town lots, at an average value, prospectively, of one hundred dollars each? Whom could we expect to desert the elegant and accomplished avocation of city-founder and dealer in real estate for the arduous and homely duties of the farmer?

We acquired great velocity and speed, in fact became a surpassingly “fast” people. We aspired at once to all the luxuries and refinements of older and better-regulated communities in the East. We emerged suddenly, from a few rough-hewn squatters, arrayed in buckskin and red flannel, to a young nation of exquisite land sharks and fancy speculators dressed in broadcloths.

The greater portion of the summer of 1856 was consumed in talking and meditating upon the prospective value of city property. Young Chicagos, increscent New Yorks, precocious Philadelphias, and infant Londons were duly staked out, lithographed, divided into shares, and puffed with becoming unction and complaisance. The mere mention of using such valuable lands for the purpose of agriculture was considered an evidence of verdancy wholly unpardonable and entirely sufficient to convict a person of old-fogyism in the first degree.

Farms were sadly neglected in the summer of 1856 and there were not as many acres planted that season, in proportion to the population, as there were the year before, but the crop of town plats, town shares, town lots, and Nebraska bank notes was most astonishingly abundant.

We were then a very gay people; we carried a greater number of very large gold watches and ponderous fob chains; sported more fancy turn-outs, in the way of elegant carriages

and buggies; could point to more lucky and shrewd fellow citizens, who had made a hundred thousand dollars in a very short time; could afford to drink more champagne, and talk and feel larger, more of consequence, and by all odds richer than any yearling settlement that ever flourished in this vast and fast country of ours.

We all felt, as they used to print in large letters on every new town plat, that we were “located adjacent to the very finest groves of timber—surrounded by a very rich agricultural country, in prospective, abundantly supplied with building rock of the finest description, beautifully watered, and possessing very fine indications of lead, iron, coal, and salt in great abundance.” In my opinion, we felt richer, better, more millionarish than any poor, deluded mortals ever did before, on the same amount of moonshine and pluck.

But the seasons were prompt in their returns and the autumn winds came then as they are coming now, and the ripening sunbeams descended upon the earth as they do today; but the fields of grain that they wandered and glistened among, were neither as many nor as well tilled as they should have been. And the fall of 1856 came and passed, and not enough had been raised and garnered to half supply our home wants.

Town lots we could neither eat nor export; they were at once too expensive for food, and too delicate for a foreign market. All that we had in the world to forward to the eastern marts was a general assortment of town shares, ferry charters, and propositions for receiving money and land warrants to invest or locate on time. The balance of trade was largely against us. We were now, more than ever, a nation of boarders—eating everything eatable, buying everything consumable—but producing absolutely nothing.

The winter of 1856 and '57 came, and the first and second days of December were most admonitory and fearful harbingers of suffering; they came like messages of wrath to rebuke the people for the folly, the thriftlessness and extravagance of the summer that had passed unheeded and unimproved. The storm that lasted those two days through, and ushered in the terrible life-taking winter of that year, will never be forgotten by those of us who were here and experienced it.

The legislative assembly convened in January 1857, and again was the wisdom and sagacity of Solon and Lycurgus called into active service.⁴ A grand rally was had for the purpose of raising more means and more money by legislative legerdemain. New towns were incorporated and new shares issued; insurance companies were chartered with nothing to insure and nothing to insure with; and finally another nest of wild cat banks was set for hatching, it having been deliberately decided that the easiest way to make money was through the agency of paper mills, engravers, and the autographs of fancy financiers. Not less than fifteen new banks were contemplated and projected. Preparations were thus coolly and deliberately made for issuing evidence of

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debt, amounting in the aggregate to millions of dollars, and a confiding and generous public were expected to receive them as money. Fortunately for you, for the territory, for our reputation for sanity, the great infliction was escaped, and out of the entire number, De Soto, and the never-to-be-forgotten Tekama were all that ever saw the light; thus, this second attempt to legislate prosperity into the country by the manufacture of an irresponsible and worthless currency failed most signally. Its only fruits have been seen in the thousands of worthless pictures which bear the impress of the Tekama Bank, and have finally exploded in the pockets of the merchants, mechanics, and farmers of this territory, and thereby defrauded them of some hundred thousands of dollars worth of capital and labor.

In the midsummer of 1857, while credulous men were buying town lots at enormous prices, and sapient speculators were anxiously looking up enough unoccupied prairie land to uphold a few more unnamed cities, while the very shrewd and crafty operators in real estate were counting themselves worth as many thousand dollars as they owned town lots, while enthusiastic seers observed with prophetic eye city upon city arise, and peopled with teeming thousands, while the public pulse was at fever heat, when the old fogies themselves were beginning to believe in the new way of making money without labor, the financial horizon began to darken. At once hope whispered that it was only a passing cloud, but judgment predicted a full grown storm. And one pleasant day, when lots were high, and town shares numerous and marketable, the news came that one Thompson—John Thompson—had failed, and also that the hitherto invulnerable Ohio Life and Trust Company had departed its pecunious and opulent existence. The streets in cities hereabouts were occupied by knots and groups of wise and anxious men; the matter was fully and thoroughly discussed, and it was generally conceded that, though it did sprinkle some, it probably would rain very little, if any.

But again and again came the thunderbolts, and the crash of banks and the wreck of merchants, the fall of insurance companies, the decline of railroad stocks, the depreciation of even state stocks, and finally the depletion of the national treasury. The quaking of the credit of all the monied institutions, in fact, of the governments themselves of both the old and the new world, demonstrated, beyond a doubt, that the storm had indeed begun, and furthermore, that it was a searching and testing storm.

Just as in your own farmyards, when a sudden storm of rain, lightning, and tempest has broken out from a sky almost all sunshine, you have seen the denizens of the pig sty, the stables, and the poultry coops, run, jump, squeal, cackle, neigh, and bellow in their stampede for shelter; so vamosed the city builders, speculators, bank directors, and patent cash makers of Nebraska, while the terrible financial tornado of 1857 swept over the world of commerce.

The last day of the summer of 1857 had died out, and was numbered upon the dial plate of the irrevocable past. The September sun had come, glittered, warmed, and ripened, and the time of harvest had gone by. November, cold, cheerless, and stormy, came on apace and whispered in chilling accents of the approach of winter. It became the duty of every man to look to his own pecuniary condition and to prepare well for the season of cold; and the examinations then made by you, by all of us, proved this: they proved that the season of planting in 1857, like that of the year previous, had slipped by almost unnoticed and unimproved by a great many of the people of Nebraska. We had not raised enough even to eat; and as for clothing, it looked as though nakedness itself would stalk abroad in the land.

If the great states of Illinois and Wisconsin found themselves that fall in an almost hopeless bankruptcy, if their people were heard to cry aloud against hard times, while yet each state had produced millions of dollars worth of grain for exportation, what, then, must have been our condition?

The irrevocable law of commerce which declares that, "Whenever the supply of any article is greater than the demand, that article must decline in market value," was most clearly proven in Nebraska. The supply of town lots, after the monstrous monetary panic of 1857, was as large as ever.

There were at least one million of town lots in towns along the Missouri River, between the Kansas line and the L'eau qui Court; but where was the demand? It had ceased! It had blown away in the great storm, or been crushed out in the great pressure. We had nothing else to offer for sale except real estate, and even that, of a very doubtful character. We were yet a colony of consumers; we were worse off than ever; we were now a nation of boarders, and had nothing to pay board with, and very little valuable baggage to pawn for the same. The greater number of our banks had exploded, and the individual liability of stock holders, as marked on each bill, proved to mean that the bill holders themselves were individually responsible for whatever amount they might find on hand after the crisis. I think we were the poorest community that the winter sun ever looked down upon; that the history of new countries can furnish no parallel for our utter and abject poverty.

I believe, on the 1st day of January 1858 there was not, upon an average, two dollars and fifty cents in cash to each inhabitant of the territory. Hard times were the theme of each and every class of society, and all departments of industry. Merchants, mechanics, speculators, and bankers were continually lamenting their desperate fortunes, and their many failures and losses.

There was one small class of individuals who, although they may have been sadly pinched by the pressure of the times, noted no failures in their ranks, and who, when winter set in, were comparatively well off, in fact relatively opulent and luxurious in their circumstances. They were the very few

farmers who had passed through the era of speculation untempted by the allurements thereof. They who had followed the plow steadily and planted their crops carefully. They, and they alone, of all the people of Nebraska, could board themselves. There is no doubt but that poverty induces thought. It may paralyze the physical energies for a time, but it will induce reason and reflection in the thoughtless, and judgment and discretion in the reckless, after all other arguments have failed. I believe that owing to our extreme poverty we were led to more thinking and reasoning during the winter of 1857 and '58 than up to that time had ever been accomplished in the territory. As you have seen your grandfathers, during the long winter evenings, sit down by the large fireplace where the huge back log and the big blaze burned so brightly, away back east somewhere, at your old homesteads, as when the old man, after reading his newspaper, would wipe his spectacles, put them up by the clock on the mantle-piece, and seating himself there in the genial firelight, place his head between his hands and his elbows on his knees, and have a good "long think." Just so with us all in Nebraska that winter. We had a "think;" a long, solemn, gloomy "think;" and among us all we thought out these facts: That the new way of making money by chartering wild cat banks had proved a most unprofitable delusion and an unmitigated humbug. We thought that building large cities without any inhabitants therefor was a singularly crack-brained species of enterprise; and furthermore, that everybody could not live in town who lived in the territory, unless the towns were laid off in eighty-acre or quarter-section lots. We thought, to sum up all hurriedly, that it was useless to attempt to legislate prosperity into the country; that it was impossible to decoy wealth into our laps by legal enactments; that we had, in fact, been a very fast, very reckless, very hopeful, enthusiastic, and self-deceived people; that while we had assumed to play the part of Dives, we were really better fitted for the performance of the character of Lazarus.⁶

The scheme for obtaining wealth without labor, prosperity without industry, and growing into a community of opulence and ease without effort had been a complete failure. The spring of 1858 dawned upon us, and the icy hand of winter relaxed its hold upon the earth, and the prairies were once more clothed in sunshine and emerald.

The result of all our thinking during the long and dreary winter was now about to be embodied in active efforts to enhance our real prosperity and substantial wealth. It had been fully and justly determined that the true grandeur and prosperity of a people was concealed in their capacity for industry, honesty, and patient endurance.

If there were fortunes to be made in Nebraska, they were to be acquired by frugality and persevering exertion alone. The soil was to be tilled and taxed for the support of the dwellers thereon; and out of it, and it alone, was all true and substantial independence to be derived. For the first time dur-

ing our political existence, we realized our true condition, and comprehended the proper method of ameliorating and improving it. The numerous signs marked "banker," "broker," "real estate dealer," etc., began, one by one, to disappear, and the shrewd and hopeful gentlemen who had adopted them were seen, either departing for their old homes in the East, or buckling on the panoply of industry, and following quietly the more honorable and certainly paying pursuit of prairie-breaking and corn-planting.

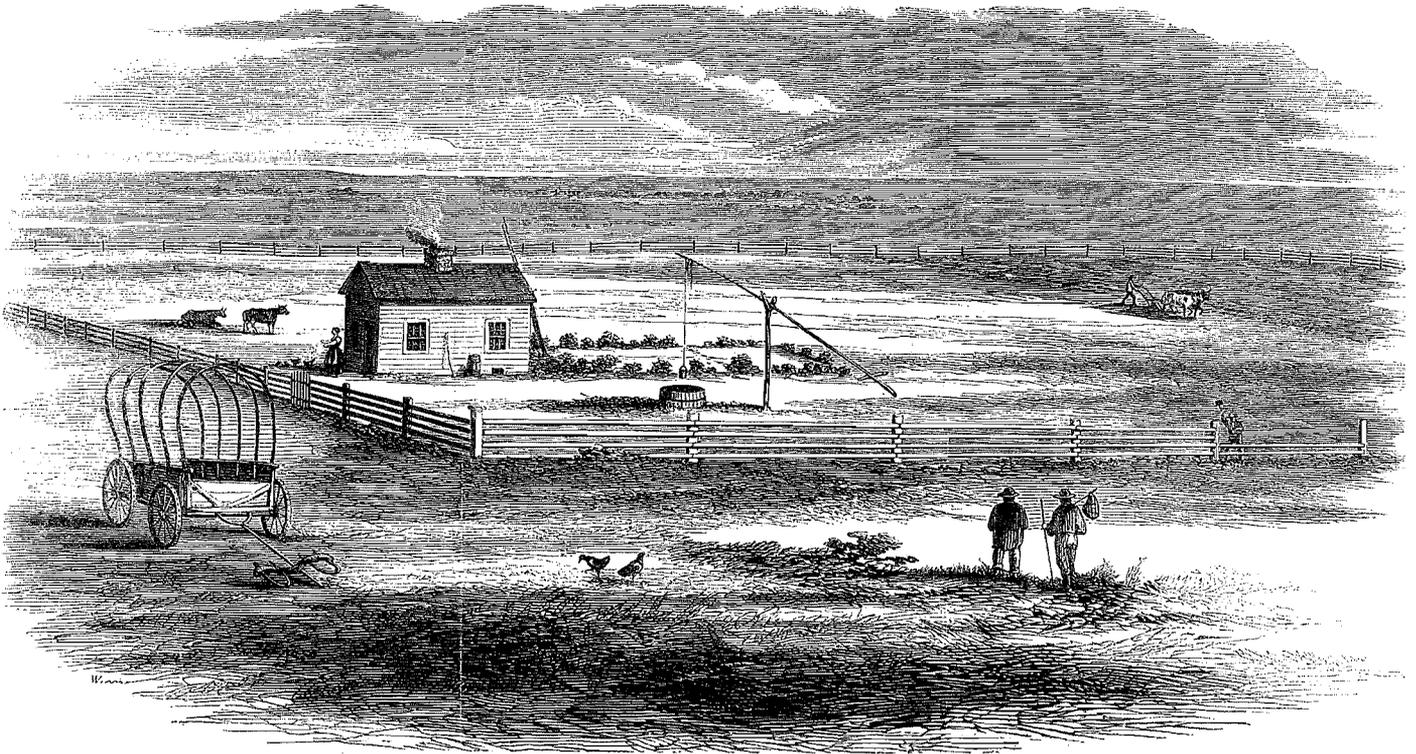
The gloom of despondency and the long night of poverty were about passing away forever. The clouds were breaking. The effulgence of a better and brighter day sent its first glad beams to reanimate and rejoice the dispirited and encourage the strong and hopeful. Labor at once began, and its hundred voices made the air resonant with its homely music. All about us, on every side, the prairie plow was at work, turning over, as it were, the first pages in the great volume of our prosperity. Everywhere were brawny arms lifted up to strike the earth, that a stream of plenty and contentment might flow forth and bless the country, even as the rock itself sent up sweet waters to quench the thirst of Israel's children, when smote by the strength of Aaron.

Everywhere these rich and rolling prairies, which had lain for unnumbered centuries as blank leaves in the history of the World's progress, were being written upon by the hand of toil, snatched from the obscurity of uselessness, and forever dedicated to the support of the Anglo-Saxon race. The sunshine seemed brighter, and the rains and the dews more beautiful and refreshing, because that they descended upon the earth and found it not all a wild and desolate waste. Seed had been sown, farms opened, and every energy had been taxed to make the Territory of Nebraska self-sustaining. It was the first genuine effort in the right direction. The people were aroused to the fact that agriculture, and that alone, was to be for many years the sole support, the sheet-anchor, and the salvation of the territory. Emulation was excited; each endeavored to outwork the other in the good cause. In many of the counties, fairs were held last fall, and agriculture had at last, after three years of neglect, assumed its true position in Nebraska.

As you well remember, the season was favorable, the crops were heavy. We had enough, aye more than enough, and the last spring witnessed our first shipment of a surplus production of grain to a foreign market. The first steamers that came up the Missouri in 1857 brought us corn to keep us and our stock from perishing by hunger and starvation. We paid for it at the rate of two dollars per bushel.

But now, by the energy of our farmers, Nebraska in less than two years has been transformed from a consumer to a producer. And the steamboats of the old Missouri bore away from our shores in the spring of 1859, hundreds of thousands of bushels of corn to the southern and eastern markets, which we did not need for home use, and for which, at the

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"Life in Nebraska—Pre-emption Improvements According to the Spirit of the Law." *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, May 21, 1859. Before the Homestead Act of 1862, the Preemption Act of 1841 provided the principal method by which individuals could acquire a tract of public land in Nebraska Territory. A settler could claim up to 160 acres at a cost of \$1.25 per acre. MNH 11055-1777

rate of forty cents per bushel, we have taken more money than we have for town lots in the last eighteen months, or will in the next twenty-four.

Thus imperfectly and hurriedly, I have narrated the history of agriculture in Nebraska, down to the planting of last spring's crop; what that was, and how much greater the breadth of land cultivated is than it ever was before, the new farms that meet the eye on every side and the vast fields of ripening grain that have magically usurped the place of the rank prairie grass, eloquently proclaim.

If our brief and only half-improved past has been thus encouraging and thus indicative of prosperity; if notwithstanding the mercilessness of the panic and the scarcity of money, the present time—to-day—finds Nebraska richer in the true elements of prosperity, stronger in the golden capital of skillful industry, and contented labor than she ever was before, who shall predict her future? Who shall attempt to portray the fulness and glory of her destiny?

The Anglo-Saxon race are being driven by the hand of God across the continent of America and are to inhabit and have dominion over it all. These prairies, which have been cleared and made ready for the plow by the hand of God himself, are

intended for the abiding place of the pioneers in the progress of the world.

The American Indian, in whom there are none of the elements of thrift, held a tenantry upon these fertile plains for centuries, but there was neither labor in his arm nor progression in his spirit. He was an unworthy occupant of so goodly a land and he has been supplanted. He is gone, and his race is fast becoming extinct—the world is too old for its aborigines. Their destiny is completed; they are journeying to their fate; they must die, and a few years hence only be known through their history as it was recorded by the Anglo-Saxon while he pushed them before him in his onward tread.

We stand to-day upon the very verge of civilization—riding upon the head wave of American enterprise; but our descendants, living here a century hence, will be in the center of American commerce—the mid-ocean of our national greatness and prosperity. Upon this very soil, the depth and richness of which is unsurpassed in the whole world, in a country whose mineral resources, as yet wholly undeveloped, are certainly magnificent and exhaustless; whose coal beds are as extensive as its prairies; whose rivers and springs are as healthful as they are numerous—in such a country,



During the early territorial years, most products used by Nebraskans came up the Missouri River by steamboat. As Morton indicates, a surplus of agricultural products was being shipped out of the territory by the spring of 1859. RG3761:4-26

agriculture must and will carve out, for an industrious people, a wealth and a happiness the like of which the world has never dreamed of before.

Manufacture and skill in the various arts may and will undoubtedly aid us in our pursuit of a glorious and independent opulence, but our great trust and strong hope is still hidden in the fertility of our soil and its adaptation to general cultivation.

The agriculturalist may be proud of his calling for in it he is independent; in it there is no possibility of guile or fraud, and for his partners in labor God has sent him the genial

sunshine, gentle rains, and the softly descending dews. The very elements are made his assistants and co-workers; the thunderbolt that purifies the atmosphere and furnishes electric life to the growing crops is his friend and his helper. It may be urged, and often is, that the calling of the farmer is an arduous and homely one—that it is arduous, no one can deny, but it is equally honorable.

The idea that a man cannot be a true gentleman and labor with his hands, is an obsolete, a dead and dishonored dogma. All labor is honorable. The scholar in his study, the chemist in his laboratory, the artist in his studio, the lawyer

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at his brief, and the preacher at his sermon, are all of them, nothing more, nothing less, than day laborers in the world's workshop—workers with the head. And the smith at his forge, the carpenter at his bench, mechanics and artisans of every grade and kind, and the farmer, are the same day laborers—workers with the hand. The two classes represent the two divisions of labor and they are mutually dependent upon each other; but if among them all, there is one art more health-giving, one art more filled with quiet and honest contentment than another, it is that of agriculture. And yet agriculture, although it is the art supportive of all arts, although it is the basis and foundation upon which the superstructure of all the commerce of the world is reared, is less studied, less thought of, and more remote from its perfection than all others. During the last ten years, it has, however, begun to attract a greater degree of attention and has taken a few steps towards that high place in the world's business which awaits it.

The county, state, and national fairs, which are now proven so useful, are the protracted meetings of husbandmen, where agricultural revivals are initiated and thousands annually converted to the faith of the great church of human industry. And this is the first revival of the kind ever instituted in a territory. To Nebraska belongs the honor and the good name of having placed a bright and worthy example before the sisterhood of children states which bound her on the south and west.

Let us continue in the good work; let every heart's aspiration, every thought and effort be to make each succeeding fair give better and stronger testimony in favor of the resources and wealth of our vast and beautiful domain. And while in the East the youth are being prepared for the so called learned professions—law, divinity and medicine, let us be content to rear up a nation of enlightened agriculturalists, men sturdy in mind and thought even as they are robust in body and active in all that pertains to the full development and perfection of the physical system of mankind. Let it be our high aim, by our enlightened and well-directed training of both the body and the mind, to elevate and improve our race and make the western man the model, both physical and intellectual, from which all the world may be happy to make copies.

With such an ambition in the minds of our people and an energy to gratify it, the future of this commonwealth is such a one as thrills the patriot's heart with grateful pride, and makes one sad to think that death may close the eye before it shall have rested upon the beauties of the garden state that will have been builded up on these shores within the next ten years; when the valleys of the L'eau qui Court, the great Platte, the Weeping Water and the two Nemahas shall have been shorn of their native wildness and be resonant with the song of the husbandman, the rumble of mills, the splash of the paddle wheel, and the puff of the steam engine; when away

out upon those undulating plains, whose primeval stillness is now unbroken, save by the howl of the wolf or the wind sighing through the rank prairie grass, the American citizen shall have builded up homes, hamlets, and villages; when the steam plow, with its lungs of fire and its breath of vapor, shall have sailed over the great land-ocean that stretches its luxuriant waves of soil from the western bank of the Missouri to the base of the Rocky Mountains, leaving in its wake thrifty settlements and thriving villages, as naturally as a ship riding upon the sea leaves the eddy and the foam, sparkling in the sunlight that gilds its path through the waste of waters; when only fifty miles westward from the Missouri River the strong saline waters of Nebraska shall have arrested the attention of the capitalist and attracted the skill of the manufacturer, and shall have become, as it must and will, the salt producer for the whole Northwest; when the rock-ribbed mountains that form our western boundary shall have been compelled to give up to mankind their long-hidden and golden treasures; when afar off up the winding channel of the great Platte, the antelope, the buffalo, and the Indian shall have been startled by the scream of the locomotive car as it roars and rumbles over the prairies and the mountains, hastening to unite the states of the Atlantic and the Pacific into a unity and fraternity of interests, a future greater and brighter than words can picture is to be achieved and you, the farmers of Nebraska, are its prime architects and its master workmen.

Be inspired, then, to hasten the carving out of that destiny of indisputable superiority which God has assigned the American people; and so inspired, and so laboring in the great fields of the world's advancement, when Death, that harvester whom no seasons control and no laws restrain, gathers you to his dark and noiseless garner, may you go like the grain that has thrived and ripened in the brightest sunshine, pure and untainted by the mildews of the world, back to Him who planted mortality on Earth, that immortality might be reaped and garnered, and loved in Heaven.

Notes

¹ For Morton's biography, see James C. Olson, *J. Sterling Morton* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1942).

² There are several published versions of the address with variant paragraphing and punctuation. Paragraphing and punctuation in this version may differ slightly from the others, but the words are faithful to the version published by the territorial board of agriculture.

³ It is unlikely that either the early Nebraska farmers or Morton were aware of the extensive and productive agriculture practiced by the troops at Fort Atkinson in the 1820s.

⁴ Solon and Lycurgus were, respectively, Athenian and Spartan statesmen. Morton is undoubtedly being sarcastic here.

⁵ L'eau qui Court, meaning "Running Water," was the earlier name of the Niobrara River.

⁶ Dives and Lazarus are the rich man and the beggar, respectively, in the parable on that subject in Luke 16:19-31.