Mapping Nebraska, 1866-1871: County Boundaries, Real and Imagined

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Article Summary: How is it that six nonexistent western Nebraska counties could appear on maps in 1866 and remain on virtually all territorial and state maps for nearly a decade? The story of how this happened reveals the evolving process of county formation during Nebraska’s transition to statehood, and also shows how publishers of maps gathered information about the development of remote areas.

Cataloging Information:

Names: G W and C B Colton, Augustus F Harvey, Alvin Saunders, Rufus Blanchard

Nonexistent Nebraska Counties Shown on Maps: Lyon, Taylor, Monroe, Harrison, Jackson, Grant

Keywords: H.R. 104, Twelfth Territorial Session, 1867 (unsigned); S. No. 6, 1867; S. No 11, 1867; 1870 census; Kansas-Nebraska Act; G W and C B Colton and Company; Colton’s Township Map of the State of Nebraska, 1867; “Colton’s Nebraska” (folding edition of Colton’s atlas map for 1870; “Colton’s New Sectional Map of the State of Nebraska,” 1870

Photographs / Images: 1857 Wells map, showing Nebraska’s thirty-one counties as of 1856; inset page from the 1870 census, Cheyenne County, with a note mentioning Lyon County, which did not exist; Augustus F Harvey; Colton’s Township Map of the State of Nebraska (1867), the first to show the six nonexistent counties; New Rail Road and Township Map of Nebraska (George F Cram, 1870); Colton’s Nebraska, published 1874, omitting the nonexistent counties; Map of Nebraska (Rufus Blanchard, 1868); Alvin Saunders; House File No. 104: An Act to Define the Boundaries of Certain New Counties in Nebraska, 1867
Cartographers are sometimes faced with emptiness, with open areas that, explored, surveyed, or unknown, provide little detail. In constructing his seminal map of the Trans-Mississippi West in 1857, G. K. Warren explained his method for such cases: “In some large sections . . . we possess no information, except from uncertain sources. In these parts the rule was adopted to leave the map blank.”1 Such restraint was not universal among cartographers, however, and maps often became subjective.

The formation of counties in Nebraska has been little analyzed, largely due to incomplete and contradictory information prior to the 1880s.2 Maps would seem to provide the best evidence for the number and location of counties, but their accuracy is marred by outdated, exaggerated, vague, misaligned, and sometimes incomplete information. This is especially true in western Nebraska, where six nonexistent counties—Lyon, Taylor, Monroe, Harrison, Jackson, and Grant—mistakenly appeared on virtually all regional and state/territorial maps between 1866 and 1875.

Creating Counties in Territorial Nebraska

Before looking at western Nebraska’s mystery counties, some background will be helpful. In 1854 the Kansas-Nebraska Act established a Nebraska territorial legislature and empowered it to establish districts and counties:

“The legislative power and authority of said Territory shall be vested in the Governor and a Legislative Assembly. . . . An apportionment shall be made, as nearly equal as practicable, among the several counties or districts, for the election of
the council and representatives, giving to each section of the Territory representation in the ratio of its qualified voters as nearly as may be."

These districts became the basis of the 1854 territorial census, which was followed by the creation of Nebraska’s original eight counties: Burt, Washington, Douglas, Dodge, Cass, Pierce, Forney, and Richardson. Acting Governor Thomas Cuming stated that the “names and boundaries of counties now designated are for the temporary purpose of this first election [to elect legislators] and are subject to alteration by the territorial assembly.”

The first legislature did exactly that in 1855, greatly modifying the original eight counties (whose original boundaries appear on no published maps) and creating sixteen more. The new county configuration was more uniform, but still contained some boundary variation, mostly along the Platte River. Some counties, such as McNeale, Johnston, and the “first” Jackson (where Fillmore County now sits) were quickly erased or renamed.

The 1856 legislature added more counties and trimmed boundaries to align the counties into four columns, with all but Buffalo lying east of the 98th Meridian. An attempt was made to create the county of Omaha out of the six townships of southern Douglas County, but the proposal was vehemently opposed. The bill would (by one vote) pass later in the session, however, with the county name changed to Sarpy. With the exception of the eleven counties along the Missouri River, and distant Buffalo (whose borders touched no other county), most counties were squares and rectangles with standard townships (each with 36 sections, for a total area of 23,040 acres per township) based on the survey system created along with the General Land Office in 1812 to ease the “transfer” of U.S. lands to the public. As a result, a map of Nebraska’s thirty-one counties in 1856 showed great uniformity as they progressed west, much more aligned with its neighboring states and territories.

Over the next five years the legislature created twelve new counties. Seven of these, including the western counties of Dawson and Lincoln (both much larger than at present), came from previously “open” (unnamed) areas. Also, some existing counties changed their names during this period, as when Shorter became Lincoln in 1861, and Monroe became Platte. The Civil War itself led to name changes. For example, Greene County was renamed Seward, and Calhoun, Saunders, both due to their namesakes being southern political figures. L’Eau Qui Court’s name change was especially complicated. It became Knox in 1873, but meanwhile had appeared incorrectly on maps as both Niobrara and Emmett. The former name was proposed in the Legislature in 1857 as “Neobarrrah,” and the latter was proposed, but not accepted, by county vote.

Other counties were divided: Cedar was formed from parts of Dixon and Pierce in 1857, and Washington took territory from Dodge in 1860. Two counties were severed from Nebraska entirely: Wilson and Morton, formed in 1859 surrounding the Sweetwater River valley in what is now Wyoming, were left out when Nebraska’s western border was redrawn in 1863.

By 1861 Nebraska had forty counties, with counties running along the Platte River to just short of the 100th Meridian, with Buffalo and Dawson on the
north bank, and Kearney and Shorter (Lincoln) on the south bank. The Civil War halted this rapid expansion until 1866.13

The Mystery Counties

The nonexistent counties of Lyon, Taylor, Monroe, Harrison, Jackson, and Grant first appear on Colton’s Township Map of the State of Nebraska, a separately issued map copyrighted and published in mid-1867 by the nationally prominent firm G. W. and C. B. Colton and Company.14 Lyon, without question, was named after Nathaniel Lyon, the first Union general killed in the Civil War; the other five appear to have been named after U.S. presidents: (Zachary) Taylor, (James) Monroe, (William Henry) Harrison, (Andrew) Jackson, and future president and recent victorious commander of the Union forces (Ulysses S.) Grant.

Following the Colton map, at least one and usually all six counties appeared on at least twenty-four maps in multiple editions between 1867 and 1875 (see Table 1). Lyon and Taylor, of equal size, comprise the whole southern half of the Panhandle, with Monroe, identical in shape and square mileage, sitting east of Taylor. Harrison, a thinner vertical rectangle with a slightly extended southwestern corner, is at the east of Monroe. In the southwest, Jackson County is in the corner of the state, with a large Grant County to its east, running to the Platte on the north and Lincoln County to the west.

The six counties were not all simple “blocks”; four were of equal size, but two were unique, showing at least some knowledge of counties already legally formed. With such exactness of boundaries, the Coltons must have received their information from a bill that didn’t pass the legislature, or was not signed by the governor, or otherwise never received statutory “power.”15

But these counties weren’t just “ghosts.” People naturally assumed that counties shown on maps had actually been organized. As a result, a growing paper trail seemed to add to their legitimacy. For example, a Beatrice land officer referred to Grant and Jackson counties in an 1871 report on the Nemaha Land District printed in the Nebraska Advertiser.16 The same year, some western residents petitioned the House for county organization under the name of “Harrison County.”17

The six counties also became a pitfall for historians. In 1921, author Grant Shumway discussed Lyon, Taylor, and Monroe counties in A History of Western Nebraska and Its People.18 A number of sources, such as A. T. Andreas’s History of the State of Nebraska (1882) and Cox’s 1870 Nebraska Census, indicate that the counties are listed in the census, and give their populations. Andreas states that five of the counties “never had a legal existence,” but says of Grant that there are “no records by which to account for its disappearance.”19

The six counties are in fact noted in the 1870 census rolls for Cheyenne and Lincoln counties. Cheyenne was extant but not yet organized, and its census roll begins with a blank page, to which is attached a handwritten note by W. B. Lanphere, the assistant marshal in charge of the western Nebraska census:

“Cheyenne County, according to the records in the office of the County Clerk, comprised the counties of Taylor & Lyon [as shown in Colton’s map of Nebraska of 1870] and All of the territory north of these to the north line of the state For all Judicial and Legal purposes,

W.B. Lanphere, Asst. Marshal”20

Could it be that a government official with access to the maps of the General Land Office instead used a commercially published map as a primary source on an official census? It appears so. The map was either a folding edition of Colton’s atlas map for 1870, titled “Colton’s Nebraska” and using the same plate as the 1867 Township map, or was the 1870 edition of “Colton’s New Sectional Map of the State of Nebraska.” The 1868 through 1871 General Land Office maps of Nebraska do not show these counties, and no “records”...
of the “County Clerk” mention them or any of the six. It seems that the records may have consisted only of the Colton map, especially since the map was mentioned outright. The census itself indicates confusion regarding the western population and its true location. It enumerates an army regiment at “Potter P.O.” (Post Office), listing the soldiers alphabetically by last name: Last names A-C are categorized in “Unnamed Territory,” while the rest of the roll is listed under “Antelope P.O.,” with names D-J in “Taylor County,” K-N in “Lyon County,” and O-W in Taylor. A hand-count total for each area differs from the totals reported by Andreas and Cox. Moreover, Julesburg, Colorado, is included in the census both for Weld County, Colorado, and Cheyenne County, Nebraska. The reason for this is clear: the Nebraska census takers were using Colton’s map, which mistakenly placed Julesburg in Nebraska.

Making Rules for Making Counties, 1866-67

A dozen years after Nebraska became an organized territory, the legal procedures for the creation, delineation, and organization of counties remained inadequate. County creation entailed naming the county and establishing boundaries; organization provided for a county seat and date for the election of county officers, and sometimes involved the redefining of boundaries. Nebraska legislators introduced five bills in 1866 and 1867 that dealt directly with the issue.

An 1866 bill for “an act to define the boundaries of the several counties in Nebraska, and to define new counties” failed to pass, but its proposed county names are tantalizing, including Omaha, Curtis, and Cotton; the archival material adds Miller, Heath, Megeath, and Iowa. None of the counties named in the journals appear on the 1867 Colton Township map.

Governor David Butler called Nebraska’s first official state legislative session on May 16, 1867. Representing the huge Ninth District in the western part of the state, Fred K. Freeman introduced three senate bills relating to counties, Numbers 6, 11, and 55. No. 11, “An act to organize Monroe County, and locate the county seat,” was killed outright. No. 6, “An act to define the boundaries of Monroe and Cheyenne counties in Nebraska,” became law, but only after omitting Monroe County. Cheyenne County in 1867 comprised the entire southern Panhandle—today’s Scotts Bluff, Banner, Kimball, Morrill, Cheyenne, Garden, and Deuel counties.

S. No. 55, “An Act for the organization of counties,” also became statute, outlining for the first time the procedures for the establishment of new counties. Before this, county creation had been solely the legislature’s responsibility, as vaguely outlined in the Organic Act. There had been no standard procedure. Before passing the bill, the legislature appointed a special committee to study the issue. The committee advised against taking action:

It is thought prudent to leave that subject [parameters of county organization] open, and within the discretion of the Legislature, which can organize new counties from time to time as fast as the necessities of the different localities may demand, and in the manner which may be required. Otherwise, for the purpose of local taxation, or for personal ends, counties might be organized through fraud or trickery, in the remote portions of the state. Your Committee are [sic] of the opinion, therefore, that it would be more prudent to make no provision for the organization of counties under general law.

The legislature ignored this advice with the passage of S. No. 55, which left county creation to the legislature but granted organizational power to the governor. In other words, only the governor could call a formal election to grant power to individuals or interests in that new county. This would have a significant effect on the development of the sparsely populated western half of Nebraska.

But the legislative bill that explains the six mystery counties was introduced earlier in 1867, during the Twelfth Territorial session held in January and
Colton’s Township Map of the State of Nebraska (1867), the first to show the six nonexistent counties of Lyon, Taylor, Monroe, Harrison, Jackson, and Grant.
February. On February 7, Representative Augustus F. Harvey of Nemaha County proposed H.R. 104, “An act to define the boundaries of certain new Counties in Nebraska.” The bill passed just eleven days later on February 18, the final day of the legislative session.\(^{32}\)

Because the journals of the House and Council (the upper house of the territorial legislature) contain few details about individual bills,\(^{33}\) it is with great fortune that the final version of H.R. 104 still exists, seemingly never having been opened since it left the hands of the legislators:

An act to define the boundaries of certain new counties in Nebraska.

Section 1. Be it enacted by the Council and House of Representatives of the Territory of Nebraska That all that part of the Territory of Nebraska lying within the following lines, to wit; beginning where the west line of Dawson County intersects the 41\(^{\circ}\) deg. N. Latitude [and] north along the west line of said Dawson County to 42\(^{\circ}\) N. Latitude, thence west to the 101\(^{\circ}\) \(1^\prime\) W. Longitude, thence South to 41\(^{\circ}\) deg. No. Lat., thence East to place of beginning Shall be called Harrison County.

Section 2. All that portion of the Territory lying between 41\(^{\circ}\) and 42\(^{\circ}\) N. Latitude and 102\(^{\circ}\) \(10^\prime\) west Long. shall be called Monroe County.

Section 3. All that portion of the Territory lying between 41\(^{\circ}\) and 42\(^{\circ}\) N. Latitude and 102\(^{\circ}\) \(10^\prime\) and 103\(^{\circ}\) west Longitude Shall be called Taylor County.

Section 4. All that portion of the Territory lying between 41\(^{\circ}\) and 42\(^{\circ}\) N. Latitude and 103\(^{\circ}\) \(10^\prime\) and 104\(^{\circ}\) west Longitude, Shall be called Lyon County.

Section 5. All that portion of the territory lying between 40\(^{\circ}\) and 41\(^{\circ}\) N. Latitude and 101\(^{\circ}\) \(10^\prime\) and 102\(^{\circ}\) west Longitude Shall be called Jackson County.

Section 6. All that portion of the Territory lying between the 100\(^{\circ}\) \(10^\prime\) west Longitude, which is hereby defined to be the west line of Lincoln County, and the 101\(^{\circ}\) west Longitude and the 40\(^{\circ}\) N. Latitude and the Southern boundary Of Dawson County, and the 41\(^{\circ}\) N. Latitude Shall be called Grant County.

Section 7. All that portion of the Territory lying within Townships 25, 26 and 27. Of ranges 1, 2 and 3 and townships 25 and 26 of ranges 4 and 5 Shall be called Wayne County.

Section 8. This act shall be in force and affect [sic] from and after its passage.\(^{34}\)

The bill was surely sent to Governor Alvin Saunders for his signature. In most cases a governor would then either inform both chambers that he had signed it into law, or would reject it by returning it to the initiating chamber for revision. Saunders, however, never reported back on this bill, despite reporting on other bills on three occasions after the approval of H.R. 104, and signing thirty-four other bills into law—including one for the organization of Saline County.\(^{35}\) Thus, as a result of the governor’s pocket veto, the six counties of H.R. 104 were never given authority by the Executive Office.

Why did Saunders not sign the bill? The answer is unclear, and little manuscript information exists to show his feelings about county creation. Five counties had been created during his six-and-a-half-year administration (Adams, Clay, Hamilton, Webster, and Franklin) and another five were organized (Seward, Jones [now Jefferson], and Saunders in the east, and Buffalo and Lincoln counties in the west).\(^{36}\) In addition, five had their names changed, and Clay, in its first appearance, was eliminated.\(^{37}\) Saunders may have opposed the bill because of an existing problem with the western
boundary of Lincoln County; perhaps he feared that establishing adjacent counties at this time would create an instant conflict about the legal location of settlements, railroad sidings, and military posts.38

Or, Saunders may have been concerned that western areas might be organized for less-than-altruistic ends—similar to the concerns soon to be expressed in the first regular state session of 1867, resulting in the adoption of S. No. 55.

Or, it might be that Saunders was simply too busy with the formation of the state to deal with a bill of this complexity. H.R. 104 gave “formality” to a sparsely populated and unsurveyed area that comprised nearly a fifth of Nebraska’s landmass. Even three years later only 1,670 people were living in the area (and 555 of these were soldiers). And although the Union Pacific completed its track through Nebraska by the end of 1867, public surveys had not crossed the 100th Meridian.39 Furthermore, Governor Saunders signed thirty-four bills on February 18, but none appear to have been both sent to him and signed on the same day. With no time for the legislature to amend the bill if the governor had any objections, a pocket veto may have been his safest option.40

What is clear is that H.R. 104 was left unsigned. As far as counties were concerned, the western third of Nebraska remained blank.

How Commercial Cartographers Gathered Their Information

Since Governor Saunders did not sign H.R. 104 into law, and since the legislature’s printed journals contained virtually no details about the bill, how did the Coltons end up putting these details in their map? Or, to put it more broadly, how did commercial cartographers (those not connected to the United States government, unlike the Topographical Engineers or those employed by the U.S. Army) receive information about remote but developing regions?

One thing to keep in mind is that the Coltons not only went to press with information from an unsigned bill, but they also missed S. No. 6 (defining the boundary of Cheyenne County, but omitting Monroe from its final version), which had been enacted.41 Only one cartographer, Rufus Blanchard, seems to have had information on this bill; his map of 1868 shows Cheyenne and Monroe—but not the Monroe that Freeman proposed with S. No. 11.42 Furthermore, Blanchard advertised maps produced by the Colton firm, including editions of “Colton’s Township Map of the State of Nebraska,” which clearly conflicted with his map. Even if Blanchard’s map was considered an “update” of the Colton map (that is, if the Colton map was only published in pocket form for one year), their General Atlas, which reproduced the pocket map with a different border and title cartouche, still showed the six, and no Cheyenne.43

The larger question is how such a serious mistake—accepting an unsigned bill as law—was neither identified at the outset nor corrected for several years. It remained on all Colton maps until 1873, when the firm added Cheyenne, kept
sometimes a town plat was filed in the General
That isn’t to say that cartographers were careless;
boundaries specified in H.R. 104. Likewise, when
the map matched the final version of the bill sent to the governor. As for H.R. 104, the Coltons must have gone to press having been told, or having assumed, that the governor would sign it into law. Such a risky assumption wasn’t surprising in the competitive business of commercial cartography.

How and from where cartographers got their information has been much debated, and evidence is sparse. Many maps list some of their supposed sources: Robert Ream’s *Sectional Map of Nebraska Territory* (1857 and 1858) credits “Field notes in the Surveyor General’s Office,” while H. R. Page and Charles Brewster’s *Map of Nebraska* (1879-1882) was “Compiled from Official Records in the Surveyor’s General’s Office/And Other Authentic Sources.” Everts and Kirk’s *Official Atlas of Nebraska-1885*, was completed, in part, from supposed “Personal Investigations,” while “official records of the Government and Railroad Offices” support the *State Journal’s 1883-90 editions of its [New Sectional] Map of Nebraska.*

However, many if not most cartographers relied on other maps as their real primary source. Maps by the Colton firm even list other maps as “Authorities” on their own maps. Unfortunately, giving credit was not standard practice. This borrowing of information is apparent when one sees “paper towns” (proposed settlements) appearing on a dated cluster of maps from different cartographers, and then disappearing at generally the same time. That isn’t to say that cartographers were careless; sometimes a town plat was filed in the General Land Office but then failed to materialize.

With at least nine other cartographers or publishers showing at least some of the six, it’s unlikely that anything but the 1867 Colton Township map was their source. It is implausible that so many individuals could have found access to the bill without learning that it had never been signed into law. As listed in Figure 3, two cartographers used S. No. 6 as well, and made size modifications to remaining counties, but Cheyenne was clearly added “on top” of the information from H.R. 104.

Arguably the best-known American map publishing house, the Colton firm was founded by J. H. (Joseph Hutchins) Colton in 1833, and continued after 1863 by his sons G. W. and C. B. Colton maps were held in high regard by other cartographers, and were popular for use as inserts into emigrant guides, railroad company pamphlets, geographical textbooks, and almanacs. Though it seems reasonable that someone would have quickly discovered the errors, this isn’t evident in the maps of the day, again showing that cartographers may have relied too heavily on their counterparts for information. If the counties weren’t real, they may have wondered, why did they appear on virtually every other map?

Printing technology may also have helped perpetuate the error: most maps were produced using the engraving (intaglio) process, in which the map image and its border were drawn into a copper or steel sheet called a “plate.” This was a time-consuming process, even when machinery was used for some of the engraving. And while it was relatively simple to add information, it was difficult to remove anything. The engraved area would have to be filled in with another material, or the plate would have to be ground down. This is one of the reasons why plates were used for as long as possible, and why informational errors and misprints were often not corrected until the production of a new plate.

**Conclusion**

Although the appearance of nonexistent counties on Nebraska maps is not limited to these six, and not even limited to commercial maps, the scope of the error is unique in Nebraska’s cartographic history: Lyon, Taylor, Monroe, Harrison, Jackson, and Grant comprised almost one-fifth of the land in the state, and they appeared on virtually all maps over a four-year period, emerging in 1867 on Colton’s township map, and showing up as late as 1877 on others. The erroneous information influenced the work of government officials, including those involved in the 1870 United States census. Clearly, what was not can be as informative as what was when examining history, and even maps can contain much more than meets the eye.

Brian P. Croft is an instructor of Composition, Literature, and History at Western Nebraska Community College, having taught at Nebraska community colleges for twelve years. He also serves on the Board of Trustees of the Nebraska State Historical Society. He has been working to create a research collection of pre-1945 maps of Nebraska, and makes use of examples in the collection as artifacts in his “History of Nebraska” course. This is his first article for *Nebraska History.*
### Nebraska’s Nonexistent Western Counties: Regional Maps Showing One or More of the Six, 1867-1875

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<td>County Map of Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota and Minnesota</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Cheyenne, Monroe (in place of Keith) (modified)</td>
<td>Warner &amp; Beers/H.H. Lloyd &amp; Co.'s Atlas of the United States (Appended atlas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County and Township Map of the States of Kansas and Nebraska</td>
<td>1874 to 1876</td>
<td>Cheyenne, Monroe (in place of Keith) (modified)</td>
<td>S.A. Mitchell/Mitchell's New General Atlas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Archives, Nebraska State Historical Society; Croft Map Collection; Wichita State University; David Rumsey Map Collection; University of Texas at Arlington; Library of Congress/National Archives; Karrow, Checklist of Printed Maps of the Middle West to 1900-Nebraska; Newberry Library.
Notes


2 Both the Council and the House of Representatives of the territory of Nebraska published their journals, and usually a text titled Laws, Joint Resolutions, and Memorials. Thus, each year the territorial legislature produced two or three official records with slight variations. The state legislature continued this publication format. Experience Estabrook published the first complete laws of the territory in 1866, The Revised Statutes of the Territory of Nebraska. The best evidence is found in the manuscripts, but these are incomplete.


4 A. T. Andreas, History of the State of Nebraska (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1882), 105-11; Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials Passed At the Sessions of the Territorial and State Legislatures of Nebraska . . . (Lincoln, NE: Journal Company, State Printers, 1886), 1:10.


6 Ibid., 147-52.

7 Journal of the Council at the Third Regular Session of the General Assembly of the Territory of Nebraska (Brownville, N.T.: Robert W. Furnas, Territorial Printer, 1857), 50-52, 73, respectively.


9 Laws (1886), 1: 663, 825, respectively; James E. Potter, Standing Firmly By The Flag: Nebraska Territory and the Civil War, 1861-1867 (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 2012), 49-50.

10 3rd Council Journal, 43, 82.


13 Long and Sinko, Atlas; General Land Office, Map Showing the Progress of the Public Surveys in Kansas and Nebraska, editions of 1861, 1862, 1863 1866, Colin and Brian Croft Collection.

14 Maps of the time came in many forms: an attached or appended folding map, either glued to a concluding book page or, more commonly, “tipped in” (attached to a thin leaf that was then bound into the book); atlas map, a single or double-page sheet tipped in as a page in a volume of maps; wall map, with a strip of wood at its top and a wooden roller at the bottom, then varnished; sheet map, just the map itself, often rolled for transport; pocket map, a sheet map folded into a small (usually not more than four by six inches) set of paperboard or cloth covers. Any map not appended or attached to a larger work is called a “separate issue.” Copyright date often differs from publication date by several years. Many times only the former is printed on the map, making it difficult to determine exactly when a map appeared.

15 Organic Act, Sec. 7. An otherwise successful bill could be denied statutory power if, prior to becoming an act, it was found to be in conflict with another act, or if it was determined that the legislature did not have proper authority to pass such a bill. Unfortunately, the journals published by the territorial and state printers simply reproduced the handwritten journals kept by the clerk of each respective legislative chamber. These usually provide little more than the “File” or “Bill” numbers and their titles. To this was added only the governor’s official Message to the Legislature, plus his messages about approval or rejection of bills. Unless one can find original bills or the writings of individual legislators, little remains about the specifics of legislative proposals.

16 “Agriculture: The Lands of Southwestern Nebraska,” Nebraska Advertiser, Apr. 13, 1871, 4. This is the only mention of the counties in that press; no notations occur in Nebraska’s most disseminated newspapers. Nebraska City News, Omaha Republican, or Omaha Herald, nor do any of these papers mention Cheyenne County despite its actual birth in May of the same year.

17 Norma Kidd Green, “Ghost Counties of Nebraska,” Nebraska History 43 (December 1962): 261. Green does not note the source and location of the petition.

18 Grant Shumway, A History of Western Nebraska and Its People (Lincoln: Western Publishing & Engraving Co., 1921), 176, 188, 220, 444, 523. Besides this error, Shumway’s section on western counties switches between the names “Lyon” and “Lyons,” and lacks citations necessary for source analysis.

19 Andreas, History, 328; Evelyn E. Cox, 1870 Nebraska Census (Ellensburg, WA: Ancestree House, 1979).


21 General Land Office, Map Showing the Progress of the Public Surveys in Nebraska, editions of 1868, 1870, 1871, Map Collections, Library of Congress/National Archives. The 1868 edition also fails to show Cheyenne County.


24 Due to the transition to state government, Nebraska held two territorial and three state legislative sessions during these years. Douglas Bakken, “Chronology of Nebraska Statehood,” Nebraska History 48 (Spring 1967): 81-90.

25 Council File No. 24, introduced Jan. 4, 1866, during the 11th Territorial Legislature by John B. Bennet of Otoe County, Journal of the Council of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Nebraska: At Their Regular Session, Begun and Held at Omaha, January 4, 1866 (Chicago, IL: Culver, Page & Hoyne, 1867), 139, 183, 197, 219-20; Journal of the Council of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Nebraska, 11th Session (RG 56, Nebraska Legislature, Box 18, Series Seven, 1866). Manuscript.

26 Senate Journal, 67-68; Journal of the House of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Nebraska, 3rd actual/1st regular Session (RG 56, Nebraska Legislature, Box 20, Series Seven, 1867). Manuscript.
Cheyenne County comprised the area from the 102nd to the 104th meridians (latitude) and from the 42nd parallel (longitude) to the 41st parallel and southern border of the state, north of Colorado Territory.

Senate Journal, 76, 80-81, 137, 204, 221, 229; House Journal, 196.

Organic Act, Sec. 4. See also Estabrook, Revised Statutes (1866).

Senate Journal, 122-23.

Laws, Joint Resolutions, and Memorials Passed at the First, Second and Third Sessions of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Nebraska (Omaha, NE: St. A. D. Balcombe, Public Printer, 1867), 95. Such had been implied in the Organic Act, but with Nebraska becoming a state, a more specific statement was necessary.

Journal of the House of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Nebraska, 12th Session (RG 56, Nebraska Legislature, Box 19, Series Seven, 1867). Manuscript, 12th Council Journal, 203.

The journals exist both as handwritten manuscripts and printed volumes, and the two sometimes differ.

“House File No. 104: An act to define the boundaries of certain new counties in Nebraska” (RG 56, Nebraska Legislature, Box 19, Series Seven, 1867). Manuscript. Wayne County appears on all maps that have the six in the west. For Wayne, Cristina Slattery and Chad Moffett, prepared for the Nebraska State Historical Society, Wayne County/Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey (Madison, WI: Mead-Hunt, 2000), 20; for counties, Martens, Nebraska Counties; Long and Sinko, Atlas.

12th Council Journal, 221.

Laws, Joint Resolutions, and Memorials Passed at the Twelfth Session of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Nebraska (Omaha, NE: Barkalow Bros., Public Printers, 1867), 31-32.

Martens, Nebraska Counties; Long and Sinko, Atlas.

W. M. Hinman [Lincoln County Clerk] “Petition to Governor Saunders” (Cottonwood Springs, N.T.: February 18, 1866) (NSHS RG1, Nebraska: Governors: SG7, Alvin Saunders); Laws, Joint Resolutions, and Memorials Passed at the Sixth and Seventh Sessions of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Nebraska (Des Moines, IA: Mills & Co., 1871), 202; Map Showing the Progress of the Public Surveys in Nebraska. 1871. Map Collections, Library of Congress/National Archives; Ira R. Bare and Will McDonald, An Illustrated History of Lincoln County, Nebraska and Her People (Chicago, IL: American Historical Society, 1920), 1:44.

Jerry Penny, Map of Nebraska Showing the Progression of the General Land Office Surveys (2012). However, counties had often been established on unsurveyed land in early territorial times. In 1856, only nine of thirty-one counties had been even partially surveyed. Martens, Nebraska Counties; Penny, Map of Nebraska; Long and Sinko, Atlas.

The Organic Act, Sec. 6, provided that “If any bill shall not be returned by the Governor within three days (Sundays excepted) after it shall have been presented to him, the same shall be a law in like manner as if he had signed it, unless the Assembly, by adjournment, prevent its return, in which case it shall not be a law.”

Laws (1867), 901.

S. No. 6 indicated a Monroe whose southern border was the South Platte River.


On Colton’s New Sectional Map of the State of Nebraska, 1873, the Colton brothers moved to the Cheyenne and Monroe configuration seen on Blanchard’s 1868, and Cran’s 1871 Sectional, maps of the state. University of Texas at Arlington, http://texashistory.unl.edu/ark:/67531/metapth231698/; “Colton’s Nebraska,” appearing in Colton’s General Atlas for 1874, but still copyrighted in 1867, shows the proper Cheyenne-only configuration, a new edition was copyrighted that same year. David Rumsey Map Collection, http://www.davidrumsey.com/.

Harvey’s own organ, the Nebraska Statesman, couldn’t have been the source of information as it was not in production at the time: It had closed in Nebraska City in 1866, to reopen in Lincoln in 1868.

Nebraska State Historical Society Map Collections; Colin and Brian Croft Map Collection.

For instance, on his 1858 (reprinted in 1875) Military Map of Nebraska and Dakota, Gouverneur Kemble Warren states that he collected much of the information personally, and includes dates of his explorations on the map itself; he also lists twenty other individuals and entities who were sources of information, from Lewis and Clark through the U.S. Land Office. Colin and Brian Croft Map Collection.

Another commercial map showing nonexistent counties is George F. Cram’s New Rail Road Map of Nebraska (1871), in the NSHS Archives, and the nonexistent Elkhorn and Garber counties appear on the official map of Nebraska created by the United States General Land Office in 1876. General Land Office, [Map of the] State of Nebraska. 1876, NSHS Archives. See Green, “Ghost Counties of Nebraska.”

1 This is not an exhaustive list. It includes only those Nebraska maps noted in texts or found in libraries, and excludes maps of surrounding areas that show only a small part of Nebraska. No maps produced by the state or federal government contain any of the six. Some commercial cartographers published maps without these counties. Notable are Chapman’s Sectional Map of the Surveyed Part of Nebraska, published by Silas Chapman in 1869; Asher and Adams’ Nebraska, published in their [Asher and Adams’] New Topographical and Statistical Atlas of the United States beginning in 1872; George F. Cram’s Sectional Map of Nebraska, published in 1872 and which corrects the errors of the 1871 1st edition (his Rail Road and Township Map of Nebraska, however, showed them again in 1871, along with 17 others in the north central region that were not official; between 1872 and 1878, although all of the erroneous counties shown in 1871 were removed, the trend continued with other counties.) However, as this table shows, avoidance of the six nonexistent counties was the exception, not the rule.

2 For pocket maps, which fold into small paperboard or cloth covers, only the title actually printed on the map is used. For example, the 1868-1872 Colton sectional maps listed above are indicated by the title found on the map; their covers read, “New Sectional Map of Nebraska and Part of Dakota.”

3 When the map appeared “on the market”; not its copyright date.