



The Father of Lincoln, Nebraska: The Life and Times of Thomas P. Kennard

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Article Summary: During his lifetime Kennard was widely known as the "Father of Lincoln," and he had a strong claim to the title. Not only was he part of the three-man commission that selected the tiny village of Lancaster as the new state capital, but during his long and varied career he exercised a broad influence in both politics and business.

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Photographs / Images: Nebraska's first capitol, completed in 1868 (2 views); Thomas Kennard (3 photographs at different times in his life); advertisements for Kennard's services from the *Nebraska Inquirer*, August 15, 1859; Union State ticket listing Kennard as candidate for secretary of state (*Nebraska Herald*, May 2, 1866); Cass County election results, *Nebraska Herald*, June 13, 1866; Richards Block at 11th and O Streets; Kennard House/Nebraska Statehood Memorial; Western Glass and Paint Company at 12th and L Streets; commercial building at 10th and K Streets





THE FATHER OF LINCOLN, NEBRASKA:

The Life and Times of Thomas P. Kennard

BY THOMAS R. BUECKER

During the nineteenth century enterprising businessmen, land agents, developers, and other entrepreneurs swarmed into the territories and new states of the trans-Mississippi West. Most sought opportunities for fortunes and empires in new regions opened for settlement. In Nebraska, one of the most successful and influential such individuals was Thomas Perkins Kennard, a dapper yet shrewd businessman and politician. During his lifetime he was celebrated as the father of Lincoln, but today is mostly remembered as the namesake of the home he built, the Kennard House, the oldest remaining structure in the city's original plat. As both Lincoln and Nebraska approach sesquicentennial milestones, the time is right for us to look back on his remarkable career.¹

Thomas P. Kennard came from a Quaker background. The Society of Friends, or Quakers, was formed in England by George Fox in 1651. Quakers believed that religious comfort and inspiration came by the voice of God speaking to each soul without an earthly mediator. Under the leadership of William Penn, Pennsylvania became a refuge for Friends as well as all other creeds. Quakers

avored plain ways, governed by "The Discipline," rules set to establish and reinforce Quaker beliefs and lifestyles. Worship was held several times a week in local homes or meeting houses. Monthly meetings were held to admit and transfer memberships, record births, marriages and deaths, and enforce discipline and disownment for violations among members.

Even though Kennard grew to maturity in the company of his parents and other relatives, in later years he admitted, "I have comparatively no knowledge of my father's and mother's family back of themselves."² According to family record, the father of John Kennard, the second great-grandfather of Thomas P., may have come over from England on the same ship as William Penn and settled near Philadelphia. For several decades his family remained as farmers near Cheltenham, a small village just north of Philadelphia. In the 1730s John relocated his family to a Friends area in nearby Bucks County. Later, Thomas Kennard, the father of Thomas P., was born at Cheltenham in 1786.³

About 1790 Levi Kennard, Thomas's father, moved his family from Pennsylvania to Maryland,

Nebraska's first state capitol, completed in 1868. NSHS RG1234-3-1 (detail)

Thomas Kennard about the time he resided in De Soto.
NSHS RG2411-1874d



where they joined the Deer Creek Monthly Meeting, at the village of Darlington in northeastern Harford County. While the family remained at Deer Creek, Thomas married Elisabeth Metcalf in December 1813. A man with a somewhat restless nature, Thomas moved his family the next year to Belmont County in eastern Ohio, an area long settled by Quaker farmers. There in October 1814, a son was born; six weeks later, his first wife died. In 1815 Thomas remarried to Elisabeth Jenkins; nine children (eight sons and one daughter) were born to the union, including the seventh son, Thomas Perkins, born December 13, 1828.⁴

While in Ohio the Kennard family lived on a ninety-six-acre farm three miles north and east of St. Clairsville, the county seat situated on the National Road. Over the ensuing years, the family belonged to the Short Creek, Plainfield, and Flushing monthly meetings. Thomas Perkins's birth was duly reported in the Plainfield record. Thomas Sr. had a typical frontier farm, with two to three horses and three head of cattle. By 1830 he had reduced his farmland one-third to become co-owner and operator of a water-powered grist mill.⁵

During the early 1830s, Thomas wanted to move further west, this time into central Indiana. In the fall of 1833 he made a trip to Henry County, an area of Quaker settlement some thirty-five miles east of Indianapolis. After purchasing land near Greensboro, he returned to Belmont County and sold his land

and mill interests. The next year the Kennard family journeyed west via the National Road into Henry County. In 1836 Thomas Sr. purchased (and moved his family to) a partially cleared 160-acre farmstead one mile north of Greensboro. There he finally settled down. The family transferred their membership to the Milford Meeting house in Wayne County, and later to the Fall Creek Monthly Meeting in nearby Madison County.⁶

As a boy Thomas P. worked on the farm and had little time for formal schooling. By his own account, when sixteen years old he had only one year of schooling. About this time he determined to seek other means of making a living rather than farming, and took up an apprenticeship at the local woolen mill southeast of Greensboro. With his older brother Jenkins, he spent four years learning the woolen trade. Then Kennard spent two years traveling and working at other mills to gain further knowledge of the cloth-making craft. In 1850 Thomas returned, and with Jenkins bought the Springdale Mill, and jointly operated it for the next several years.⁷

About this time Thomas P. made two decisions that shaped his future. First, he decided to become a lawyer, not seen as an ideal career choice by his fellow Quakers. Friends were advised to avoid lawyers as "law suits against fellow Quakers were strictly forbidden along with the oaths that might be required in a court of law."⁸ Not to be deterred, Kennard made an agreement with a prominent law firm in New Castle, the county seat, to borrow law books, which he read in evenings after the mill closed. Every other Saturday afternoon he returned to New Castle to be quizzed and assigned further readings.⁹

Second, in January 1852 he was married to Livia E. Templeton by a local Baptist Elder. That September the Fall Creek Monthly Meeting noted in its records that Kennard had been dismissed for "marriage contrary to discipline" for marrying a non-Quaker. He did not repent and "condemn" his misconduct, and was not again mentioned in the minutes. Even though Thomas P. was never again part of any organized religious affiliation, he maintained attributes of his Quaker upbringing.¹⁰

The new couple resided in a small house in Greensboro, where Thomas continued to work at the mill and read law. It was here that their first child, son Alva, was born in January 1853. After several years of study, his mentors drew up his application for admission to the legal profession. One went with Thomas to his examination before a judge of the district court, which he passed and was granted license to practice law in Indiana. He

retired from the mill business and hung out his shingle to lawyer in Greensboro. Several years later he moved his young family to Anderson, the county seat of Madison County, where he entered a law partnership with one Thaddeus Cooper. Kennard remained in Anderson for the next two years.¹¹

As a result of family influence and Quaker upbringing, Thomas P. was an affirmed abolitionist. Not surprisingly, his political views led him to Indianapolis in 1854 to attend the convention of the "Fusionists," a movement to unite several independent groups opposed to the extension of slavery into the territories. Attending the convention was his first political action. Two years later, with his firm anti-slavery beliefs, Kennard was sent as a delegate to Indianapolis for the convention where the state Republican Party was organized. From that point onward, T. P. Kennard was a sworn Republican, a decision he saw in later years as having "brought the greatest amount of good to the greatest number of my fellow men."¹²

Seeking opportunity in the promising west, two of his brothers, Levi and Marshall, had moved to Nebraska Territory in 1856. They settled in De Soto and established a general mercantile business. The next year, as Thomas P. later recalled, "I took Horace Greeley's advice to 'Go west, young man, and grow up with the country,' and decided to join them."¹³ In early April, Kennard traveled by rail from Indianapolis to St. Louis, and then went up-river by steamboat to Nebraska. On April 24, 1857, he landed in Omaha and made his way on foot to De Soto, twenty-some miles north of Omaha.

De Soto was one of a number of new Missouri River towns that hoped to become the main jumping off point for travelers heading farther west. By 1857 the town was on the road to prosperity, with a population of nearly seven hundred, a river ferry, three stores, two hotels, three banks, and more than several saloons. De Soto also became the Washington County seat in 1858. With his brother Levi, Thomas started a general land agent business, locating land and handling financial affairs for owners in the region. Being "satisfied with the outlook of the new territory," Kennard returned to Ohio in 1858 and moved his family to De Soto.¹⁴ In addition to land agent work, he purchased and ran a small hotel, had part interest in a store, and opened a law practice. Along with regular legal work, he advertised as being a collecting agent and Solicitor of Chancery.¹⁵

Although De Soto declined when a good part of its population left for the Colorado gold fields in the latter 1850s, the town did rebound. Among

L. J. & T. P. KENNARD,
General Land Agents,
 DE SOTO, - - - - NEBRASKA.
Will Locate Land. Invest Money. Pay
Taxes. &c., in Western Iowa. Ne-
braska and Kansas, on reasona-
ble terms, n5
 REFERENCES.—James, Kent, Santee & Co.,
 Philadelphia; Oglebay, Atkinson & Co., Bridge-
 port, Ohio; McCormack & Co., Omaha, N. T.

De Soto Pilot, May 30, 1857


T. P. KENNARD,
ATTORNEY AT LAW
 DE SOTO, N. T.
WILL attend promptly to any business
 that may be entrusted to his care.
 Particular attention paid to collections in
 Nebraska and Western Iowa.
 De Soto, July 1859. n16

Nebraska Inquirer, August 15, 1859

the population that remained, Thomas P. became active in local civic affairs and Republican Party committee work. In early March of 1860, he was chosen as one of three Republican delegates to the first constitutional convention, where Kennard was prepared to submit two platform planks which supported women's suffrage and prohibited capital punishment. Unfortunately, the 1860 convention was not held: the people of Nebraska Territory were not ready for statehood, and did not vote in favor of state organization.¹⁶

Undaunted by this setback, Kennard continued his participation in local politics, and became chairman of the Washington County Central Committee. Although defeated in election for town council recorder in 1862, two years later he was elected mayor of De Soto. Meanwhile, in 1863 he was appointed Deputy Assessor for the Northern

The Nebraska Herald.



PLATTSMOUTH, NEBRASKA.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 2, 1866

UNION STATE TICKET.

For Congress.
T. M. MARQUETT.

For Governor
DAVID BUTLER.

For Secretary of State.
T. P. KENNARD.

For State Auditor,
JOHN GILLESPIE.

For State Treasurer,
AUGUSTUS KOUNTZE.

For Chief Justice,
O. P. MASON.

For Associate Justices,
**I. CROUNSE,
GEO. B. LAKE**

District of the Internal Revenue. This position gave Kennard opportunity to become acquainted with settlers and businessmen north of Douglas County, a measure that several years later would work to his benefit. During the De Soto years, two more children were born to the Kennard family: daughters Ida Lulu in 1862, and Cora in 1864. Their second child and first daughter India, born in Indiana in 1854, died at an unknown date while the Kennards lived in De Soto.¹⁷

On April 19, 1864, Congress passed a Nebraska statehood enabling act, calling for a June 6 election for delegates to a constitutional convention to be held on July 4. Most of the delegates were pledged against statehood and adjourned the convention when it convened without writing a constitution. Kennard more than likely realized the futility of holding a constitutional convention at that time and did not serve as a delegate.

The question of statehood came up for a third time in 1866. This time Kennard was ready to enter the arena. Hoping to attract "War" Democrats under the name of the "Union Party," the Republicans met April 12 at Plattsmouth and nominated a ticket in favor of state organization. The Democrats, meanwhile, met at Nebraska City, resolved against statehood.¹⁸ Kennard attended the Union convention as one of the two delegates from Washington County. Later that day, he was elected as the Union candidate for secretary of state on a ticket headed by David Butler for governor, and John Gillespie for state auditor. After the convention, Kennard and Gen. John Thayer, one of the Republican candidates for the U.S. Senate, made a whirlwind canvass of the Territory to gain support for statehood.¹⁹

The election of 1866 was not a statehood or Republican landslide. The statehood measure was carried by a margin of a mere 100 votes, 3,938 to 3,838. Butler defeated Democrat J. Sterling Morton for governor by 145 votes; Kennard won office by 130 votes to become Nebraska's first secretary of state. For some years after the election, Morton, then editor of a Nebraska City newspaper, expressed a dislike for the new secretary of state and often referred to him in the press by the disagreeable variations of "Cannard" and "Old Tom."²⁰ He also made similar disparaging comments about other Republican stalwarts.

The Kennard families left De Soto during its last years of existence. After his election to public office, Thomas P. moved his family to Omaha. In 1869 a new town named Blair was selected over De Soto for a railroad crossing of the Missouri River. Merchants and professional men quickly moved off to Blair (just four miles north) or other points. Levi and Marshall Kennard relocated to Omaha and continued in the mercantile trade. And as De Soto began to pass into history, Thomas P. hitched his wagon to an obscure village then known as Lancaster.²¹

Territorial Governor Alvin Saunders remained in office until March 27, 1867, when the certified copy of President Andrew Johnson's statehood proclamation reached Nebraska. Saunders then announced his term as territorial governor had ended and that David Butler was assuming office as state governor. Thomas Kennard likely began his duties at the same time. The duties of the secretary of state were basic. He was in charge of all official documents (including the great seal of Nebraska), responsible for accurate copies made of all laws and resolutions, and made sure adequate supplies of ink, stationery, and fuel were on hand before

each legislative session began. The secretary countersigned all commissions issued by the governor and at that time also served as state librarian. Because there was no lieutenant governor, he was the second highest state official. The elected term was two years with an annual salary of \$1,200.²²

One main undertaking for the new state government was to locate a site for the capital. This had been a point of contention among Nebraskans since 1854, when Governor Thomas Cuming announced that the territorial legislature would meet in Omaha. Although twice as many people lived south of the Platte River as on the north side, the south Platte region was apportioned less representation than the north. Resentment and argument over the issue continued for years, with south-of-the-Platte legislators determined to remove the capital from Omaha.²³

After the end of the Civil War, the south Platte forces gained enough power to get the capital relocated to their section. An act approved June 14, 1867, established a capital commission of Governor Butler, Secretary Kennard, and Auditor Gillespie. They were charged with locating a suitable site either in Seward County, or the southern halves of Saunders and Butler Counties, or the northern portion of Lancaster County. The new capital was to be named "Lincoln." The site was to be surveyed and town lots sold to finance public buildings to be built there, i.e., a capitol, state university, insane asylum, and penitentiary. The commission was also in charge of securing specifications and architects to submit proposals, and to select the best ones "adapted to the wants of the state."²⁴

The commission left Nebraska City on July 18, arrived at the village of Lancaster on the evening of the nineteenth, and spent the next three days exploring the vicinity. Then they traveled through Saunders and into Butler County, and along the way saw "no situation of commanding advantage."²⁵ They moved next through southern Seward County to Milford, and on the twenty-seventh returned to Yankee Hill. After two days of looking and debating, the decision was made—they selected Lancaster. While Butler and Gillespie returned to Omaha, Kennard remained to supervise the surveying work and drove the first stake of the survey. Plots were laid out for the capitol and other public buildings, including schools, the university, and a city park. During the initial survey, today's familiar lettering and numbering of streets was devised and platted. On August 13 the commissioners again assembled at Lancaster. The next day they announced the founding of "Lincoln" as Nebraska's seat of government.²⁶

OFFICIAL RETURNS.

The following is the vote of Cass county, according to the official canvass. It does not include the soldier's vote, which is reported at 39 majority for the Union ticket, and 62 majority for the Constitution. Neither does it include the vote of Rock Bluffs precinct, which was rejected by the board of canvassers on the ground of non-compliance with the election laws of Nebraska by the judges of election. The vote as canvassed is as follows:

<i>Governor.</i>			
Butler,	375	Morton,	343
<i>Secretary of State.</i>			
Kennard,	377	Sturges,	347
<i>Auditor.</i>			
Gillespie,	376	Barnum,	347
<i>Treasurer.</i>			
Kountz,	376	Goodrich,	348
<i>Congress.</i>			
Marquett,	326	Brooke,	336
<i>Chief Justice.</i>			
Mason,	367	Little,	349
		Kennedy,	1
<i>Associate Justices.</i>			
Krounse,	378	Thomas,	347
Lake,	377	Kennedy,	347
<i>Senator for Cass.</i>			
Hanna,	365	Cooper,	345
<i>Senator for Cass, Lancaster, Saline, and Seward.</i>			
Cadman,	452	Hellman,	426
<i>House of Representatives.</i>			
Chapin,	364	Hinkeley,	360
Maxwell,	367	Vallery,	352
Hathaway,	367	Patterson,	346
Bell,	353	Mutz,	352
		S. F. Cooper,	1
For Constitution,			233
Against Constitution,			480
For Special Tax,			169
Against Special Tax,			516

Cass County election results, *Nebraska Herald*, June 13, 1866

Kennard portrait taken during the time he served as Nebraska's first secretary of state.
NSHS RG2411-2874



The commission had several reasons for selecting Lancaster. The site was centrally located in relation to existing population centers. Its physical setting was conducive for building railroads coming in from different directions. And the nearby salt basin was a major draw that could provide economic benefit. But others, particularly those in Omaha, failed to see the commissioners' rationale. To many observers the selection and development of such an obscure locale for the state capital was nothing but a fool's errand. In August a short-sighted Omaha editor protested:

No man in his senses believes that the present location can be permanent. It is in *one corner of the state*—away from all lines of travel possessing neither the advantages of railroads, navigable rivers nor telegraphs.²⁷

One might argue that the editor was astute, since Omaha already had the infrastructure that Lancaster lacked.

The sale of town lots began in September. Although realized prices were low, enough cash was eventually raised to enable construction of the capitol to begin in January 1868. By this time Lincoln had grown to a town of about one hundred houses with a population of three hundred. Before

the end of the year Kennard moved his family and took up full-time residency in his city.²⁸

Despite the controversy of capital selection, Butler, Kennard, and Gillespie were all reelected to office in November 1868. Kennard's victory was not a landslide, but he won by a far wider margin than for his first term. Preparations were made for continued land sales to construct the university building and asylum. During the last part of November, Kennard moved the great seal from Omaha to the new capital city.²⁹

On December 3, Governor Butler issued his official proclamation that the capitol building was completed and that all state officers at the former capitol in Omaha were to move all "public property, archives, records, books, and papers to said Lincoln" within three months.³⁰ Also that hereafter, all sessions of the legislature would be convened at the new state capitol. As with all official documents, his proclamation was duly countersigned "T. P. Kennard, Sec'y of State." The next week all the furniture and materials were moved from the territorial capitol, beginning a new era in Nebraska history.

Sales of state lands to finance construction of public institutions continued into 1869. Enthusiastic about news of a soon-to-be-built railroad line to Lincoln, a ceremonial groundbreaking was held in Lincoln that June. After remarks by Governor Butler, Secretary Kennard addressed the crowd, "giving many sound reasons for his faith in the growth of Lincoln."³¹ As a demonstration of their faith in the new capital, the three original capital commissioners decided each to build imposing homes, Kennard's and Gillespie's on the block southeast of the capitol, and Butler's on his farm one mile west. Their mansion houses were impressive structures meant to encourage others to invest in Lincoln. It worked. New business houses and private homes were built, reflecting in Kennard's words, "the glorious future of the young Capital of Nebraska."³²

Meanwhile, trouble was brewing for the capital commissioners, who had been openly criticized for, among other things, "incredible laxity" in handling state funds. But on the other hand, there were no set rules for the commission—they were just to go out and locate a new capital and get it going. To some outside observers, it appeared that the commissioners could ignore legal technicalities "in appreciation of their great service to the public."³³ In the fall of 1870, Butler and Gillespie were reelected for third terms; Kennard chose not to run again. His second term as Nebraska's first secretary of state expired on January 10, 1871.

T. P. probably made a wise decision. In March the legislature began impeachment proceedings against Governor Butler. He faced eleven charges, including corruption in granting contracts for state buildings, failing to turn over state moneys to the treasurer, and letting a bid without bond for construction of the asylum (and to the same contractor who was building houses for Butler and Kennard). The most serious charge was that he used school land funds for personal purposes. He was found guilty and left office on June 2, 1871. Impeachment charges were next brought up against Auditor Gillespie for complicity with the governor in illegal activities. One charge was that he took money from the state treasury ostensibly to purchase trees and shrubbery for the capitol grounds, but which were allegedly used for the individual benefit of Gillespie, Butler, and Kennard, probably at their private residences. Eventually Gillespie was found not guilty of all charges and continued in office. Although Kennard no longer held office and could not be impeached, he was called up several times to testify in the cases of Butler and Gillespie.³⁴

That spring Kennard had a shot at international politics. On May 31, Nebraska Senator Phineas Hitchcock wrote President U. S. Grant recommending Kennard for the position of United States Consul at Singapore. Although he assured the President that T. P. was “always an active Republican—and a fair lawyer,” the Grant administration felt he did not have the legal qualifications to fill the consulate.³⁵

Kennard had other irons in the fire before the end of his term as secretary, and once in the private sector he became a very busy man. In April 1871 he became the local agent for the Midland Pacific Railroad, which had just completed its line from Nebraska City. With two outside partners, T. P. began construction in June of a business block at Ninth and O Streets. Later that month the banking house of Bowker, Kennard & Wheeler opened for business. In October 1872, Kennard & Jacobs Brothers, a wholesale dry goods business, opened its doors. When speaking of Kennard, the Lincoln paper reassured that Lincoln citizens “have confidence, in his integrity and business habits.”³⁶

Unfortunately, hard times following the Panic of 1873 led Kennard to change his business plans.



Nebraska's first state capitol, completed in 1868. Auditor Gillespie's house and the rear of Kennard's house are visible in the right background. NSHS RG1234-3-1



View of the Richards Block on the northeast corner of 11th and O Streets. The offices of T. P. Kennard & Son were located on its second floor. NSHS RG2158-84

He soon left the dry goods trade, and his bank was forced to close in early 1875. He and his partner Bowker published notice to “. . . assure our creditors that all liabilities will be paid.”³⁷ After this setback he sold real estate and continued to serve as a director for the Midland Pacific, soon to be renamed the Nebraska Railway Company.

Although a man of short stature, T. P. had the reputation of being well dressed, frequently appearing in a frock coat, velvet vest, and wearing a silk hat. Others later recalled seeing him at local political conventions wearing a dress suit. Kennard himself claimed to have worn a dress coat “indiscriminately, the same as any other article of apparel.”³⁸

Always the promoter, he was ready to step forward in support of any project or proposal he felt had merit. This was particularly true of railroads, the buzzword of the 1870s. Kennard was keenly aware

of the important role railroads would play in the development of western regions. His first involvement with railroading came in 1867, when he was one of the incorporators of the Northern Nebraska Air Line Railroad Company, reorganized to build a line from De Soto to Fremont. In 1869 he was an incorporator of the well-known Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley Railroad. After Kennard relocated to Lincoln he became a strong advocate of any plan to bring in a new railroad line. For example, in 1875-76 he helped organize the Lincoln, Beatrice & Republican Railroad, intended to build a narrow gauge road from Lincoln to Denver (it never came about).³⁹

Although many proposed rail lines were never built, such as the Northern Nebraska Air Line and the later Yankton & Lincoln Railroad, Kennard assisted mainline companies wanting to lay track to Lincoln. In 1878 he became the local lawyer for

the Union Pacific and bought right-of-way for the line into Lincoln. In 1885 he purchased land in the city for the new Missouri Pacific yard. Additionally, he laid out towns along the new roads. In 1867 he purchased Washington County town sites for Blair, Arlington, and Kennard (which he named for himself) and for John Blair's Omaha, Sioux City & Pacific Railroad. In 1880 he laid out Raymond on the Union Pacific, and brought Eagle and Walton into existence for the Missouri Pacific.⁴⁰

As a businessman and entrepreneur, Kennard was always on the lookout for economic opportunity. Early in 1873, Governor Furnas appointed him agent to prosecute claims against the federal government on sales of Pawnee reservation lands and areas of swamp and overflow lands. To settle the claim, T. P. made three trips to Washington, on one trip staying three months. The state collected \$27,000 as a result of his work. Kennard insisted that by agreement he was to receive one half of the funds recovered; his personal expenses in the venture totaled \$3,600.⁴¹

After Kennard submitted his claim, Furnas denied he had entered a contract for recovery of the funds. Kennard's claim was shelved due to the apprehension that if he were paid, the state would have to repay all the funds collected. Over the ensuing years Kennard's claims were frequently resurrected before the state legislature; eventually the case was heard by the U.S. Supreme Court, which declined to intervene. Eventually the state rejected payment due to the expiration of the statute of limitations. According to one state historian, "The state then unjustly remains the beneficiary of one-half of the \$27,043.99, which it is not disputed Mr. Kennard procured for it."⁴²

Kennard still had politics in his blood. In 1872 he was elected as an alternate to the Republican National Convention; some thought he had a Senate seat in mind. Four years later he actively reentered the political arena. That year he was a member of the Republican State Central Committee, and at the September county convention he was nominated by acclamation for state senator from the Seventeenth District (Lancaster County). According to the *Daily State Journal*, Kennard "is the man to whom every business man in the county instinctively turns as a leader . . . or whenever an enterprise for the building up of our prosperity is contemplated."⁴³ In November T. P. was elected to the state senate. After the Fourteenth Session of the Nebraska Legislature convened on January 2, 1877, he received committee assignments in two areas of his expertise: public lands and buildings,



The Thomas P. Kennard House / Nebraska Statehood Memorial in 1973. RG2158-12

THE THOMAS P. KENNARD HOUSE / NEBRASKA STATEHOOD MEMORIAL

In 1869 all three Nebraska capitol commissioners built elaborate houses in Lincoln. The houses were designed in the popular Italianate style with brackets, paired windows, balustrade balconies, and belvederes (cupolas). Of the three, only the Kennard house remains and is Lincoln's best example of an Italianate house.

After H. T. Clarke sold the Kennard house in the 1890s, it became a boarding house with as many as nineteen occupants. Between 1900 and 1923 it served variously as a single residence, housed several fraternities and a sorority, and boarded downtown working boys. In 1923 Robert Ferguson purchased and extensively remodeled the house, doing interior work and removing the front porch and back wing.

During the 1950s the house saw a variety of residents, ranging from college students to a Smithsonian archeologist and an officer from Lincoln Air Force Base. In 1961 the State of Nebraska purchased the entire north half of the block and planned to demolish all of the structures, including the Kennard house, to make room for a parking lot. Fortunately the house's historical significance was recognized in time; legislation for its preservation passed in 1965, and the Nebraska State Historical Society began restoration work in late 1966. The house was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1969.

Since 1968 the Kennard House, 1627 "H" Street, has served as the Nebraska Statehood Memorial, commemorating Thomas P. Kennard's role in Nebraska history and the selection of Lincoln as the state capital. It is open by appointment only, Monday through Friday.

402-471-4764 • nebraskahistory.org/sites/kennard



Western Glass and Paint Company's first building located at 12th and L Street. By the time of this photo it housed the offices of William J. Bryan's newspaper, *The Commoner*.
NSHS RG1869:4-5

and railroads. He introduced several new pieces of legislation, including support of free libraries and appointment of a state inspector of illuminating oils; he also fought against a bill to regulate railroad rates.⁴⁴

Several weeks after he entered the senate, T. P. received an offer that appealed to him more than his legislative responsibilities. On January 30, he was appointed by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior to a commission sent to Indian Territory to appraise Cherokee lands ceded to other tribes. After completion of the Fourteenth legislature, Kennard resigned as state senator and departed for Lawrence, Kansas, to meet with the other members; he was elected president of the commission.

In April they began looking over the required area in the northwest corner of the reservation. With an escort of soldiers, the commissioners were in the field until July when excessive heat compelled them to suspend work. After completion of a report of the lands examined, Kennard resigned from the commission and returned to Lincoln to attend to "private affairs."⁴⁵

Kennard reentered the private sector and opened a law office and real estate brokerage in 1878. Several years later he and Alva founded the firm of Kennard & Son, offering brokerage services, loans, and insurance sales. In addition to his expanding business interests, T. P. served as a director of the Lincoln Board of Trade and over the years made booster trips promoting Lincoln to other towns and communities. In 1880 he traveled to Kansas City as a representative of the board to attend a convention to encourage the federal government to improve barge navigation on the Missouri River.

In 1883 his eldest daughter Lulu married James E. Riggs, a druggist from Omaha. Two years later Riggs joined with his father-in-law to open "Kennard & Riggs," a retail drug, paint, and oil business in downtown Lincoln. T. P. developed a keen interest in the paint and oil trade over the next several years.

Kennard's wife Livia died of a stroke on January 5, 1887. He never remarried. After her death, he decided to sell the house at 1627 H Street and build a new one on the northeast corner lot of the same block, which he still owned from the first Lincoln land sales. After the new \$25,000 home was completed, he sold the old house to Henry T. Clarke, a businessman who had built the Sidney Bridge across the North Platte River during the Black Hills gold rush period. By the 1880s Clark owned a large pharmaceutical wholesale business in Omaha; he bought the Kennard house for his two sons, who managed his new Lincoln branch.⁴⁶

Kennard never again ran for public office after the 1876 election, but remained active in Republican politics. Over the years he attended countless neighborhood caucuses and county and state conventions, either as a delegate or committee member. Kennard was seen as a political kingpin, someone you wanted in your corner, or someone to be consulted for his opinion on issues. In 1886 the *Omaha Daily Bee*, never a paper to portray T. P. in a good light, published a scathing image of Lancaster County politics that explained how "Tom Kennard . . . is acting as ring master, and cracking his whip in a manner well calculated to terrify and subjugate all raw recruits."⁴⁷ Despite such criticism, Kennard remained an influential political figure.

T. P. expanded his paint and oil business in 1889, organizing Western Glass & Paint Company, his most successful business venture. The new concern specialized in plate glass, paints, varnishes, doors, sashes, and painting supplies. Son-in-law James Riggs served as secretary-treasurer, and in 1890 Kennard's son Alva built a large brick business/residential apartment building on South Twelfth Street,

between L and M Streets, to house the business. As his trade grew, Kennard built an even larger wholesale and retail store one-half block north on M Street. Always the opportunist, he rented out the former Western Glass space to William Jennings Bryan, a Democrat, who converted it to offices and mailing rooms for his newspaper, *The Commoner*. Among other projects in Lincoln, Western Glass installed store fronts and windows on the Terminal Building, Miller & Paine, and Hardy's Furniture. T. P. served as president and general manager until his retirement.⁴⁸

Apparently the James Riggs-Lulu Kennard marriage was not made in heaven, and scandal loomed for the Kennard family. Accusing Riggs of extreme cruelty, Lulu was granted a divorce on March 7, 1893. Needless to say, Riggs's employment in the family business ended. According to the *Evening News*, however, "Some sensational features as [*sic*] said to be in reserve."⁴⁹ During a related suit months later, the question arose as to why Riggs had not contested the divorce; Riggs claimed that for several years prior to the divorce, Lulu had received men at her home, "absented herself from his house at night," and otherwise

indulged in criminal conduct with other men. At the time Kennard, hoping to keep the affair quiet, had told Riggs he would cancel loan notes held against him if the divorce was not contested, to which Riggs agreed. But he evidently did not keep quiet and the sensational story made it into the press. Kennard by this time had considerable experience weathering storms, and this one, like the others, eventually went away. The next year Lulu married George Holden, who became general manager of Western Glass on T. P.'s retirement.⁵⁰

Kennard's political "last hurrah" came in 1896 when he was elected a Nebraska delegate-at-large to the Republican National Convention in St. Louis. Upon arrival, the sixteen-member Nebraska delegation elected him a convention vice-president (every state selected one). As a reward for his support for President McKinley, T. P. received a political plum in 1898 and was appointed receiver of public moneys for the U. S. Land Office in Lincoln. He served in this position until 1902, the last public office Kennard would hold.⁵¹

Kennard maintained his interest in railroads, but in later years focused most of his attention on interurban and streetcar transportation. In 1905 he



Another of Kennard's commercial buildings, built in 1889 on the northeast corner of Tenth and K Streets. Shown here in 1968, the building remains to this day, and has recently been remodeled.



Thomas P. Kennard in his later years. From *Lincoln: The Capital City and Lancaster County Nebraska, Vol. II* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1916), 5.

was an incorporator and director of the Citizen's Railway Company, which later consolidated with Lincoln Traction Company, the main street railway in Lincoln. He also supported the idea of building an interurban line from Auburn to Lincoln and then west to York. Additionally, from 1900 to 1909 he openly pursued his pet project—the construction of a union depot to serve all railroad lines coming into Lincoln. But the period before the World War saw the beginnings of motor vehicle transportation, which ultimately caused the demise of rail travel. Like other schemes the interurban and union depot never became reality.⁵²

After the turn of the century, Kennard made time for personal travel. In 1903 he went with daughter Cora on a four months' vacation to Europe. Three years later he returned to Indiana to attend a family reunion. After T. P. retired from active business pursuits in 1910, he had more time for social affairs (the Kennard family belonged to the "Upper Ten," Lincoln's social elite) and for public service. For some years he personally financed annual excursions for children from the Lincoln orthopedic hospital, including a 1914 trip to Capitol Beach amusement park. He also served for six years as a director on Lincoln's park board, and was a committee member during the campaign to build a city YMCA building.⁵³

Kennard enjoyed entertaining friends and holding social gatherings. One of his earliest social affairs was a January 1873 reception at the Kennard House for Robert Furnas, the newly inaugurated governor. One source estimated six to eight hundred guests attended the three-hour event, with ninety people in the parlors at one time by actual count. In 1895 the Kennards sponsored a "Trolley Party" aboard a rented car strung with electric lights and flags for an evening drive around Lincoln and out as far as University Place. Nearly sixty friends rode along on the new after-dark fad. Major election nights were also important social events, when Kennard invited friends from both parties to gather at his residence for an evening of cards and receiving the latest vote counts. In 1900 when it became evident that President McKinley would be reelected, a telegram of congratulations with the signatures of all present was sent to him.⁵⁴

In his later years, T. P. Kennard became an iconic touchstone between twentieth century residents and the earliest days of Lincoln. Numerous articles in the local press reminded them of his importance in the development of their city. For instance:

- 1907 – "(Kennard) deserves to be called the father of Lincoln."
- 1908 – "The fifty thousand people of this city are proud of the father of Lincoln."
- 1913 – "It has been Mr. Kennard's privilege to be the connecting link between the past and present . . . [Kennard is] one of the most dearly loved members of the community."
- 1917 – "He has given to Lincoln some of his very self and Lincoln appreciated it."

One article recalled an address he made during Lincoln's first years which included the brash statement that someday one hundred thousand people would live in the city!⁵⁵


As his historical legacy grew, T. P. obviously enjoyed his celebrity status. Because he was the last surviving member of the capital commission, Kennard was frequently called on to tell his story of Lincoln's founding. In 1912 he spoke on his favorite subject to a large crowd at the Lincoln Country Club, a fitting place because at the time the club was the original 1869 David Butler house. According to one source, Kennard spent more time at work talking about the city's early days than he did business. At a 1915 pageant celebrating Lincoln's establishment, the grand old man was made to stand and bow to the appreciative audience at the end of the third scene, which portrayed the selection of the capital. The fiftieth anniversary of Kennard's arrival in Nebraska was duly celebrated by a private dinner and remarks at the Kennard home attended by close friends and important civic leaders. On his ninetieth birthday, four hundred well-wishers stopped by to pay their respects, including Governor Keith Neville and twenty-five state officials and judges of the Nebraska Supreme Court.⁵⁶

T. P. began limiting his activities as the years advanced. In the fall of 1914 he suffered through several weeks of serious illness, and in 1915 delivered his last public address before the Lincoln Rotary Club (of which he was a founding member) and made a final visit to Indiana. After forty years of attempts, January 1919 saw the last filing of the "Kennard Claims" in the legislature. He never received any payment for what was claimed the state owed him for services rendered.⁵⁷

Kennard's health deteriorated rapidly in 1920. On June 22, his beloved Western Glass & Paint business was destroyed in a devastating fire, but because of his critical condition he was never told of the conflagration. In the early evening of June 24, Thomas P. Kennard died peacefully at his home. His cause of death was listed as a carbuncle and old age. The funeral was held at his home on Sunday the twenty-seventh; honorary pallbearers included Governor Samuel R. McKelvie and University Chancellor Samuel Avery. After the services, he was buried next to Livia in Wyuka Cemetery, another Lincoln institution he was instrumental in securing.⁵⁸

Kennard always knew he played a key role in state history and wanted to preserve the record of the past. During the initial survey back in 1867, the capital commissioners set aside a block for a historical museum and library association building. As early as 1872 Kennard was part of an effort to establish a state historical society. In 1878, T. P. was one of the founding members of the Nebraska State Historical Society and served on its various committees. Thirty years later, it was Kennard who recommended the site of the ill-fated museum building east across from the capitol. Additionally, in 1889 he was one of the founders of the state Old Settlers Association.⁵⁹

For several years after his death, ideas were brought up to perpetuate his legacy. In 1923 Kennard's name was suggested for a new school building to be built in southeast Lincoln near Thirty-first Street in the Sheridan Boulevard neighborhood. His nominator said that it "would be difficult to find a name more interwoven with history of Lincoln or one more deserving of recognition."⁶⁰ However, the school was named Sheridan Elementary, the same name it carries today. Four years later, a large bronze tablet was unveiled near the main entrance of the Burlington Depot commemorating the selection of Lincoln as state capital. Among the speakers were Lulu Kennard Holden and a daughter of John Gillespie. The tablet, which noted T. P.'s part in the establishing of Lincoln, and which he called "the pride of my life," is no longer there, reportedly sold for scrap.⁶¹ The town of Kennard which he established in 1867 still exists, although pronunciation of its name has been changed.⁶²

But signs of his role in Nebraska settlement and development are still apparent. Kennard and the capital commission are mentioned on the "Lincoln's Founding Block" marker at 10th and Q Streets. In Lincoln, Blair, and other places he established, the title "Kennard Addition" can be found on various subdivisions or town additions.⁶³ Although some of the railroad lines he helped bring to Lancaster County are long gone (the Missouri Pacific, for example), the towns he established along their routes still exist. And within the historical record, and through the preservation of his 1869 house, Thomas P. Kennard's place in Nebraska history, and role as the father of Lincoln, is well established and secure. 

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NOTES

¹ Although moved several times, the cabin built by Thomas J. Hudson in 1863 is the oldest surviving Lincoln structure. It is preserved today as part of the Pioneer Park Nature Center.

² Jarman G. Kennard, "Information Compiled on Thomas Perkins Kennard, updated 1978," copy of personal history dictated by Kennard, ca. 1910 (hereafter Kennard Typescript), 1.

³ "The Ancestors and Heirs of Jacob and Rebecca Kennard," compiled by Jarman G. Kennard, typescript, updated 1978, 11-12.

⁴ William W. Hinshaw, *Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy, Vol. IV* (Ann Arbor, MI: Edward Brothers Inc., 1946): 232, 339.

⁵ Richland Township, Lands & Houses, Personal Property, 1830; Richland Township, Lands, Houses & Factories, 1833-34. www.ancestry.com

⁶ R. Thomas Mayhill, *Land Entry Atlas of Henry County Indiana 1821-1849* (Knightstown, IN: The Bookmark, 1974): n.p.; "Grantee Index to Henry County Deed Records, 1837-1847," Book F, 198-99, Genealogy Collection, Indiana State Library.

⁷ Kennard Typescript, 1; Albert Watkins Interview of Thomas Kennard (hereafter Watkins Interview), NSHS MS 357, 1; Grantee Index, Book R, 25-26.

⁸ Sheryl Vanderstel, "Quakers in Indiana in the Nineteenth Century," www.connerprairie.org, 2 (accessed March 29, 2012).

⁹ Andrew J. Sawyer, *Lincoln The Capital City and Lancaster County Nebraska, Vol. II* (Chicago: S. J. Clark Publishing Co., 1916): 5-6; Watkins Interview, 2.

¹⁰ Marriage license, January 17, 1852, Henry County Historical Society; Willard Heiss, Ed., *Abstracts of the Records of the Society of Friends in Indiana, Pt. IV* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2008): 143.

¹¹ Watkins Interview, 2-3; G. W. Hawes, *Indiana State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1858 and 1859, Vol. I* (Indianapolis: Geo. W. Hawes, Publisher, 1858), 5, 417.

¹² Logan Esarey, *A History of Indiana From 1850 to the Present, Vol. II* (Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen & Co., 1918): 634-39; Kennard Typescript, 2.

¹³ "Territorial Pioneer Days, Speeches made at the Annual Meeting of the Nebraska State Historical Society, Jan. 15, 1902," *Proceedings and Collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society, Vol. 15* (Lincoln: Jacob North & Co., 1907): 51.

¹⁴ Kennard Typescript, 3.

¹⁵ *De Soto Pilot*, May 30, 1857; J. Sterling Morton, *Illustrated History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: Jacob North & Co., 1905), 524; *Nebraska Inquirer* (De Soto), Jan. 5, 1860. A term relating back to English common law, a Solicitor of Chancery was a lawyer who generally handled business law cases and those of laws of equity.

¹⁶ *Nebraska Inquirer*, Mar. 1, 1860; Sawyer, *Lincoln, The Capital City*, v.2: 6; Morton, *Illustrated History*, 423.

¹⁷ "Minutes of the De Soto Town Council 1857-1873," NSHS RG0318, Washington County, Roll #1, 61-62, 68-69; Morton, *Illustrated History*, 524.

¹⁸ Democrats in the north were divided into "war" and "peace" factions. War Democrats generally supported the administration's measures to restore the Union. James F. Potter, *Standing Firmly by the Flag: Nebraska Territory and the Civil War, 1861-1865* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 83.

¹⁹ *Nebraska Herald* (Plattsmouth), Apr. 18, 1866; Kennard Typescript, 3.

²⁰ *Nebraska Herald*, July 4, 1866; N. C. Abbott, *Lincoln: Place & Name* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1930), 124.

²¹ Forrest B. Shrader, *A History of Washington County, Nebraska* (Omaha: Magic City Printing, 1937), 242-43.

²² Albert Watkins, *History of Nebraska from the Earliest Explorations to the Present Time with Portraits, Maps, and Tables, Vol. III* (Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Co., 1913), 1; E. Estabrook, comp., *The Statutes of Nebraska Embracing all of the General Laws of the State in Force August 1st, 1867*, 935-36.

²³ For a discussion of the capital location issue, see James C. Olson & Ronald C. Naugle, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press: Third Edition, 1997), 81-84, 147-149.

²⁴ *Report of Commissioners to Locate the Seat of Government of the State of Nebraska* (Omaha: St. A. D. Balcombe, 1869), 1-6; *Laws, Joint Resolutions, and Memorials Passed at the First, Second, and Third Sessions of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Nebraska* (Omaha: St. A. D. Balcombe, 1867), 54.

²⁵ *Report of Commissioners*, 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁷ *Omaha Weekly Herald*, Aug. 7, 1867.

²⁸ In later years Kennard recalled that because of the housing shortage in the new capital, he and his family lived for more than a year in the capitol building. The Kennards occupied one suite of three rooms which were not needed for office purposes, and Governor Butler lived with his family in three other rooms. *Daily Star* (Lincoln), Jan. 8, 1914.

²⁹ For an analysis of the several stories on moving the state seal, see James E. Potter, "Moving the Great Seal of Nebraska, 1868," unpublished manuscript, Nebraska State Historical Society.

³⁰ *Nebraska Herald*, Dec. 17, 1868.

³¹ *The Statesman* (Lincoln), June 12, 1869.

³² *The State Journal* (Lincoln), June 19, 1869.

³³ Olson and Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 152-53.

³⁴ For the complete transcript of the Butler impeachment, see *Impeachment Trial of David Butler Governor of Nebraska at Lincoln* (Omaha: Tribune Printing House, 1871). For Gillespie, see *Articles of Impeachment against John Gillespie, Auditor of Nebraska* (Lincoln: Journal Print, 1871). In 1877 the legislature expunged Butler's impeachment from the record.

³⁵ John Y. Simon, editor, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, Vol. 21: November 1 1870 – May 31 1871* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 489.

³⁶ *Lincoln Daily Journal*, July 12, 1871.

³⁷ *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), Feb. 12, 1875.

³⁸ Sawyer, *Lincoln, The Capital City*, 186-87.

³⁹ *Nebraska State Journal*, Dec. 17, 1875.

⁴⁰ Kennard Typescript, 5; Watkins Interview, 12-13. Numerous references were printed and reprinted in Lincoln papers about Kennard's railroad work. For example see "Thirty Years Ago Today" column, *Nebraska State Journal*, Oct. 29, 1909.

⁴¹ Watkins Interview, 10-11.

⁴² Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska, The Land and the People* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1931), 488-90; J. Sterling Morton, *History of Nebraska from the Earliest Explorations of the Trans-Mississippi Region* (Lincoln: Western Publishing & Engraving Co., 1918), 567. In 1902 Kennard's case was heard before the U. S. Supreme Court, which "held that there was no federal question involved and therefore dismissed the case for want of jurisdiction." *Nebraska State Journal*, June 3, 1902.

⁴³ *Daily State Journal* (Lincoln), Nov. 7, 1876.

⁴⁴ *Beatrice Express*, Jan. 11, 1877; Feb. 1, 1877; Feb. 15, 1877.

⁴⁵ *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior on the Operations of the Department for the Fiscal Year Ended January 30, 1878* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1878): 477, 658-59; Watkins Interview, 10.

⁴⁶ *Omaha Daily Bee*, Feb. 28, 1887; A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska, Vol. II* (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1882), 1367.

⁴⁷ *Omaha Daily Bee*, May 4, 1886.

⁴⁸ *Pen and Sunlight Sketches of Lincoln* (Chicago: Phoenix Publishing, 1892: 80; *Daily News* (Lincoln), Mar. 16, 1890; *Nebraska State Journal*, Jan. 13, 1901.

⁴⁹ *Lincoln Evening News*, Feb. 22, 1893.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Dec. 22, 1893; Jan. 4, 1894.

⁵¹ *Lincoln Evening News*, Apr. 16, 1896; Charles M. Harvey, *Republican National Convention, St. Louis, June 16-18, 1896* (St. Louis: I. Haas Publishing, 1896), 102; Kennard Typescript, 5; Watkins Interview, 11.

⁵² *Electrical World and Engineer XLV* (Feb. 4, 1905): 275-76; *Lincoln Evening News*, Mar. 15, 1910; *Nebraska State Journal*, July 17, 1908, June 18, 1909.

⁵³ *Daily Star* (Lincoln), June 23, 1914; *Sunday State Journal*, Sept. 19, 1909.

⁵⁴ *Nebraska Advertiser* (Brownville), Jan. 16, 1873; *The Evening News* (Lincoln), Sept. 11, 1895; *The Courier* (Lincoln), Nov. 10, 1900.

⁵⁵ *Lincoln Star*, April 26, 1907; *Lincoln Daily Star*, Feb. 29, 1908; Dec. 19, 1913; *Lincoln Sunday Star*, Dec. 13, 1917; *Lincoln Evening State Journal*, Mar. 5, 1920.

⁵⁶ *Lincoln Evening State Journal*, July 20, 1912; *Lincoln Sunday Star*, June 6, 1915; Dec. 16, 1917.

⁵⁷ *Evening State Journal*, Jan. 8, 1919.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, June 23, 1920; Death Certificate filed June 28, 1920, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services; *Lincoln Sunday Star*, June 27, 1920.

⁵⁹ *Daily State Journal*, Apr. 8, 1872; Robert W. Furnas, ed., *Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska State Historical Society, Vol. I* (Lincoln: State Journal Co., 1885): 13-16, 229; Albert Watkins, ed., *Publications of the Nebraska State Historical Society, Vol. XVIII* (Lincoln: NSHS, 1917): 19-23. In 1908 the Society received deed to the west half of the block east of the capitol. The basement of the south wing was the only part of the building completed. It was roofed and used for storage until the late 1940s.

⁶⁰ *Evening State Journal*, June 9, 1923.

⁶¹ *Lincoln State Journal*, July 26, 1927; *Lincoln Daily News*, May 5, 1913.

⁶² Although the proper pronunciation of his last name is Ken-NARD, the contemporary pronunciation of the town is KENN-erd.

⁶³ The double block east of the Kennard House and east of Seventeenth Street in Lincoln is "Kennard's Addition," laid out in 1871.