



Omaha Central High School

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

This article is copyrighted by History Nebraska (formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society). You may download it for your personal use.

For permission to re-use materials, or for photo ordering information, see:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/re-use-nshs-materials>

Learn more about *Nebraska History* (and search articles) here:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/nebraska-history-magazine>

History Nebraska members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* annually:

<https://history.nebraska.gov/get-involved/membership>

Full Citation: [I. F.], "Omaha Central High School," *Nebraska History* 17 (1936): 178-180

Article Summary: In 1871 the unknown author who signed these reminiscences "I. F." entered Omaha High School as a member of its first class.

Cataloging Information:

Omaha Central High School Teachers: Nightingale, Barrett, Beals, John H Kellom

Omaha Central High School Students: Fanny Kenniston, Edwin Woodbridge, Henry Estabrook, Charles Redick, John Creighton

Nebraska Place Names: Omaha

Keywords: *Excelsior* (Omaha High School newspaper)

Photographs / Images: view of Omaha High School from corner of 15th and Farnham c. 1872

OMAHA CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL

(Reprint of an article, "The Old to the New" in the Literary Section of the **High School Register** for April, 1901. The author (I. F.) is unknown).

There never can be another first class to come into the Omaha High School, and it is not surprising that the class which entered in 1871 was the proudest class these walls can ever see. We were so proud, indeed, that when we first marched up the hill we could see nothing but the glorious blue above us and the infinite hills in the distance, things most in harmony with our exalted mood. Possibly the force of contrast may have added something to the impressiveness. The temporary "High School" from which we came stood on the lowest ground in Omaha, at Fourteenth and Jackson streets. It was an old ramshackle, two-story building, with its rickety stairway on the outside. From our standpoint, therefore, this old building, which is now trying to hide behind its modern successor, was a wonderful thing.

We were not, as you are, lords of all we survey up here. The High School occupied but two rooms of this building. The janitor and his family had a most comfortable and commodious home in the basement; all of the rooms on the first floor and nearly all on the second floor were filled by the lower grades of the Central school.

In the physics rooms, for instance, was the finest primary department in the city, and from 42 a large eighth grade class gazed with longing eyes at the superior High School students, who went into 31.

Across the east end of 43 was a fairly good stage with a drop curtain and a few flats. Many a brilliant performance was given upon this stage, for Prof. Nightingale himself was its manager and personally supervised all exhibitions. On the great bare floor of this room there were daily exercises in a "calisthenics," if you please, under the able direction of sweet-voiced Miss Barrett. We were the proud possessors of dumb bells and clubs and wands, and with these we frequently contested for prizes, which are still counted among our dearest treasures.

But the gayest time in 43 was the noon hour—a generous hour then—when we danced away the dull cares of the morning and prepared to enter the three hours' work of the afternoon with renewed zest.

The High School proper—or improper, according to your point of view—was in room 31, with the adjacent 25 for a recitation

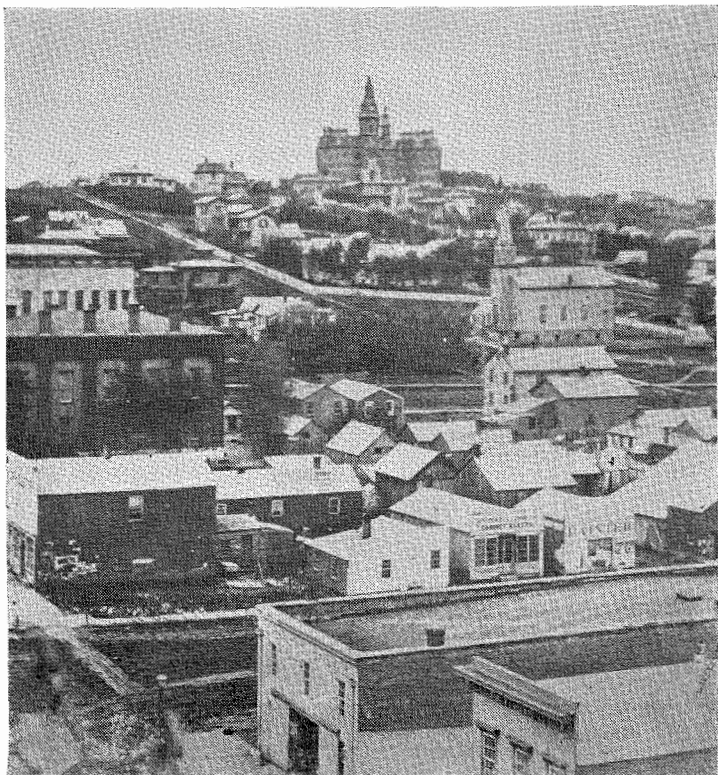


PHOTO BY SCOTT STUDIO, OMAHA

Looking Towards Omaha High School From Corner of 15th and Farnam, About 1872

room. At first there were only two teachers and about thirty students. Under Prof. Beals we learned to "amo" with English accent and Romance fervor, and all the known and unknown quantities from a to z.

Mr. John H. Kellom, the saint of our calendar, taught us to analyze and parse "Pope's Essay on Man", and opened to us the beautiful mysteries of Milton and Shakespeare. Chemistry, with its disturbing elements, was not in our curriculum, and physiology was modestly unobtrusive. The writer still retains the thrill of the dramatic moment when the first rabbit was brought into this building to be "dedicated," or "dessicated," as we insisted upon calling it.

The students in 31 were seated according to rank. The number ones had the back seats. Thence we were gradually lowered in dignity until we were immediately under the kindly, watchful eyes at the desk. Always on the back seat was the father of Fanny Kenniston of the class of 1900 and the mother of Edwin Woodbridge of 1904, while down in the front seats was an illustrious company, whose names it will not be safe to give without the special permission of Henry Estabrook or Charles Redick or John Creighton and others.

Many tales of great interest might be told about those good old days. Some of them you are repeating in your experiences, and others emphasize the change that has taken place. One of the former may be interesting to you.

A golden-haired cherub, whom we called "Tote," came often to school with her "big" sister. The petting and spoiling she got from the students was always received with a most amusingly serene indifference. It was a superb "matter of course" to her dimpled majesty that we should be her willing slaves. This sentiment unites the old and the new, for you are still her willing subjects—in another capacity.

We had a paper in the old days which is entitled to mention, because it still lives and has a name suggestive of both old and new High School purposes—*Excelsior*. We had no library, however, and our books were not furnished by a too generous board. The present library was then the principal's office, somewhat more inviting in appearance, but far less popular.

There were many other differences, internal and external, between the first High School and that of today. We were more democratic; snobbery had not become a fine art, consequently we were happier. The surroundings and conveniences were vastly different. If we were fortunate enough to live at a north or south distance, a forlorn little street car brought us to Eighteenth street, and we climbed the hill in mud such as you never dreamed of. West of us was the rolling sweep of the prairie; down in the hollow at Twenty-fifth street we gathered wild strawberries for our lunch; a great arm of the woods reached up from Farnam street to our back door and flung the sweets of wild plum and grape blossoms into our open windows.

If these are not differences enough, ask your fathers and mothers to fill in the details, they can do it better than

I. F.