



The American Imprints Inventory in Nebraska

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Article Summary: A national Works Progress Administration project recorded holdings of early press publications including books, pamphlets, and broadsides (mostly printed before 1877). Many such publications had been lost over the years. An author file of existing Nebraska imprints was to be maintained at NSHS.

Cataloging Information:

Photographs / Images: title-page of the first printed history of Lincoln; title-page of the Provisional Laws and Joint Resolutions passed at the first and called sessions of the General Assembly, 1860

The American Imprints Inventory in Nebraska

By R. HAROLD MARKS

Project Supervisor, American Imprints Inventory, Nebraska

ALMOST the first problem of the writer of history is, inevitably, the search for source material. Not only those who write their history straight, but even many modern authors of so-called "historical fiction" collect and frequently publish extensive lists of references consulted. A noteworthy feature of the work being done by societies and individuals in the historical field today is the emphasis being placed on the collection, preservation, and making usable of our source materials, so that the researcher may employ that time in study and production which he once would have spent in looking for his material. And so we find that the cataloguing, arranging and indexing of public and private records of every sort, and the preparation of descriptive inventories and check-lists, are the order of the day.

One of your Society's current efforts in this direction is its sponsorship in Nebraska of the American Imprints Inventory, a project of the Professional and Service Division of the Work Projects Administration which is taking stock of holdings of our early source materials in that strangely elusive field, the early issues of the press. In conjunction with similar work being conducted throughout the country either by separate projects, as here, or by units of the Historical Records Survey, the Nebraska staff have been recording the description and location in Nebraska of copies of early issues of the press of the United States, the territories, and the pre-Revolutionary colonies—books, pamphlets, and broadsides printed up to December 31, 1876, excepting eight north prairie and mountain states, where the limit is December 31, 1890. The national editorial office in Chicago has the benefit of valuable technical advice and supervision from Douglas C. McMurtrie, who has achieved the highest reputation for his untiring research in the history of the press. This Chicago office keeps a catalogue file on the inventory in all the states, and is thus able to locate

LINCOLN,

— T H E —

Capital of Nebraska.

A COMPLETE HISTORY OF ITS FOUNDATION AND
GROWTH UP TO THE PRESENT TIME, TOGETHER
WITH A FULL DESCRIPTION OF ALL THE
PUBLIC STATE BUILDINGS, SALT
SPRINGS, AND OTHER MATTERS
OF INTEREST, SITUATED
THEREAT

BY

J. H. AMES,

ATTORNEY AT LAW.

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA.

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA:

STATE JOURNAL POWER PRESS PRINT,

1870

Title-page of the first printed history of Lincoln. Note reference to the salt springs, which were thought to be a prospective source of considerable wealth.

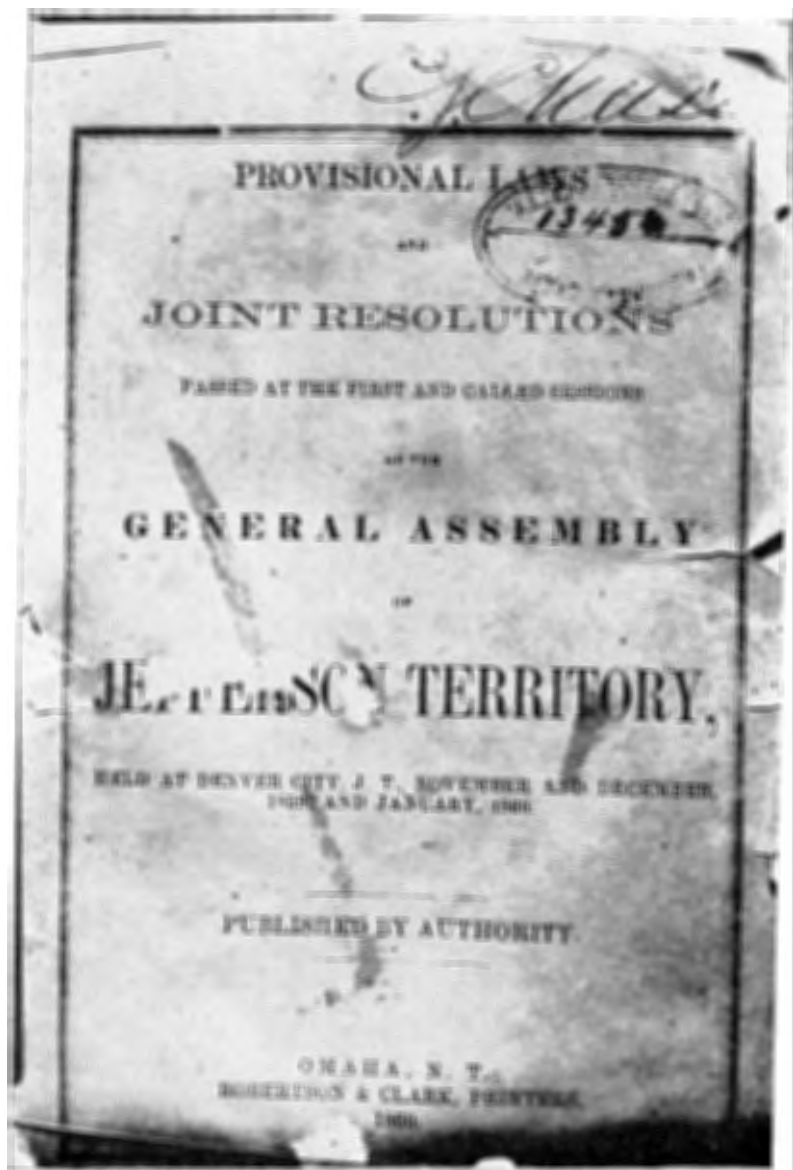
existing copies of rare items even though they may be a thousand miles from the place of issue. Regional or state check-lists are published from time to time, indexed for easy use and with the location of available copies shown. A Nebraska check-list is soon to be issued, of which more later.

Rarest Imprints Frequently Uncatalogued

The Inventory's master file is being made available to the Library of Congress, while a complete author file of findings in Nebraska will be maintained at your Society's headquarters. A great many of them, including the more fugitive type of broadsides and little pamphlets, will not be found catalogued elsewhere in the state, either in the institution possessing them or in the excellent Union Catalogue project of the W. P. A.

Nearly 35,000 slips have been typed (as of March 20, 1940) representing early imprints, catalogued and uncatalogued, in more than thirty Nebraska libraries and private collections. Project employees have copied the appropriate cards in some Lincoln and Omaha libraries, utilized the microfilm record of catalogues of outstate libraries participating in the Union Catalogue project previously mentioned, and immersed themselves in the dust-laden contents of storerooms of books and pamphlets to list them directly, notably here in the Historical Society's partially uncatalogued material and in the old-book collection of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary at Omaha. Even where the holdings of a library have been well catalogued, as at the University of Nebraska, the special bibliographical interests of the project necessitate the checking of numerous items individually, particularly to insure a complete listing of Nebraska material.

Space limitations permit only a brief mention of interesting and important finds. The oldest American imprint we have so far recorded in Nebraska is the *Order of Their Excellencies the Lords Justices in Council, confirming several Acts and Laws of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay, made in the years, 1694, 1695, 1696, 1697* (Boston, 1699), a copy of which is at the Omaha Public Library; and we wonder if there are not some earlier issues of the American press tucked away, perhaps in a private collection whose merits are known to only a few.



The State Historical Society owns one of the few known copies of this 1860 Nebraska imprint, lacking in most of the finest law libraries. Autographed by C. S. Chase, three times mayor of Omaha (1875-77, 1879-81, 1883-85) and member of the University's first board of regents.

Morton and the "Third House"

Uncommon and historically interesting Nebraska pamphlets and broadsides, only one copy of some having been found in the entire country, include the following:

A very unofficial "governor's message" delivered by J. Sterling Morton, elected "Squatter Governor" by the "Third House," a legislative fun organization which enlivened the evenings of the 1857 territorial session at Omaha. This eight-page "inaugural address" exhibits the young Morton's lusty wit at its best.

Transactions and proceedings of professional and church groups from the beginnings of their organization—for instance, the Nebraska Medical Society's annual publications (1868 and later) which describe some remarkable exploits by pioneer Nebraska doctors in effecting cures and saving lives under rather primitive conditions.

Catalogues and prospectuses of long-forgotten educational institutions—"Nebraska University," an academy at Fontenelle, Dodge County, which preceded by some years the present University of Nebraska (whose own small but sturdy beginnings are reflected in its documents); little Naomi Institute, at Rock Bluff, Cass County (1870), which exerted a profound if geographically restricted influence on its student body—whose names are given in the pamphlet; Nebraska City Academy (1871); and others.

Notices of, even invitations to, social functions (New Year's balls, dedicatory exercises, etc.) that brought gayety to the ladies' hearts on this frontier of the '60s.

Shrewdly (not to say optimistically) phrased immigration pamphlets printed by the state and the railroads in English, German, Danish, Swedish, Bohemian, and distributed among Europe's land-hungry millions; they must have contributed greatly to the wave of foreign settlement in the new state during the '70s and later.

County and local histories written by men who were very close, in point of years, to the events described. A. J. Hall published an *Early and Authentic History of Omaha, 1857-1870*; Alfred Sorenson printed the first edition of his history of the same metropolis in 1876. J. H. Ames wrote the first history of Lincoln when it was only three years old; this pamphlet is one of the earliest Lincoln imprints, and is not often found. Early county histories of Franklin (by Michael Sullivan, 1873); Seward (by O. T. B. Williams, a Milford 1872 imprint); Polk (by Albinus Nance: Osceola, 1876); Washington (by John T. Bell, 1876) are representative of this group—all contemporary source materials that should not be overlooked by the researcher in their respective fields.

The compiled ordinances of Brownville, Lincoln, and Omaha. The 1857 ordinances of Omaha included an unequivocal mandate against allowing hogs to run at large in the streets.

The rare and valuable *Provisional Laws of Jefferson Territory* (which became the Territory of Colorado), printed at Omaha, 1860.

Examples (only two or three) of that picturesque feature of the journalism of eighty years ago—The Carrier's Address. Printed generally as a supplement to the first issue of the year, it served as the newspaper carrier's New Year greeting to his patrons and chronicled in very crude verse the events of the times and virtues of the community. Here is an excerpt from the *Brownville Advertiser's* ornately decorated sheet, dated January 1, 1861:

"In our city terminate two telegraph [!] lines,
One from St. Louis and one from the mines,
On one we may hear from Atlantic's shore,
The other will tell us the tale of gold ore."

All these with many more items of equal interest will be described and indexed and the location of existing copies noted in the forthcoming mimeographed check-list of Nebraska imprints through 1876, the contents of which are now being edited for early publication. The Nebraska list will be similar to lists already issued by the American Imprints Inventory covering, in at least a preliminary edition, the early imprints of the press of Missouri, Minnesota, Arizona, Chicago (ante-fire imprints, 1851-1871), Kentucky, Nevada, Alabama, New Jersey, and Kansas. The Nebraska State Historical Society is the official depository in the state for all such publications, past and future.

All Copies of Some Imprints Lost

In our efforts to make the inventory of early Nebraska imprints as complete and authentic as possible one lamentable fact stands out: Nebraska has let so very many of her historical records slip through her busy fingers. In the specific field of this inventory, for instance, the number of early issues of the press which we know were printed but of which no copy has come to light in the state is fully as remarkable as the important items that have been located. State, county and city offices do not have complete files of their early publications. Sometimes the entire files of early annual and biennial reports or other printed documents have been lost, or purposely destroyed to make way for records of more immediate usefulness. Your Society is the outstanding single depository in the state for obsolete official documents, and yet its holdings of such material are far from complete. Similarly, the unofficial imprints of the territory and early state are only available in part.

A few examples of documents known or assumed to have been printed in pamphlet form, but not found in the state to date,

are as follows: *Official*. Organic Law of Nebraska, 1855 (500 ordered printed); governors' annual messages, 1856-58; Governor Black's special message vetoing an act to prohibit slavery, 1860 (500 ordered printed); Enabling Act and proposed Constitution for the State of Nebraska, 1864. *Unofficial*. Gilbert C. Monell's *Guide to the Newly Discovered Gold Fields of Kansas and Nebraska; containing a brief description of routes, etc.* (Omaha, Republican press, 1860); T. M. Marquett's brief, *Power of Congress to add to, alter, amend, or repeal the Pacific Railroad acts.* (Lincoln, Journal print, no date—probably ca. 1875); and a *Grade Book of Lincoln*, 1869, listed under that intriguing though ambiguous title as being in the State Library in 1871 but not now to be found.

Much History Still Hidden

Every historian knows that there is more local history hidden in old trunks, closets and attics than has yet been published. So in our attempt to compile as serviceable an inventory as possible of early printed documents, particularly of Nebraska and the surrounding region, may we ask members of the Society and other readers of this magazine to let us know of items they themselves possess or which they know about in some other place? Any information on private historical collections, single examples of early imprints, and files or scattering issues of very old newspapers will be gratefully received by the writer, who may be addressed c/o American Imprints Inventory, Nebraska State Historical Society, State Capitol, Lincoln. Credit will be given to all sources of information. No pressure will be exerted to acquire material; the project's interest is exclusively in *recording* it. On the other hand, we would be negligent not to stress the desirability of preserving this highly fugitive class of historical source material in some suitable place. Your Society stands ready to accept material of this character along with manuscripts, old diaries, and other records of the state's historic past.

The writer, as supervisor of the Inventory in Nebraska since its inception, acknowledges with sincere thanks the constant cooperation received from librarians and citizens of the state; from his sponsor, the Nebraska State Historical Society; from his employer, the Work Projects Administration; and from his co-workers of the project.