



Music of the Pioneer Days in Nebraska

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Article Summary: This is the first of a series of articles that record the early musical life of the state of Nebraska, after white settlers began to arrive here. Written by the first DAR state chairman for the Advancement of American Music, it presents information from the DAR and other sources, including reminiscences from early white settlers.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Moses P Kinkaid, Mrs Fenner Ferguson, Peter A Sarpy, Moses Merrill, J N Wise, Mrs G W Noble, Mrs Lillian Swearingin-Hasse, Mrs Ida Waterman-Wagner, Anna Wechbar, Mrs Alex Clark, Mrs C M Butler, Kate Stadelman, Lillian Kauble, A Eigenbrodt, Alex Clark, Mr Hodabt, Olive Gass, Lydia Wechbar, Alma Schmidtmann, Edna Marshall, Clara Street, Ralph White, Will Butler, Conrad Schlater, Mrs Kittie Cummins Roberts, Mrs Clara Street Wescott, Edgar Hilt Wescott, M M Neihardt, Blind Boone, Dr Saxby, Professor Lippitt, David Bispham, Mrs Edward MacDowell, Miss Grace Ware, Mrs Phil Hanner, Mrs Sarah Vandoozer, Louis Smith, Charles Vanicek, William H Myers, John Albright, Scott Rosenstock, Enid Johnson, Mrs E J Cogswell, Miss Molly Keith, Keith Neville, Mr Conterno, Mrs Simpson, Mr Jones, Mr Simpson, Mrs Ridgeway, Mrs Hinman, Miss Stebbins, Charles Martin, Mrs Church, E B Warner, P H McElvoy, Joe Fillion, Nicholas Klein, Fred Weingard, William Sweeney, Nicholas Klein, E A Garlich, Ainan Berg, Mrs L A Brown, Nino Martini, Ricci, Mary McCormic, Mrs Rose T Page, Mrs Mary Breamer, Professor Schaeller, John Stauffer, Frederick W Hohman, Arthur Pryor, Harry T Irvin, David Frank Easterday, Mrs Albert Watkins, Mrs Carrie Belle Raymond, Mrs A W Jansen, S H Burnham, B Barnaby, H J W Seamark, Miss Ermina D Cochran, Gustav C Menzendorf, Oliver B Howell, August Hagenow, Wilhelm Lamprech, Clemens Movius, A A Hadley, Marie Hoover, Maud Richards, William Leonard Gray, Mary Elizabeth Latimer Gray, J A Parks, Louie M Allen, Willard Kimball, Carrie Belle Raymond, W L Sheetz, Mortimer Wilson, Guy B Williams, Thurlow Lieurance, Wilbur Chenoweth, Carl F Steckelberg, Hazel G Kinscella, Howard J Kirkpatrick, Edward J Walt, Herbert Schmidt, Sidney Silber, Henry P Eams, John M Rosborough, David Frank Easterday, Lieutenant Townley, George B Frankforter, Bishop Beecher, Will Owen Jones, Paul F Clark, Emory Hardy, Elton Fulmer, Wilber Knight, James Sayre, George Andrews, E J Walt, R O Williams L A Bumstead, John P Williams, W K Tuttle, Hazel Gertrude Kinscella, Dr Damrosch, Carrie Belle Raymond

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Photographs / Images: Miriam Stanley Carleton-Squires; piano/melodeon in the State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska



MIRIAM STANLEY CARLETON-SQUIRES

Music of The Pioneer Days in Nebraska

Compiled by
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Preface

FOR this paper I have gathered data regarding the musical activities in the early days of Nebraska after the white settlers arrived. While far from complete, this will serve as a beginning, and from time to time I shall hope to add to and revise it if additional information is obtained or errors are discovered. I am especially indebted to the music-chairmen of the various D.A.R. chapters in the state for the information they have given me and which I have used verbatim so far as possible.

It is the purpose of this compilation to attempt to rescue from oblivion some of the musical facts of the early days of Nebraska. Much of what is contained herein exists only in the memory of the people who were among the first settlers of different sections of the state, and the writer wishes to acknowledge her obligation to all those who have furnished the valuable data.

This paper lays no claim to being an encyclopedic history of music in Nebraska. It is simply the result of tireless and enthusiastic research on the part of the writer. If certain facts have been omitted which should have been included—and such is absolutely certain to be the case—the writer asks pardon for such unintended omissions and wishes to remind the reader that complete comprehensiveness in so large a state is scarcely to be expected of one person. That this report may help to stimulate an historical interest in the musical background of this state is the earnest hope of the writer.

In compiling this record of the early musical life of the state I felt that it was a duty incumbent on me, the first D.A.R. state chairman for the Advancement of American Music, because we, as an organization, believe in preserving the historical records of a community; then too, it seemed to me that this should be

undertaken while at least some of the early settlers of the state are still with us. To that end I delegated various people over Nebraska to secure all the information possible regarding the early musical activities and sent out questionnaires pertaining to all phases of pioneer music. In writing this article I base my report upon the answers received.

Practically within the memory of many of those now living, nearly all of Nebraska's musical history has been made. In the short span of a single life we have gone from the music of the melodeon to the concert of the radio, from the humblest beginnings of community music to orchestras playing the great symphonies and choruses singing the oratorios.

Moses P. Kinkaid, congressman from the Sixth Nebraska District (1903 to 1922), introduced a bill for 640-acre homesteads and this law colonized most of northwestern Nebraska. Homesteaders in the sandhills sang at all old settlers' picnics, reunions and political gatherings the following ballad which ended with his name. I quote the first of the Nebraska ballads:

You ask what place I like the best—
The sandhills, oh, the old sandhills!
The place Kinkaiders made their home,
And prairie chickens freely roam.
In all Nebraska's wide domain
'Tis the place we long to see again;
The sandhills are the very best,
She is queen of all the rest.

The corn we raise is our delight;
The melons too are out of sight.
Potatoes grown are extra fine
And can't be beat in any clime.
The peaceful cows in pastures dream
And furnish us with golden cream;
So I shall keep my Kinkaid home
And never far away shall roam.
Then let us all, with hearts sincere,
Thank him for what has brought us here,
And for the homestead-law he made,
This noble Moses P. Kinkaid.

Another song which was printed in many Nebraska papers in the 70's and 80's, and quite generally known, was "The Little Old Sod Shanty." These songs, along with "Oh Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie," "The Cowboy's Lament," and "Starving to Death on a Government Claim," provide for us a picture of those early days.

The first piano brought to the state of Nebraska about 1854 now rests in our State Capitol Museum. It was presented to the State Historical Society by Mrs. Fenner Ferguson of Bellevue. It was brought from St. Louis by steamboat by Peter A. Sarpy for his niece, and was "The Wonder" to the Indians who visited the Sarpy fur-trading post at Bellevue.

It is interesting to learn that the first Nebraska book consisted of several hymns translated into the language of the Otoe Indians by the first missionary, Moses Merrill.

What was the first musical event of any importance? When was music first introduced in the schools? Who owned the first piano? Who directed the first band?

These are a few of the questions I sought to have answered. I have assembled all the data which has been pertinent and condensed it, so far as feasible, according to the earliest date mentioned in each reply.

PLATTSMOUTH

Plattsmouth was settled in 1853-1854 and we find, as early as 1858, records of community organization for the purpose of a "General Advancement in Mental Growth." In the secretary's book of the organization there are frequent references to "singing by the members." J. N. Wise, with his tuning fork, was the leader of these "sings."

Soon after the civil war an opera was presented by local talent. The operas of Gilbert and Sullivan were very popular during the latter part of the 19th century. Plattsmouth musicians organized for the purpose of presenting some of these. Between 1887 and 1900, "Pinafore," "Pirates of Penzance," and "The Mikado" were given by them.

Following the presentation of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, "Elijah" was given in 1892, directed by Mrs. G. W. Noble, and "The Messiah" in 1893, also directed by Mrs. Noble. In 1898 "Queen Esther" was given, under the direction of Mrs. Lillian Swearingin-Hasse.

One of the earliest music clubs was the Mozart Study Club, composed of music teachers and students.

In 1887 the "Zither Orchestra" was organized. The zither players were Mrs. Ida Waterman-Wagner, Anna Wechbar, Mrs.

Alex Clark, Mrs. C. M. Butler and Kate Stadelman. The violinists were Lillian Kauble and A. Eigenbrodt. Alex Clark played the cornet; Mr. Hodabt the bass viol. The guitar players were Olive Gass, Lydia Wechbar and Alma Schmidtman. They not only gave entertainments in Plattsmouth but also in neighboring towns.

From 1900 to 1905 Edna Marshall, Clara Street, Ralph White and Will Butler sang together as the Plattsonian Quartette.

Conrad Schlater played the first church organ in Plattsmouth.

Mrs. Kittie Cummins Roberts has been the organist at St. Luke's Episcopal Church for forty years. For forty-two years Mrs. Clara Street Wescott has been the soloist and choir-director at the First M. E. Church, and for forty-four years Edgar Hilt Wescott has been its organist.

NEBRASKA CITY

As early as 1866 Dawson Collins, who conducted a music store in Nebraska City, gave piano lessons.

In 1876 Judge M. M. Neihardt, father of the present poet laureate of Nebraska, organized and directed Nebraska City's first band.

In 1877 Blind Boone gave a concert here.

In 1885 the Oratorio Society of Nebraska City presented two oratorios, "The Messiah" and "The Creation," with orchestral accompaniment under the direction of Dr. Saxby.

Music was introduced in the schools in 1892, Professor Lippitt being the first music supervisor.

The first pipe organ in the city was installed in 1898 at the School for the Blind.

David Bispham and Mrs. Edward MacDowell were two of the most eminent musicians to appear in concert in Nebraska City.

For many years there has been a flourishing music club in Nebraska City. It was organized by Miss Grace Ware, a musician who studied in Berlin and Vienna, and who has contributed Nebraska City's musical data for this paper. Her aunt, a graduate of Mount Vernon Seminary at Washington, D.C., for many years played a little melodeon in the Episcopal Church here.

Miss Ware passed away soon after writing these notes.

DAVID CITY

Mrs. Phil Hanner owned the first piano which came into David City in 1868. Mrs. Sarah Vandoozer was the first piano teacher.

Louis Smith directed the band when it was organized in 1875, and he also gave lessons on the cornet.

Blind Boone, the Negro, in 1892 gave the first concert of any importance in David City.

The first musical organization in the city was Charles Vannicek's orchestra.

William H. Myers in 1895 was the first supervisor of music in the schools.

In 1896 John Albright opened the first music store.

In 1903 the M. E. Church installed the first pipe organ in town.

Scott Rosenstock composed a song which a concern in Lincoln published, and Theodore Presser & Company published "Crocus Blooms," a composition by Enid Johnson.

Among those of prominence who have performed in David City, besides Blind Boone, are the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Sousa's Band, and Ruth Etting.

NORTH PLATTE

Mrs. E. J. Cogswell, a Unitarian preacher and missionary from Boston, came to North Platte in 1868 and taught organ in the Unitarian Hall. In the early 70's a piano was bought for the hall and Mrs. Cogswell then gave piano lessons. However, Miss Molly Keith, the mother of Hon. Keith Neville, brought the first piano into the community in 1869. In 1873 there were several pianos in North Platte.

In 1872 there was a band in North Platte. This was probably the Army Band which was directed by Mr. Conterno, one of the soldiers.

In 1876 the Episcopal Church choir, composed of Messrs. Simpson and Jones and Mmes. Ridgeway and Hinman, with Miss Stebbins as organist, was a well-known early musical organization.

Charles Martin gave cornet lessons in North Platte in 1876.

On December 20, 1877, there was a "grand concert" in the Unitarian Hall. Its printed programs are prized possessions in North Platte today.

In 1878 an orchestra composed of five pieces, with Mrs. Church (who is now living) as the pianist, gave an entertainment, followed by a dance, to make money. The sum of fifty-two dollars was realized.

Mr. E. B. Warner sold music and musical instruments in 1878, and P. H. McElvoy carried on a music business in a jewelry-store in the early 80's.

In 1879 Joe Fillion directed North Platte's band.

There were many home-talent musicales, operettas and cantatas in the early 80's, including "Pinafore," "The Little Tycoon," and "Queen Esther."

The Gordon Silver Cornet Band, organized for a Fourth of July celebration in 1883, was directed by Nicholas Klein, teacher of piano, violin and cornet. At an expense of over \$1,000 Buffalo Bill gave each one of its members a band uniform. In the D.A.R. Museum at North Platte is displayed the suit which belonged to Fred Weingard. The suits were of white broadcloth, with gold braid, boots, gloves and helmet. William Sweeney of St. Louis, a step-son of Nicholas Klein, organized the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show band and was with the show from its organization until it permanently closed. This band toured the United States and many foreign countries.

The Church of Our Saviour in 1895 installed the first pipe organ in North Platte.

Music was introduced in the schools in 1896 or 1897. E. A. Garlich was the first music supervisor.

A vocalion was installed in the Episcopal Church in 1899.

Many valuable instruments are in North Platte. Ainan Berg has a violin which he brought from Sweden and which is dated 1739. Mrs. L. A. Brown owns a Kimball piano which was awarded a gold medal at the Trans-Mississippi World's Fair in 1898. There is an organ bought in 1876 which is owned at the present time by the D.A.R.

The United States Marine Band, Ricci, Nino Martini, Mary McCormic and many other musicians of note have performed in North Platte.

COLUMBUS

The first musical organization in Columbus was the Platte County Brass Band, organized in 1869.

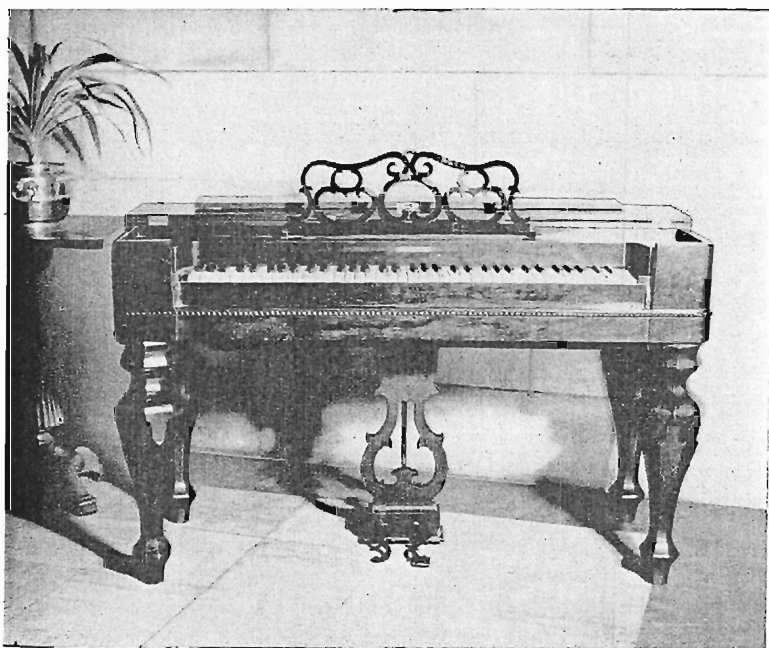
Mrs. Rose T. Page was the first supervisor of music in the schools.

The first piano in Columbus was owned by Mrs. Mary Breamer, but the date of its arrival is unknown.

In the early 70's Professor Schaeller taught piano and violin, and in 1873 John Stauffer taught the cornet.

Scott & Hill opened the first music store in Columbus.

The first pipe organ in town was installed in 1914 at St. Bonaventure's Church.



IN STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM

This piano obviously has a story. What is it? So small that it is usually called "the melodeon," it was in the Museum long before the present Superintendent took office and no man knows its donor or its history. Can any of our readers identify it?

LINCOLN

Lincoln has been called "The City Musical." Its musical history now covers three-quarters of a century.

In 1869 Frederick W. Hohmann established the first exclusive music-house in the state of Nebraska, under the name of Hohmann's Music Depot. Organs made up the larger part of his trade, but pianos, brass and wind instruments and sheet music could also be purchased there. In 1870 Mr. Hohmann erected a two-story building at 1140 O Street and it remained one of the early buildings on that street until 1939. Material for the structure was hauled from Nebraska City. The first floor was used for the music store and the Hohmann home was above.¹

In 1869 Mr. Hohmann organized the Hohmann Band and became its director. It was a large band for a young village, and it made many public appearances.

Another early band was organized in the early 70's and conducted by the father of Arthur Pryor. It was mainly a ladies' band but the two sons of Mr. Pryor also played in it. They met and practiced in the old Academy of Music, which antedated the oldest theater building in the city.² The Nebraska State Band, conducted by Harry T. Irvine, was one of the older bands of the city. David Frank Easterday—now deceased—was also an early band-leader.

An early musical pioneer was Mrs. Albert Watkins, who came to Lincoln in 1882 and for many years was a member of the First Plymouth Congregational Church quartette under the direction of Mrs. Carrie Belle Raymond. The other members of the quartette were Mrs. A. W. Jansen, S. H. Burnham and B. Barnaby. Mrs. Watkins also sang in the early days at the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church when H.J.W. Seamark was the organist. In

¹ At the conclusion of this series we hope to have an illustrated story on the Hohmann Block written by Mr. E. J. Walt, who in 1939 erected a new store on the historic site. Before the building was demolished Mr. Walt visited Mr. Hohmann in the family home on the second floor of that building and took many photographs of the living rooms, the yard, the trees that persevered thru the years despite all the handicaps of a small shaded garden on the north side of O Street.—*Ed.*

² "Art was so small," remarked Mr. E. J. Walt on reading this, "that when going down the street the trombone looked larger than he."

1883 Mrs. Watkins took part in the music drama "Belshazzar," presented at the Centennial Opera House by the Philharmonic Society.

Miss Ermina D. Cochran, before her marriage to Prof. Gustav C. Menzendorf, taught piano and organized the Department of Music in the University in 1886, but there may have been piano teachers in Lincoln before that year. Professor Menzendorf instructed the chorus and all orchestral parts.

It has been reported that the old Nebraska Conservatory of Music, founded in the late 80's, was the first school west of Chicago teaching music exclusively. Oliver B. Howell was its director and pipe-organ instructor from 1889 to 1895. During that time the celebrated Hungarian violinist Reminyi gave a concert in the Conservatory chapel at 13th and L.³ Other members of the faculty were Prof. August Hagenow and Prof. Wilhelm Lamprecht, violin; Prof. Clemens Movius, voice and harmony; Prof. A. A. Hadley, Marie Hoover, Maud Richards and William Leonard Gray, piano; and Mrs. Gray (*née* Mary Elizabeth Latimer), voice. The well-known Nebraska composer and arranger of choir and quartette music, J. A. Parks, was also a member of the faculty. Another member, Louie M. Allen, taught guitar and mandolin, banjo, Irish harp and ukelele, and continues to teach them. For fifty years or more she has directed her own guitar and mandolin club in her private studio near the university campus.

Prof. August Hagenow is probably the most widely recognized violin teacher in Lincoln's early history. He organized and directed various bands and gave instruction in the different wind and brass instruments. He founded Lincoln's first string quartette and helped to promote, organize and incorporate the first Lincoln Symphony Orchestra of which he was the conductor.

From the time of the founding of the University School of Music by Willard Kimball in 1894, to the completion of the University Coliseum in recent years, Lincoln has had numerous outstanding musical events. Opera companies, including the Chicago Civic Opera; symphony orchestras, including the Theodore

³ "The morning after that concert," Mr. Walt relates, "Reminyi was first to set a spade in earth at the laying of the cornerstone for a proposed new conservatory directly across the street, but it never materialized."

Thomas orchestra; and Lincoln's annual Artists' Concerts since 1917 have provided the best in musical entertainment.

The first pipe organ in Lincoln was probably installed in the First Congregational Church, where the late Carrie Belle Raymond was the organist and choir director for many years. Besides that church, the First Presbyterian and St. Paul M. E. Churches were among the first to have pipe organs. The organ now used in Grant Memorial Hall on the university campus was exhibited at the Omaha Exposition in 1898.

One must not forget to mention the "Matinee Musicale," a women's organization founded in 1894 and which continued for more than forty years—or until it was decided to disband in 1935 in order to merge its energy with Lincoln's Civic Music and Concert Courses.

In the minutes of the board of education of the Lincoln School District dated July 3, 1899, there is mention of the election of Prof. W. L. Sheetz of Burlington, Iowa, as supervisor of music—but music was taught in the Lincoln schools for many years prior to that date.

The winter of 1899-1900 witnessed the opening of the City Auditorium with a piano recital by Paderewski. During the same season Mme. Melba appeared in concert there.

Lincoln has been the home of many well-known composers. Mortimer Wilson, Guy B. Williams, Thurlow Lieurance, Wilbur Chenoweth, Carl F. Steckelberg, Hazel G. Kinscella, Howard J. Kirkpatrick and Edward J. Walt are but a few of them. It has also been the home of numerous other musicians of considerable note, namely, Herbert Schmidt, pianist and teacher; Sidney Silber, now living in Chicago; and Henry P. Eames, who opened a piano studio in Paris after leaving Lincoln, and is now professor of music at Scripps College, California.

A contemporary figure in Lincoln's musical life is John M. Rosborough, director of the Lincoln Cathedral Choir, now in its twentieth consecutive year. This unique, non-sectarian choir of university singers has won high place in the nation—not alone because of its superb rendition of great music, but because of an even greater thing—the ideals in music and in life with which the director inspires its every member.

Editor's Note: Because of the difficulties experienced by Mrs. Squires in securing desired information, we sent out a questionnaire of our own to supply Lincoln's missing links. The following items have been received; much musical history is anticipated as a result of the interest aroused.

The first faculty director of Nebraska's University Band (January, 1884) was David Frank Easterday. He organized the university orchestra on April 5 of that year; and later, the Glee Club. Taught music in Lincoln for fifty years; was organist in the First Presbyterian, First Baptist, St. Mark's Lutheran and other churches. The University Band was organized while Lieutenant Townley was commandant, with George B. Frankforter, professor emeritus of the University of Minnesota, as its leader. Bishop Beecher of Hastings, Will Owen Jones, Paul F. Clark, Emory Hardy, Elton Fulmer, Wilber Knight—these are a few of the many familiar names of boys in that band.

Quite a remarkable string quartette was organized in 1886 or '87. August Hagenow and his brother Charles played first and second violins; James Sayre the viola; Dr. George Andrews the cello. "He was a marvelous cellist," said Mr. Walt, "and he had a marvelous cello." Mr. Hagenow agreed, adding that "George's father paid \$800 in gold for it before the Civil War, when that amount of gold meant something. It was a genuine Gaspar de Salo. George had his office in the Carter Block, which was the scene of a bad fire. When he heard about it he rushed into the dense smoke after his cello and was brought out unconscious, but the cello was not harmed."

From E. J. Walt and R. O. Williams we learn that the Telyn Male Quartette was organized in 1892 with Mr. Williams as first tenor, L. A. Bumstead second tenor, John P. Williams bass, and W. K. Tuttle second bass. Tho not professionals, they all sang in the First Baptist choir, and for nearly fifteen years were in demand thruout eastern Nebraska. "Telyn" is a Welsh word meaning harp. Mr. Williams added that the author of this series "is a very beautiful soprano and taught music in Boston for some years. . . Her husband and I were classmates in the law school here."

Willard Kimball founded the University School of Music in 1894, coming from Grinnell College at the invitation of Chancellor Canfield. In this school it was his aim to make Lincoln a musical center and to attract students from a broad field. He was active as a conductor, organist and lecturer until a few years before his death in March, 1939. From the first he was one of the strongest figures in Lincoln's cultural life. Perhaps his most noteworthy contribution was found in the series of concerts by foremost artists of the world. This he initiated in order to create a definite and lasting desire for good music in the community. He succeeded beyond his expectations.

A warm personal friendship over many years leads the editor to add this special word on a gifted modern composer and pianist, Hazel Gertrude Kinscella, best known as originator of "the Lincoln Way" of group piano instruction in public schools. She is a member of the advisory council for Dr. Damrosch's Music Appreciation Hour; one of three piano consultants for America at the Anglo-American Music Conference in Lausanne, 1931; member of the MacDowell Colony; and author of more than sixty professional articles and books. Her Music Appreciation Readers are widely accepted by teachers. "History Sings in America," now in press, is believed by her publishers to be the best in that series.

Now on leave of absence from the University of Nebraska, where she is professor of music, Miss Kinscella is reading history of the American Revolution and the Pacific Northwest in the Huntington Library at Pasadena, working toward a Ph.D. degree. She returns to the University of Washington in April.

Probably the greatest of Lincoln's true pioneers in music was Carrie Belle Raymond, who came here in 1886 to take charge of music for the First Congregational Church. She was known as one of the finest organists and choir leaders in this country. Later she became director of music for the University of Nebraska, was one of the organizers of the Matinee Musicale, and organized the Oratorio Society which soon had a membership of 300 and became an important factor in the city's musical life. Her annual May Festival was the chief musical event for many years, bringing soloists of note from New York, Boston and Chicago. This paved the way for the University Chorus. The convocations she inaugurated brought to students a broad range of knowledge: in one year, for example, she had a course on the growth of symphonies; the next year seven Beethoven symphonies were presented by Mrs. Raymond at the organ, assisted by a string quartette. "Her capacity for arranging an orchestral score for the few instruments at hand was almost uncanny in its skill and musical comprehension." She refused many offers to go elsewhere, tho Lincoln could not afford a remuneration comparable to that of the larger cities. We cannot close this very brief summary of Mrs. Raymond's contribution to Nebraska without quoting a *Journal* editorial the day after her death—October 3, 1927.

The passing of Mrs. Raymond leaves a gap impossible to fill. No one else who has lived in Lincoln has touched so closely all lines of musical activity. The large choruses she conducted for more than forty years brought her into intimate contact with almost everyone who could sing, whether student or citizen; and with the orchestras she brought together for those choruses. By the generosity of her treatment she cemented bonds of friendship with players of all kinds of instruments.