



## Editor's Table

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# The Editor's Table

## Land and Livestock

### Water and Power

In the pioneer period of Nebraska history two fundamental issues appeared — Land and Livestock. They were the immediate questions of human existence. They were all we had to live on and fight over. And we certainly "fit" over them plenty.

The writer of this article has lived in Nebraska long enough to remember those early battles between the prairie homesteaders and the stockmen for dominance in the southeast Nebraska region. These were settled by the Herd Law of 1871 which made it possible for the homesteader to plant his crop on the open prairie and reap his harvest.

The conflict between the stockmen and the homesteaders then shifted to the West. It culminated there in the Custer County tragedy — the burning of Mitchell and Ketchum and the memorable Olive murder trial at Hastings in 1877-79.

The last chapter in this conflict between Land and Livestock was written in Sioux County, ending in the election of 1889 and the triumph of the homesteader. Governor Griswold's father and mother were in the midst of that last campaign, and the writer of this story was in Dawes County on the edge of the war.

After the Land and Livestock wars came the vivid years of Nebraska conflict over Transportation and Money, filling nearly forty years. These ended in the abolition of the Free Pass, the reduction of Freight Rates, the establishment of the Farmers Co-operative Elevator system, and the Federal Government Loans on farmers' crops at three per cent per annum — instead of three per cent per month as in the early homesteading years.

Sings the old German Folk Song:

Vorbei sind die Kinderspiele,  
Und alles schwebt vorbei.

And so are the old issues of Nebraska political and economic life.

In their place emerge the issues of the Nebraska legislature of 1943:

**Water — Power**  
**Irrigation — Electricity**

As I write in the Historical Rooms in the State Capitol the rumbles of these new and flagrant battles reverberate through the unicameral halls above me.

Nebraska has fifty million acres of land and only a million (or less) under irrigation ditches and wells. The fertile, smooth thirsty loess plains call on the Platte Valley for water. The Platte calls back "Behold me! I am the child of the Oregon Trail and the Pacific Highways. I have need of all my waters for my children."

And the conflict for Hydro-Electric Power presents another great public issue. Consumers Power calls from its Columbus headquarters: "We give you the voice of Nebraska consumers of electric power. We gather under our guardianship the Farmers' Electric Lines; the far-and-near cities and towns of Nebraska unite under our banner. We carry the current from the flowing waters of the Platte, the Loup; from all the streams where dams pile up the waters to give us power. Give us freedom to light up the farms; to turn the wheels of industry in every Nebraska town and village; to catch the force which falls over the great Federal dams and make Nebraska glow with electric energy which has been sleeping here for a million years since the ice sheet melted."

Omaha, also, lifts her voice: "Behold me! I am the Gateway City of the West. I am the Queen City, the Metropolis of Nebraska. I am the Livestock and Grain Market of the Plains, even to the mountains. The Missouri River, longest of the world, washes my feet — even with excess of waters at times. On these waters shall float a mighty river commerce from the mountains of Montana to the mouths of the Mississippi. From my markets radiate the railroads, the paved highways, the telegraph and transmission lines which bind all Nebraska and the borders beyond — east, west, north and south — to the Gate City of the West, the Metropolis of Nebraska. Let me join with you in this distribution of the waters and powers of our great commonwealth. Let us make here, at the heart of the American continent, a center of production and of distribution."

## Edgerton on Hybrid Corn

For some time Frank E. Edgerton of Aurora has been carrying on two important projects in Nebraska agriculture. One of these is well irrigation on Hamilton County farms. The other is the production of hybrid sweet corn. On the side he confesses to a fancy for raising pure-bred cattle.

Mr. Edgerton is a lawyer by profession. This signifies what good use may be made of lawyers. It is estimated that there are three thousand lawyers in Nebraska. Think what a lot of hybrid corn and high-grade cattle might be grown on irrigated farms by the lawyer crop in this state!

## Boslaugh on Irrigation

The most important history being made in Nebraska today is related to water and electricity. The State Historical Society plans to publish the significant advancements made in these fields while the work is in process. Accordingly the Society invited Paul E. Boslaugh of Hastings to give an address on these subjects at a recent annual meeting. It publishes his notable address in this issue. It is our purpose to present an address later by one of the ablest leaders of the Platte Valley.

The editor of this magazine has been a land-owning irrigator in the North Platte Valley for thirty years. That region is destined to become the richest area in the trans-Missouri country. It is the aim of this editor to make his 640 acres there one of the model farms of the west. In his position as historian and irrigator he will seek to make full and impartial record of the great historical facts of today matching in human interest the earlier history of the Overland Trails and the Indian Wars.



GOVERNOR GRISWOLD AND WITNESS GROUP  
Signing School Endowment and Historical Building Bills

## Signing the School Endowment and Historical Building Bills

On April 16, 1943, at 4 o'clock p. m., a historical group assembled in the State Capitol in Lincoln. That group gathered in the Executive Office to witness an important event in the history of the State — the signing by Governor Griswold of two important and interlocked bills :

Legislative Bill 147

Legislative Bill 423

The effect of these two bills, introduced by Senator Daniel Garber of Red Cloud, is to levy one-tenth of a mill tax on the grand assessment roll of Nebraska for five years (1943-47). The income from this tax bill will, first, restore the defalcations and deficiencies in the Permanent School Endowment Fund of Nebraska, and second, will provide a fund for the erection of a worthy State Historical Society Building in Lincoln.

The group photograph on the opposite page includes Governor Dwight Griswold signing the two bills and (standing from left to right) the witnesses :

Nathan Gold, Treasurer State Historical Society

Addison E. Sheldon, Superintendent and Secretary,  
State Historical Society

J. E. Lawrence, President State Historical Society

A. T. Hill, Director Historical Society Museum

Daniel Garber, State Senator

Robert B. Crosby, Speaker State Legislature

This group and this act mark an important event in Nebraska history. Their results will be known and honored through the centuries as Nebraska goes forward through great achievements to her high destiny.

## Being a War President

Carl Sandburg, newspaper writer, poet, author, of Chicago and Michigan, wrote the *Life of Abraham Lincoln* in four bulky volumes, published in 1939. Very many "Lives" of Lincoln had been published before Carl Sandburg brought out his great work. Yet Sandburg's *Life* was a new book, a new revelation of

the most remarkable character in the history of the American Republic.

I read Sandburg's work as a patriotic experience. It gives me strength and courage for my duties as an American citizen today. It reveals not merely Lincoln. It reveals the American people to me. It has the great merit of historic courage, frankness and foresight. It shows you Abraham Lincoln in the full measure of his imperfections. It shows him also in the height and glory of a sublime soul dedicated to a noble purpose in the midst of malignant forces and appalling obstacles.

Especially full in Sandburg's *Life of Lincoln* is the detailed record which he has assembled and put in readable form of the violent, scurrilous, abusive and vicious things which were said of Abraham Lincoln when he was president of these United States in the midst of a great war for the very existence of the country which we call ours today. I have thought that a few quotations from Sandburg's record of the things said and done about Abraham Lincoln in the agonizing years of 1862 and 1863 might be worth while for the columns of NEBRASKA HISTORY. I shall take only a few out of the hundreds, yet they are descriptive samples. Here is one:

"Perhaps Lincoln's flatterers, the contractors and the brave knights of shoddy, have persuaded him that he is a great man. Lincoln should have a medal representing himself as standing between a dungeon and a graveyard holding a white man's skull on the point of a sword with a negro baby resting on his bosom."

"The crimes of the administration are all Mr. Lincoln's own. What is the sense in talking about the president's 'honesty' and 'good intentions'? Does he not know better than to break the laws he was elected to administer? These conservative members of congress who still profess to believe in his good intentions should bring a resolution to remove him as an imbecile and an incapable executive."

A New York newspaper in 1863 indicted Abraham Lincoln in the words of the Declaration of Independence:

"He has erected a multitude of new offices and sent hither swarms of officers to harass our people and eat out their substance."

Here is another anti-war-president screed:

“With a beard that was filthy and red,  
His mouth with tobacco bespread,  
Abe Lincoln sat in the gay white house,  
A-wishing that he was dead.  
Swear! Swear! Swear!  
Till his tongue was blistered o'er,  
Then in a voice not very strong  
He slowly whined the Despot's song.”

A noted man in American history was Samuel F. B. Morse, inventor of the electric telegraph, honored and knighted for his scientific discoveries. He wrote of Lincoln: “He is weak, vacillating, illiterate — a President without brains.”

Another northern writer: “I would rather take my chances with Jefferson Davis at the last judgment than with President Lincoln.”

And for a final quotation from hundreds: “Lincoln, the Baboon President, the low-bred, obscene clown.”

One of the most malignant denouncers of Lincoln in war-time bore one of the best known names in the history of Nebraska.

Yet Abraham Lincoln survived the war with all its vindictive abuse and left his name forever to the Capital of Nebraska.

### Dr. Driggs in Lincoln

Dr. Howard R. Driggs of New York City, president of the American Pioneer Trails Association, spent one April day in Lincoln recently. He was on his way to Oregon to speak at the Champoeg Centennial Celebration — the beginning of American free government on the Pacific Coast.

A group of Nebraska legislators and other friends met Dr. Driggs at luncheon and felt the inspiration of his glowing words on the heroic pioneers who crossed the Nebraska plains in 1843 and later, carrying the flag which now leads the World War for freedom.

### Early Nebraska Historical Documents

In the midst of the billions of dollars demanded and given by the American people to end the World War and begin a new



World Era there has arisen at Washington a crisis over a little item of \$14,000 in the State Department appropriation for continuing the publication of the Territorial Papers of the United States during the year 1944.

Dr. Clarence E. Carter of the State Department has carried forward this work for years. Under date of April 8, 1943, he wrote Superintendent Sheldon:

I regret to announce that the House Appropriations Committee has voted no funds for the Territorial Papers for the next fiscal year, which means that unless the action is reversed by the Senate this office will close on June 30. The exact language of the report is as follows: "The amount of \$14,000 requested for continuing in 1944 the collecting and editing of official papers of the Territories of the United States has been denied. While the committee recognizes the inestimable value of these publications to our cultural, historical, and educational institutions, it is believed that this work may be deferred until after the war." (House of Representatives, Rept. No. 343, 78th Cong., 1st Sess., p 7)

This is the most critical stage that has ever confronted us, and if we lose now I am convinced that the project will never be revived. Of course, there will be a heavy loss entailed as well, because we shall have tied up in the printing office one whole volume and parts of two others. And a trained staff, small as this one is, cannot be replaced very easily, and certainly not with much loss of time.

Included among these volumes are the Territorial Papers which give the early history of the Nebraska region when it was part of Louisiana, of Indiana and of Missouri.

In response to this appeal Superintendent Sheldon sent letters to Senators Butler and Wherry, and with them a copy of a previous letter written last year to Congressman Stefan when the same crisis arose and was cared for by the energy of Congressman Stefan and others. He also sent a letter to former Senator George W. Norris at McCook.

As the letter to Congressman Stefan is good "historical copy" for all citizens of Nebraska, it is published as follows:

The roots of Nebraska history run back deeply into French, Spanish and territorial history. Therefore, knowledge of this part of Nebraska history is important today, and the documents in which are found these records are of great service to all interested in the story of our State. I

have had occasion to translate some of these documents from the French and Spanish sources for use in our publications.

In my *Nebraska Civil Government*, which is used in all schools of Nebraska from the grades to the university, you will find on pages 34 and 35 a greatly condensed account of Nebraska as a part of Indiana Territory, Louisiana Territory and Missouri Territory. In Volume I of my three-volume *History of Nebraska* you will find (Chapters VI and VII) a wider discussion of government, customs and population of our Nebraska region when it was governed from New Orleans, Vincennes and St. Louis.

On a shelf in my office, directly in front of me, is a series of volumes entitled *Territorial Papers of the United States*. These volumes are issued by the Department of State under an Act of Congress and under the editorial direction of Clarence Edwin Carter, a very competent scholar in that field. The last volume in this series ( Vol. IX) is on Orleans Territory—another name for Louisiana.

I have hitherto written my recommendation for the continuance of these publications. I did not need to be urged to do this. It was my voluntary recommendation, based upon my knowledge of the field and its value to any person interested in the history of the Nebraska region.

voluntary recommendation, based upon my knowledge of the field and its familiar with the languages and the sources of several of the elements of our Nebraska population. I hope you may be able to aid the continuance of these publications, even in war time. The total cost is insignificant. Continuity of the work is important, as I know from my own historical research and publications.

We are in the midst of the greatest era the world has ever known. Those of us who know the history of the world, and especially the history of America in the world, look forward confidently to the end of the present war and the institution of a World Confederation—a dream older than Tennyson, Plato, or the Hebrew prophets. Nebraska desires to do her full duty in this world service, and we count on you as one of the strong pillars at Washington upon whom we may rely.

## Notes and Comments

### Captain Jack Wilson

One of the most beloved pupils of Margaret Sheldon at Doane College was Stella Vennum, who became the mother of Fern Steuteville. In the University of Nebraska Fern and Jack Wilson fell in love as others have done before them, and in Honolulu the two were married shortly after Pearl Harbor, while Jack was waiting for his orders. Now at age twenty-four, Jack is a veteran air fighter, being flight commander in a squadron of Flying Fortresses. He was at Hickham Field during the raid on Pearl Harbor, at Midway just after the bombing; then back to Hawaii; to the Solomons where he helped the marines bomb the first Jap tank

forces; to Guadalcanal, to Australia, and finally to New Guinea where he contracted the malaria that brought him home on sick leave and into the editor's office on April 1, bringing Mrs. Wilson with him for a most welcome visit.

From the *Nebraska State Journal* that morning we had clipped an interview with Captain Wilson, and we quote the following:

At that particularly tight spot, Rabaul (off the coast of New Guinea), Captain Wilson was one of the first five to try out, with his crew, the type of air warfare originated by Major William Benn — skip bombing. This required dropping down to about 150 feet above water to release bombs in such way that they would skip into the side of a vessel. Anti-aircraft guns of the enemy built a wall of fire around the arena in which the mad performers dove, plainly visible in a battery of search lights. In fact, the Fortresses were "shot at quite a little," as he says temperately. His engine was struck, the regulator was broken and the propeller wouldn't "feather." But he managed to drag his ship up, out and off to safety . . . and went limping back to the base so late that his comrades looked up and saw him as a Lazarus descending, instead of ascending from the grave.

"We're always scared, of course," he remarked candidly, "at least in the few hours before going out. Then you're into it and don't have time to be scared. You drop your bombs on the target and get away fast. You light a cigaret and relax. And then you can sleep. Any time, anywhere."

Captain Wilson was eager to get back to the squadron. He is always glad to have boys from the Middle West in his crew. They have a courage, he says, that boys from the large cities do not seem to possess. His brother, Lieut. Harold Wilson, is fighting with the air forces in North Africa to such good account that recently he received a citation. "It's in the blood."

#### Lieutenant Walker

Another of the Nebraska boys who wear wings is First Lieutenant Lowell L. Walker of Columbus. In a letter to his parents he gave a thumbnail sketch of the view from his army quarters in North Africa that seems to justify us in pilfering it from the *Telegram*:

Hot sand, dirty with the ageless dirt of countless generations of Arabs, with their donkeys, their camels, their bare feet. Cool waves: huge breakers booming in swiftly, caressing the sands with untracing fingers. White foam: white across the lavender sunset, white above deep green waters at noon, white with pinkish strawberry icing at dawn; bubbling constantly, topping each wave, floating back to the next. Gray rocks, cold-looking, misty, water-worn but craggy forever, waiting for something no one knows. . . . I'm seriously considering building my nest here after the war.

#### New York's Tribute to Jackson and Meeker

The Explorers Club and the American Trails Association have issued joint invitations to a tribute-meeting in New York March 28, 1943, "hon-

oring Edwin W. Deming, William H. Jackson and Ezra Meeker, noted pioneers of the West, and Walter Granger, scientist-explorer. Pictures of old Western scenes will be shown."

### Proposed Jackson Memorial at Scottsbluff

The American Pioneer Trails Association has tentative plans for "a living memorial" to W. H. Jackson—a room in the museum of Scottsbluff National Monument on the old Trail through Nebraska. "Here might be gathered and appropriately displayed photographs, original paintings, the books he wrote and certain articles he treasured." Surely, in all the West, there is no more suitable place for this superb collection.

The Association "has arranged for the erection of a granite monument to be dedicated with appropriate ceremonies in Arlington National Cemetery on April 4, 1943—the one hundredth anniversary of Mr. Jackson's birth. It is hoped that all his friends who are in the East will attend if possible to do so."

Another Jackson Monument will be dedicated early in August during the progress of the Old Oregon Trail Centennial. This will mark the site of his camp near Scottsbluff in 1866.

De luxe editions of the Jackson books, some being autographed, are another feature of this year of the memorials, giving all friends of the movement opportunity to swell the fund in a very satisfying way.

### "Make America Live for Americans"

Such is a slogan of the American Pioneer Trails Association. A folder just received quotes from several significant letters. One is from a mother in the East who wrote:

"I wish with all my heart that young Americans could have a square deal in the teaching of American history. My fourteen-year old son may have social studies galore, but real history seems taboo."

And from a veteran of the First World War:

"When I was in France in 1918, I read a book on the Oregon Trail, and it made me a better soldier."

### "Sheldon versus De Mille"

For long the editor has sought opportunity to present in these pages the complete account of an exchange of letters between Lincoln and Hollywood that was played up in the press at that time. Because movies are still being shown, the matter is sufficiently important to be given space today.

It began when Wesley Ruggles and Lou Smith wrote Governor Cochran asking for "two or three items of historical, political or social interest . . . which would enable us to judge its merits [the history of Nebraska] as a film subject, . . . and which might provide a basis" for such a story. The fact that over one and a half million was spent in

Arizona in filming the picture of that name was offered as compelling inducement. But here is a point the movie magnates miss: Is even ten million sufficient compensation for filling the minds of our school children with glamorous falsehoods and picturesque distortions so that all the splendid history of our state is seen through that window of rosy ripple-glass?

The governor referred above letters to the superintendent of the State Historical Society, who sent *Nebraska Old and New* as an index and factual basis for consideration, together with a widely quoted letter wherein he wrote:

The Governor asks me to tell you whether I would approve having the story of our state depicted on the screen.

That all depends. It has been my lot to be called upon numerous times in the last twenty years by the proponents of various screen stories relating to the western plains. The assistance requested has been given. In practically every case the historical facts were garbled and distorted, dissynchronized, or otherwise stage-butchered. As I have seen the portrayal of these beautiful and attractive stories of the region where I have spent my life, and for the preservation of which I have written thousands of pages, I have been so dam-mad that I swore I would never again give help in a commercial screen play. The literal, simple truth of the historical facts, told with their chronology, to my mind is better than the fiction and falsehoods which the high chiefs of Hollywood send traveling over the world.

If your people wish to make a really faithful film story of Nebraska, you should send one of your most intelligent and discriminating people here to the Historical Society collections in our beautiful State Capitol and have him spend enough time to sense the situation.

Among the many approving letters that flowed into this office was one from C. G. Garlow, attorney of Columbus, complimenting "your good horse sense and the conditions upon which you would cooperate." He added:

I think that practically every play that is intended to be a history of the State (and not only of our state but others) has been so overdrawn that those who are old enough to see the State grow from youth to maturity feel just as you and I do about the false representations. It does seem to me that a picture so overdrawn as most of them are is only disgusting to people who really know the history. It's not doing any good to the state so represented.

Another letter of special interest came from W. F. Fleeming ("Kit Carson Jr.") He was a figure on the cattle trails of sixty years ago. Quoting in part:

Well, I am of the same opinion as yourself. Those directors want others to supply them with a few ideas which they fill in to suit their own notion, and it is awful to sit and look at the picture. The youngsters don't know the difference and are full of praise, but when you and I see the work of the butcher we are just plain

disgusted. "Dodge City" was terrible; so was the story of Jesse James. I knew the James boys. It seems as though the directors must use dope to get their imagination to work.

Hollywood dropped the subject and Nebraska lost the million and a half. Hollywood is always willing to spend money on a production but is not willing to be hampered by the facts. Therefore (excepting those children who possess exceptional strength of character) the minds of future citizens are filled with a romantic hodgepodge which makes history dull indeed and truth of no consequence.

## The Place of Fact in Fiction

The vital importance of preserving historical records, even though seemingly trivial, is attested by the story of Reh Field, author of the "fictionized biography" titled *The Beloved Bachelor*.

In a letter to the editor Miss Field (Mrs. Eugene Levy) reminded him that when Margaret Sheldon was making a lecture-tour on "The Cause and Cure of War," she went along as Mrs. Sheldon's secretary. The "beloved bachelor" is her uncle Julius Meyer, known to the Ponca who adopted him as *Box-Ka-Re-Hash-Ta-Ka* — "Curly-head White Chief One Tongue," and known to Governor Cochran as "one of the most unique characters contributed to early Nebraska." The Historical Collection contains a number of photographs of this well known interpreter and guide in groups of noted Indians.

In reality there is but little need of fiction to make romantic this story of the life of Julius Meyer. The incident of missing details of fact, without which his niece could not have completed her work, is set out so effectively in the *Evening State Journal* of that time that it is reprinted in full:

Next Saturday Mrs. Eugene Levy of Lincoln, member of a pioneer Omaha family, will send us a fat manuscript dealing with the early history of Omaha. But if it were not for *The Journal's* daily editorial-page feature, "Fifty Years Ago Today," one of the most striking and important incidents in the book would probably not have been included. . . .

Julius Meyer, among other things, was once nearly scalped, and was saved in the best Pocahontas style by the daughter of the chief. The two fell in love but were not married, because Julius did not want to live with the tribe as a "squaw man," and the Indian maiden could not bear the thought of life in Omaha among her beloved's aristocratic relatives.

At any rate, the Meyer brothers, in the Max Meyer and Brothers building, built up one of the finest mercantile establishments in the Middle West. When the business was at its peak, the building caught fire and was burned to the ground, all except one wall. The building inspector advised against razing the wall, and said that it could be used in rebuilding in the spring.

The Meyer Brothers acted on his advice. Two weeks later one of Nebraska's great prairie winds flung down the wall on adjacent small residences, and sixteen people were killed and twenty

injured. The Meyer Brothers lost every suit for damages brought against them, with the result that their fortune of several millions was dissipated and their business was brought crashing in ruins about their heads.

When Mrs. Levy arrived at the point of narrating these incidents, she had only family tradition upon which to base her account. No one could recall exact dates and other figures. She wrote the Omaha newspapers asking information, and even set prominent Omahans on the trail, all to no avail. Then, on February 4 of 1939, when she was reading her customary *Evening Journal*, she found under "Fifty Years Ago Today" an account of the great Meyer Brothers' store fire in Omaha. Examination of *The Journal* files of that period gave the author all the facts and figures she needed to make her story complete.