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Article Summary: The first Nebraska school, established in 1822, served the children of Sixth Infantry families stationed at Fort Atkinson. Then religious groups and local communities created numerous schools. Land endowments and various taxes, fines, and licenses funded the public schools.

Scroll Down for complete article.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Moses Merrill, Eliza Wilcox Merrill, Samuel Allis, John Dunbar, Edward Creighton, John Creighton, Thomas Doane, Fred Alley

Nebraska Place Names: Brownville, Nebraska City, Plattsmouth, Bellevue, Omaha, Lincoln

Educational Institutions Established: Fontenelle University, Methodist Seminary and College, Nebraska State Normal School, Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, Nebraska State School for the Blind, University of Nebraska, Fairfield Normal and Collegiate Institute, Cotner University, York College, Nebraska Central College, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Academy of the Sacred Heart, Mount St. Mary's Seminary, Academy of the Holy Child Jesus, St. Theresa's Grammar School, St. Francis Academy, Creighton University, Luther College, Dana College, Concordia Teachers College, York College, Brownell Hall, Talbot Hall, Worthington Military Academy (Lincoln), Gibbon Seminary, Grand Island College, Union College, Otoe University, Bellevue College, Oakdale Seminary, Hastings College, Pawnee City Academy, University of Omaha, Doane College, Gates College

Religious Groups That Founded Nebraska Educational Institutions: Congregational Association, Methodist Episcopal Church, Catholic Church, Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Church of the United Brethren in Christ, Friends (Quakers), Protestant Episcopal Church, Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, Presbyterians

Keywords: Otoe Hymn book, district system, compulsory school act, township high schools, free high school law

Photographs / Images: Nebraska Christian University (later Cotner College) during construction

Early Education in Nebraska

By Helen Siampos

THE Sixth Infantry, enroute to the Northwest, left Plattsburgh, New York, the latter part of March, 1819. It left St. Louis July 5, and reached Council Bluffs, near the present town of Fort Calhoun, Nebraska, September 29. Here an outpost was established and named Fort Atkinson. It was the regiment's station for the next six and a half years.¹

General Atkinson's soldiers, located far from a base of supplies, planted crops, raised livestock, built and operated a sawmill, and burned brick.²

As soon as the welfare of the regiment had become routine, the commandant turned his attention to the welfare of the children at the post. From the council books as left by the Sixth Infantry, under the command of Col. Henry Leavenworth, the following order is noted:

Ft. Atkinson 4 Feb., 1822

The school room being completed a school will commence on Wednesday next under the direction of Sergeant Mumford, who has been appointed teacher and will be respected accordingly—

By Order of Maj. Foster
C. Pentland
Adj. 6th Infantry³

Thus on Wednesday, February 6, 1822, four hundred miles from the nearest outpost of civilization, the first school was opened upon the soil later to be known as Nebraska. The Indians were sufficiently friendly to make possible conducting this first school in a small log building

¹Hayden DeForest Hughes, "Beginnings of Formal Education in Nebraska," (MS Thesis, University of Nebraska, 1934), p. 8.

²Walter Kenton Beggs, *Frontier Education in Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1939), p. 1.

³Hughes, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

outside the post. Here Sergeant Mumford, the first teacher, directed his little band of scholars in the rudiments of the three R's.⁴

The next attempt to bring education to the Nebraska country was in the winter of 1833 when the Baptist missionary, Moses Merrill, arrived at the Bellevue trading post under the auspices of the Baptist Foreign Missionary Society and was assigned to the Otoe tribe. Moses Merrill and his wife, Eliza Wilcox Merrill (typical missionary-traders), began a school in a log cabin at Bellevue the seventh day after their arrival.⁵

In 1834 Mr. Merrill rode on horseback from Bellevue to the Otoe village near the bank of the Platte River about ten miles north of Ashland. Here he held the first Sunday school in Nebraska and the first singing church.⁶

Notes from Mrs. Merrill's diary give some idea of the first days at school.

I showed them the letters and cards, and some picture books I had, and a slate with the eight notes marked on it in the usual form. They were afraid to try to sound them before the chief, and I took eight of them down to a little brook. After seating them as I wished, on a log, I began. They hesitated. At last I told them that the one that would say Faw first should have some of my dinner, which I showed them. A little one 3 years old said it, and the rest soon followed and learned well. Later she wrote—The past week we opened our day school with seven scholars. The second day we had eight. They were very wild. Some of them had nothing on but a shirt.⁷

In the summer of 1834 the Otoe Hymn Book was published. This was the first book published in Nebraska—a little pamphlet of only 14 pages. Its title: *Wdlwhtl Wdwdktha Eva Wdhonetl*.⁸

⁴*Ibid.*, in the resume.

⁵Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska Old and New* (Lincoln: University Publishing Co., 1937), pp. 139-141.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁷S. P. Merrill, "Missionaries Among the Indians Along the Missouri River Sixty Years Ago," *Transactions and Reports*, Nebraska State Historical Society, V, 220.

⁸Sheldon, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

Mr. and Mrs. Merrill had to endure many hardships in their efforts to help the Indians settle down, learn to farm, send their children to school, and above all to accept Christianity. Later the Indians became rather hostile as a result of the influence of traders who deliberately encouraged them to acquire a taste for whiskey, and who bitterly resented what they considered the encroachment of the missionaries on their priority. Consequently they exploited the superstition of the savages by telling them that the missionaries were "bad medicine" and advised that they be driven out. Often the scheme worked, especially when the braves could be fortified with "fire water."⁹

But even with opposition and reverses Mr. Merrill remained undaunted and in February, 1839, he proposed to open an English school. He died the following year but his work was carried on by other great missionaries such as Samuel Allis and John Dunbar who represented the Presbyterian Mission Board to the Pawnees in 1834 and established schools for them, and Father DeSmet, a Catholic missionary. These men also brought some of the gadgets of civilization which they desired to trade, but for an entirely different commodity than the traders sought. They wanted none of the Indian's worldly goods, but only his acceptance of their ministrations and the doctrine of the brotherhood of man.¹⁰

During the latter part of 1846 and the beginning of 1847, thousands of Mormons wintered in log cabins and sod houses where Florence now stands. While they stopped there on their way across the plains to Utah, schools were held during the winter for their children.¹¹

The Territory of Nebraska was opened to white settlement in 1854. Free schools came to Nebraska with its first government, for on March 16, 1855, a free public school

⁹Beggs, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁰*Idem.*; Sheldon, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

¹¹Addison E. Sheldon, *History and Stories of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University Publishing Co., 1913), p. 243.

act was passed. By this act the office of territorial superintendent of schools was combined with that of territorial librarian, and counties were selected as the subdivisions of school government. A county superintendent was to be chosen by popular election. This official was responsible for dividing his county into districts, and notifying the residents to proceed with the organization of their schools. Each county was to levy a tax of not less than three nor more than five mills on all taxable property in the county and to distribute the revenue thus raised among the districts on the basis of enumeration of white children between the ages of five and twenty-one years.¹²

The bulk of control rested in a local board of education consisting of three members for each district. To this board fell the organization and management of the district school.¹³

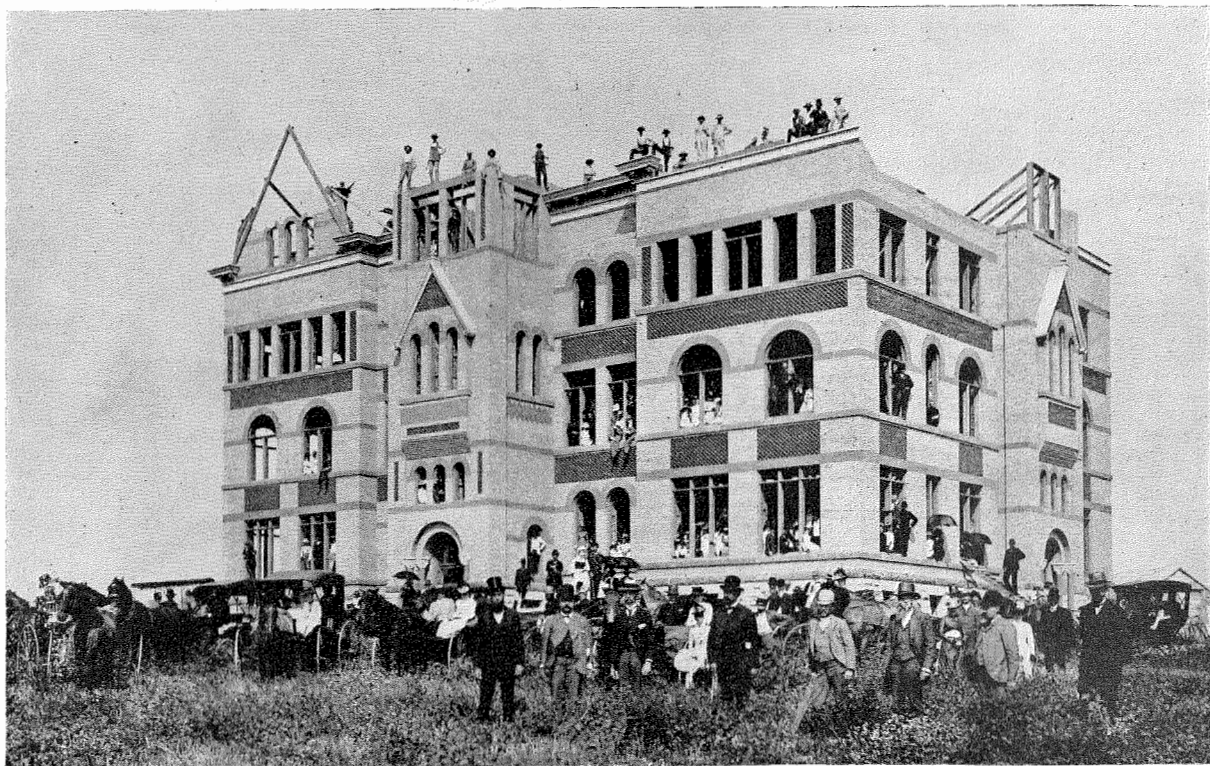
These first free schools were not very pretentious, but wherever there were children schools were held. It was not uncommon for the first school to be taught in a log cabin home by the mother, with the children sitting on benches split out of trees. An average "regular" school building was about 22x32 feet and 12 feet high, and cost, including furniture, about \$1,000. They were made of rough logs and had sod roofs. Since they were used for all public gatherings, they were built larger than was necessary for school purposes.¹⁴

Although the county superintendent could certify teachers as he saw fit, it was customary to have school teachers examined by the local school board for proficiency in spelling, reading, writing, geography, history of the United States, and English grammar. These examinations were oral. There was little money to pay the teacher—the average monthly salary of a man was about \$30.00 and that of a woman, about \$26.00. For this reason the

¹²*Ibid*, pp. 243, 244; Beggs, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹³Beggs, *op. cit.*, p. 3

¹⁴Sheldon, *History and Stories of Nebraska*, p. 243.



NEBRASKA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY (LATER COTNER COLLEGE) *DURING CONSTRUCTION

teacher often "boarded around" the district, a week at each house. Many of the teachers were men who had received some education before coming west. A man teacher was generally preferred who was able to do the "licking as well as the learning."¹⁵

Pupils ranged in age from five to twenty-one. It wasn't uncommon for a student to be as old or older than the teacher. Books were very scarce until 1891 when a law was passed whereby the school board was required to furnish textbooks.¹⁶

Although the records reveal practically nothing of what happened in the rural areas, for the towns we can get a rather complete picture, particularly in the five river towns of Brownville, Nebraska City, Plattsmouth, Bellevue, and Omaha.

The schools developed along the same general pattern in all of the towns. They had been started, in each instance, as early as 1855, but had to be abandoned during the depression following the panic of 1857. During those times when there were no public schools, private institutions stepped into the breach.¹⁷ The latter were as unpretentious as the public institutions. At times they received some public support. Occasionally they aspired to be exclusive finishing schools for girls, as did Mrs. Byer's school in Nebraska City.¹⁸

Their most important contribution, however, lay in the fact that they kept the idea of education alive. There is no indication that the people of the territory made any fine distinction between the "select schools" and publicly supported schools.

A report made in 1859 shows that out of a total of 4,767 children of school age, only 1,310 attended any school

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 244, 245, 317; Beggs, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁶Beggs, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 6.

in the year and seven counties with considerable population had no schools at all in the county. In order to remedy this situation, the township-district plan was adopted in 1858. This remained in force until June, 1867, when the single-district plan was again adopted. In 1873 a general law was enacted providing that all incorporated cities and towns should be organized as separate school districts. This led up to the law passed in 1919 to redistrict by counties the schools of the state. Thus originated the district system which our modern educators find so difficult to do away with.¹⁹

It was not until 1891 that Nebraska's first compulsory school act was passed. It provided that all children from eight to fourteen years of age must attend school not less than twelve weeks per year. This was followed six years later by a law concerning child labor.²⁰

Although township high schools were provided for by the law of 1858, few, if any, were organized. From 1867 to 1873 the high schools of the state were organized by special acts of the legislature. By 1886 there were 119 high schools organized and graded and 112 others partially graded.²¹

The history of the Omaha High School shows the rapid development of education in the state. It was begun in 1861 as a private school conducted by S. D. Beals. Students came from a radius of over a hundred miles to attend it. In 1869 the old capitol building and grounds were given to the city of Omaha to be used for school purposes. The high school which was then organized was entirely distinct from the graded schools of the city and under separate management. By an act of 1871 the high school became a part of the city system, under the control of the board of

¹⁹Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska, The Land and the People* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1931), I, 294-295.

²⁰*Compiled Statutes of Nebraska, 1929*, pp. 1596-1599.

²¹Howard W. Caldwell, *Education in Nebraska* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 259.

education. After 1885 growth was rapid. In 1886 the attendance was 372 but within 11 years it increased to 1,380.²²

In 1899 the free high school law was extended to secure free tuition for all children.²³

Ambition to found universities, colleges, and academies burned in many of the pioneer settlements of Nebraska. Within two years from the time the first legal settler entered Nebraska, provision had been made for seven colleges and universities. Each town, in many cases while yet a mere paper town, desired to have the name, at least, of enjoying higher educational facilities.

Fontenelle University, opened in 1858 under the auspices of the Congregational Association, was the first Nebraska institution to give collegiate work. As the year passed it became evident that the college could not flourish, and in 1873 it ceased to exist. Gradually the town of Fontenelle, which at one time had a population of five hundred, was abandoned until it became a rural cross-roads village.²⁴

An early institution of higher learning which still survives was the Methodist Seminary and College established in 1867 at Peru. This institution, which became the first state normal school, had its beginning in the year 1866 as the "Mount Vernon College," a private school under the control of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The first term of this private school opened August 29, 1866, with thirty-eight students enrolled. In August, 1867, the property of this college, previously referred to as the "Peru Seminary" was turned over to the Board of Education of the State Normal School. The first term of the Nebraska State Normal School for training teachers opened October 24, 1867.²⁵

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 259-260; Mrs. M. B. Newton, "History of Education in Omaha," *Transactions and Reports*, Nebraska State Historical Society, III, 60.

²³*Compiled Statutes of Nebraska*, 1929, pp. 1580-1582.

²⁴*Bulletin of Doane College* (Crete, 1947), p. 13.

²⁵Addison E. Sheldon, *Semi-Centennial History of Nebraska* (Lincoln, 1904), pp. 147-148.

The Institute for the Deaf and Dumb in Omaha was also founded in 1867, having an attendance of only thirteen pupils. During the first year the institution was maintained at a cost of \$2,995.²⁶ Besides the usual courses of instruction, an industrial department is connected with the school in which students are taught to be self supporting.

The Nebraska State School for the Blind was established at Nebraska City in 1875 and Professor Samuel Bacon, a blind man, acted as its first superintendent. Instruction was available in the following departments: the literary, the music, and the industrial. Students were taught piano tuning, broom making, weaving, sewing and cooking as a means of making a livelihood.²⁷

The first beginnings of the movement toward state supported universities date back as far as 1619 when Virginia proposed to grant land for the establishment of such an institution. Massachusetts, in the same spirit, extended help to Harvard College. But it was not until 1776 that the duty of the state to support a university was recognized in the constitutions of Pennsylvania and North Carolina. This marked the first definite breaking away from the concept of church control of higher education. With the formation of new states in the Northwest Territory and later in the Middle West, the state university as we know it today came into being.²⁸

The University of Nebraska (state university) was founded by an act of the state legislature approved February 15, 1869—commonly known as the Charter. It opened in 1871 with twenty students in the university proper and one hundred and ten in the preparatory school. The first commencement was held in 1871 although no one was graduated. By 1874 the school was felt to be a success since it had an enrollment of over one hundred students.²⁹

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 131.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 133.

²⁸Caldwell, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 64-67; *Bulletin of the University of Nebraska* (Lincoln, 1946-1947), p. 75.

The College of Agriculture was established by an act of the legislature of 1909, reorganizing the colleges within the University. The purpose of this college was to provide thorough instruction in the technical agricultural sciences and home economics, and to aid in the promotion of agricultural extension work.³⁰

Many institutions of higher education in Nebraska were founded by various churches. The Christian denomination, in June, 1884, incorporated the Fairfield Normal and Collegiate Institute. Fairfield, a small town in Clay County, had donated 300 acres of land to secure the location of the school, which opened to receive students in September, 1884.³¹

As in many other poorly supported denominational schools, teacher's salaries at Fairfield Institute were very low and the work hard. Each instructor was obliged to teach a variety of subjects thus preventing any specialization. This detracted much from the efficiency of the instruction offered.³² The new school was soon involved in financial difficulties which later forced it to close.³³

An agreement was entered into January 31, 1888, with various parties in Lincoln, to prepare plans for the establishment of a church university for the state to which all its other educational institutions should be tributary.³⁴ The university, located in Lincoln, opened its doors under the title "The Christian University," but after receiving an endowment from Samuel Cotner of Omaha, it changed its name to Cotner University. Fees were placed very low, *i. e.*, about \$30.00 per year, in order to meet the competition of the State University where tuition was free. A dormitory was also erected, providing board at cost in order to aid incoming students.³⁵

³⁰*Bulletin of the University of Nebraska* (Lincoln, 1941), p. 93.

³¹Caldwell, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

³²*Idem.*

³³*Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 125.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 126.

In addition to three years of preparatory, four college courses have been offered varying somewhat in classification in different years. In general the courses have borne the names—ancient classical, modern classical, scientific, and Biblical.³⁶ The larger proportion of the students enrolled were in the preparatory, normal, and music courses.

In 1889 the Lincoln Medical College was established as the medical department at Cotner University. The greatest weakness of the school had been due to the lack of good hospitals for clinical purposes. For many years all that existed of Cotner University was a deserted building on the outskirts of Lincoln, but it was reorganized in 1946 as a school of religion.

The Methodists made two or three attempts to establish colleges during the territorial period, but were without any conference school until October 11, 1879, when provision was made for the location of a conference seminary at York. Two buildings—one for college purposes, the other for a women's dormitory—were constructed at a cost of \$20,000. The school was conducted as an academy until 1883, when it was incorporated on a college basis, with a right to grant all customary degrees. The following colleges were organized: the literary college, college of music and fine arts, and a medical college located at Omaha until 1884 when it became a branch of York College. The attendance was comparatively large, reaching its maximum in 1885 with a total enrollment in all departments of 313.³⁷

Another Methodist school was organized at Osceola in 1879 by Rev. J. J. Fleharty. This was a private academy. Attempts were made to secure its adoption as a conference seminary. Failing in this, Mr. Fleharty moved the school to Fullerton. Later, it was reorganized, transferred to Central City and named Nebraska Central College. For a few years it was conducted as a denominational school under the North Nebraska Conference, but dependent for

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 127.

³⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

support on contributions and tuition fees, it became involved in debt and was discontinued about 1890.³⁸ The organization of the present Nebraska Central College under the control of the Friends is discussed below.

The failure of the earlier Methodist schools, of which Mallalieu University at Bartley was yet another institution attempting to subsist on landed endowments which brought no income, emphasized the need for unification if a Methodist educational institution was to survive in Nebraska.

The opening of Nebraska Wesleyan University at Lincoln on September 25, 1888, was the result of the merging of the small Methodist colleges previously mentioned. The plan of agreement, which accomplished the unification, was adopted by a commission representing the three colleges then in existence and the Nebraska Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The charter which the trustees were instructed to secure for the new university was granted January 20, 1887.³⁹

In October, 1888 the first classes met at Wesleyan. The building was only partly completed but all available rooms were used. Teachers and students carried on their work in the midst of the confusion and litter of construction. The enrollment was 50 at the beginning and increased to 96 by the close of the school year.⁴⁰

Most of the schools established in the state by the Catholics had been parochial schools or schools of an academic grade; but with the growth of the state and a corresponding development in the church, the need for schools of a higher standard made itself felt.

The Academy of the Sacred Heart was established in 1881 as an institution of learning for young ladies, and as the name indicates, was under the guidance of the Order of the Sacred Heart. This order was founded in 1800 by Madam Barat of Paris to support a higher education for girls

³⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

³⁹*Bulletin of Nebraska Wesleyan University* (Lincoln, 1943-44), p. 17.

⁴⁰Caldwell, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

than that generally provided at that time in France by other religious orders. Tuition fees accounted for the entire support of the school. However, whenever extraordinary repairs or improvements were necessary grants were made by the society itself to meet them. The attendance has varied, reaching its maximum of 110 in 1889-90. During the crisis period, 1893-1897, there was a decrease in numbers, but with the improvement of business conditions in Omaha and the state an increase in numbers was evident.

Mount St. Mary's Seminary received its charter in 1873 and its first building was erected on St. Mary's avenue in Omaha. The Sisters of Mercy supervised the school which had well sustained commercial, art, and music departments.

In 1883 the Academy of the Holy Child Jesus was established in Lincoln under the control of the sisters of the same name. Its building has an interesting history in connection with education in Nebraska. The money for its construction was given by the citizens of Lincoln that a dormitory might be erected for the use of the young women attending the State University. However, it did not meet expenses, and as there was a mortgage of some \$4,000 due, it was sold and purchased by a Mr. Fitzgerald and dedicated to school purposes.

St. Theresa's Grammar School was founded at Lincoln in 1890 by the Right Rev. Thomas Bonacum, D. D. In September of the same year it was placed under the charge of the Sisters of Charity. In 1895 a high school was added, having a total attendance of 250.

The Order of St. Francis of Assisi in 1882 established the St. Francis Academy located on the outskirts of Columbus. The first graduating class was in 1895 with five members.⁴¹

The story of Creighton University properly begins in 1856 when the brothers, Edward and John Creighton,

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 138-140.

settled in Omaha to lay the foundations for their vast fortune. Prosperity favored them in their numerous activities, which included the construction of telegraph lines, the operation of wagon trains, stock raising, investing, and banking.

His death in 1874 defeated the philanthropic designs of Edward Creighton, whose lifelong ambition had been to establish a free school for boys, but his widow, Mary L. Creighton and his brother John A. Creighton, perpetuated his memory by founding and liberally patronizing "Creighton College" which was incorporated in 1877, and which threw open its doors to students in 1878.

In the beginning Creighton was little more than a grammar school, for the Omaha of the late seventies was not yet ready for a real college. But rapidly the infant school grew under the guidance of the Jesuit Fathers, who still operate it, and in 1881 high school courses were added. The first college class of five students was graduated in 1891.

The expansion of Creighton into the field of professional education dates from 1892, when the School of Medicine was opened. Starting with 34 students, it speedily outgrew its quarters and entered a new building in 1897.⁴²

Luther Academy was organized at Wahoo in 1883 under the management of the Nebraska Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod, and supported by the Swedish Lutherans of the state.⁴³ During the first year there were 50 students in attendance, and in 1898-99 there were 88. Luther Academy, now known as Luther College, is still an institution of learning, offering courses of instruction in all departments.⁴⁴

Dana College, located on College Hill just west of the city of Blair, was established in 1886. Two years previous, in 1884, Trinity Seminary out of which Dana grew, was

⁴²*Bulletin of Creighton University* (Omaha, 1940), p. 20.

⁴³Caldwell, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

⁴⁴*Idem.*; *Bulletin of Luther College* (Wahoo, 1946), p. 7.

founded by Dr. A. M. Andersen, for the purpose of training young men for the Lutheran ministry. The teachers training and commercial departments were added in 1899.⁴⁵

Concordia Teachers College was founded in the year 1894 by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other states. It is located at Seward. The institution today includes two major divisions: the high school with a four year program, and the college with a four year teachers-training program.⁴⁶

In 1890 York College, located at York, was founded by the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and opened its doors to students in the same year. Differing from many of the smaller colleges in Nebraska, it managed to keep open during the depression and drought. Its support comes from the church and from a large group of constituents near the college.⁴⁷ In the college proper there were two graduates in 1894, four in 1897, and two in 1898.⁴⁸ Still existing, the college offers courses in liberal arts, education and pre-professional preparation in various fields.⁴⁹

Seemingly the Friends (Quakers) made no attempt to establish a school for higher education in Nebraska previous to the winter of 1898-90.⁵⁰ Elsewhere in this paper an account will be found of "Nebraska Central College," a Methodist school, located at Central City. In 1895 due to hard times and the lack of support, the school closed its doors to students. Later the building and the section of land were taken over by one of the stockholders and the property was converted into a large stock farm. When the Friends began to plan for a college, they purchased the property. The purpose of the college was to provide for the people of

⁴⁵*Bulletion of Dana College* (Blair, 1946-47), p. 9.

⁴⁶*Bulletin of Concordia Teachers College* (Seward, 1945-46), p. 5.

⁴⁷*Bulletin of York College* (York, 1946-47); Caldwell, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

⁴⁸Caldwell, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

⁴⁹*Bulletin of York College*, p. 10.

⁵⁰Caldwell, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

the extreme middlewestern states who wished to give their children an education in a school under the control of the Friends.⁵¹

A school for the education of women was organized at Saratoga, a small village just north of Omaha, in 1863, under the control of the Episcopal Church. In 1867 the school was removed to Omaha, and has been known from that time to the present as Brownell Hall. The first graduating class of two members received its diplomas in 1868. In 1897 because of drought and depression the school closed its doors for a year, but was reorganized in 1898 by the board of trustees.

At an early date a school for boys was established at Nebraska City under the title of Talbot Hall. The name was changed a few years later to Nebraska College. Like many another of the early colleges of the state, its resources were insufficient for its sustenance, and finally in 1884, it was discontinued.

The Worthington Military Academy began its first school year September 1, 1895. Its building, Trinity Hall, was located in the northern part of the city of Lincoln. It was founded by the Grand View Building Association, but was constructed in conformity with the spirit and principles of the Protestant Episcopal Church. The school consisted of two departments, preparatory and academic. The military system was used only as a means to an end, that of discipline and exercise. On June 1, 1898, just at the time when the academy was at the point of success, the building burned and the Association decided not to rebuild.⁵²

The educational work of the Baptists in the state has been neither extensive nor successful since their frontier mission work. It was not until the organization of the Nebraska State Convention in 1860 that the subject of higher education began to be noticed by the denomination. Under this condition the Baptists in 1880 founded the

⁵¹*Idem.*

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 147-150.

school known as the Gibbon Seminary, whose purpose was to prepare students to enter college. In 1883-84 there was an attendance of 143 with two graduates. The school had to close, since a committee reported to the state convention in 1885 on the location of a "Baptist College."

The Grand Island College organized in 1892 was the only other Baptist school in the state. Besides the endowment the college had secured since 1892 property valued at \$10,000, scientific apparatus valued at \$2,000, and books valued at \$2,000. Courses of study offered were collegiate, preparatory, normal, business, and music. During a period of seven years five students received degrees.⁵³

The Seventh-Day Adventist denomination founded Union College at Lincoln in 1891. To date the college offers courses in liberal arts and pre-professional training in various fields.⁵⁴

The first educational work done in Nebraska by the Presbyterians was the mission to the Pawnees which was begun in 1834 under the direction of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. With the removal of most of the Indians from the state and the incoming of white settlers the need changed⁵⁵ and attempts were made to establish academies or colleges. The first of these attempts was as early as 1868, others followed in the Eighties.⁵⁶

In 1868 Otoe University situated at Nebraska City was organized as the first Presbyterian school in its area, opening September 7 with an enrollment of approximately 100 students. Records are incomplete as to the curriculum, but from the following advertisement one may assume that the curriculum ranged from elementary to college subjects:

Classes will be formed from time to time in all higher as well as the lower branches, while special pains will be taken to give a thorough drilling in the common English studies.⁵⁷

⁵³*Ibid.*, pp. 150-154.

⁵⁴*Bulletin of Union College* (Lincoln, 1945-46), p. 11.

⁵⁵Frank E. Weyer, *Presbyterian Colleges and Academies in Nebraska* (Hastings, 1940), p. 172.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 39.

Before the close of the first year serious problems began to arise due to the following factors: an unsound financial policy, internal discord, unsatisfactory leadership in the presidency, and inexperienced leadership in the Board of Trustees. In the Spring of 1872 the trustees sold the building to the Episcopal church.

A second Presbyterian school, Bellevue College, might be said to have had its origin in the mission to the Omaha Indians founded at Bellevue in the 1840's. The Presbyterian Synod of Nebraska incorporated the college in 1880, and three years later students were admitted. At first, classes were held in the Bellevue Presbyterian Church and in a dwelling house. The enrollment the first year numbered twenty-six students, and three teachers made up the faculty. Bellevue College graduated its first class, a group of four, in June, 1889.⁵⁸ For a number of years the college grew and developed, reaching its peak in the period 1900-1909. Thereafter, it declined until in 1919 classes were suspended. For a number of years various plans were made to reopen Bellevue but they were unsuccessful and in 1934 the Board of Trustees officially closed the institution.⁵⁹

Another Presbyterian school was Oakdale Seminary, established in 1881. Work was carried on for ten years before the seminary was forced to close. Lack of support, personal differences, divided leadership and the lack of feeling of a real need for the institution were ascribed as reasons for its failure.⁶⁰

An editorial, "Why not have a Presbyterian College at Hastings," appeared in the *Hastings Journal* of August 19, 1873. This suggestion met with an enthusiastic response; but a severe drouth and grasshopper scourge compelled the postponement of any such plans until 1879, when they were taken up in earnest. These plans resulted on September 14, 1881, in the appointment of a board of trustees who,

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 48 ff.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 73-75.

on May 10, 1882, completed the organization of Hastings College.⁶¹

Classes during the first two years were held in six rooms in the Chilcote Buliding, which was the second floor of the post office building. During the first year the faculty consisted of three full time and two part time teachers. The student body numbered forty-four students in the secondary departments. The first graduate of the college received his degree three years after the institution was established.⁶² Although Hastings College has undergone many changes, it is the one remaining Presbyterian institution of higher education in Nebraska.

The Pawnee City Academy was established in 1883. At first it was organized as a stock company under the sponsorship of the United Presbyterian Church of Pawnee City which provided rooms for class work when the school opened in September, 1883. The peak of enrollment was reached in 1896-1897 with 118 students housed in a commodious building. With the development of public schools, however, the enrollment decreased until in 1908 the academy was closed by the Board of Trustees.⁶³

The University of Omaha, as first organized in 1891, was merely a board of trustees, not an institution to furnish instruction. It was planned to develop an Omaha University with technical and professional schools using Bellevue College as the liberal arts branch. These plans did not work out as hoped and the University of Omaha organization was discontinued in 1908. Immediately reorganized, the university came into competition with Bellevue College and for some years there was a strong movement to move the latter school to Omaha. In 1930, the present Omaha Municipal University was organized.⁶⁴

⁶¹*Bulletin of Hastings College* (Hastings, 1945-46), p. 15.

⁶²Weyer, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁶³*Ibid.*, pp. 101-105.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

The first Congregational leaders to settle in Nebraska Territory began at once to provide for a college. The Rev. Reuben Gaylord organized the first Congregational Church in Omaha in 1856. In 1857 the three churches, Omaha, Fontanelle, and Fremont formed the General Association of Congregational Churches of Nebraska, which at its first meeting resolved, "that we deem it expedient to take measures to lay the foundation of a literary institution of high order in Nebraska." On January 6, 1858, the Association accepted the offer to take over the embryo "Nebraska University" at Fontanelle, as already recounted, and fostered it as its college for more than a decade.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, Thomas Doane, Chief Engineer of the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad, and a deacon of the Congregational Church of Charlestown, Mass., who had already "pledged himself to use his influence, and personal means to further higher 'Christian education'," was directing the extension of the railroad from Plattsmouth to Denver. One day as he walked with a few friends to the top of the hill east of Crete and looked out across the Blue River Valley, he exclaimed: "This is the most beautiful spot on our line from the Missouri to the Rockies. We must build our college here." Suiting action to his words, he interested his pastor, the Rev. Fred Alley of Plattsmouth in the project. The Crete Church was organized in March, 1871, and the Crete Academy was incorporated May 22, with Mr. Alley as its principal. Cash contributions and pledges of 50 city lots and 600 acres of land were secured from the railroad. The General Association met in Omaha in June, 1872, and adopted the recommendation of its Committee on Education that the college be located in Crete.

Doane College was incorporated July 11, 1872, as a non-profit institution by an independent self-perpetuating Board of Trustees, and named in recognition of Mr. Doane.

⁶⁵*Bulletin of Doane College* (Crete, 1947), p. 13; Caldwell, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

The building and facilities of Crete Academy were inherited by the college. With the beginning of the school year, in the fall of 1872, the preparatory department opened its doors to students. David Brainerd Perry was the only teacher. Thirteen preparatory students were enrolled. The next fall five college freshmen were enrolled to form the first college class, 1877. With the building of Merrill Hall in 1879, the college moved from the valley to the hill.⁶⁶ In 1883 the corner stone was laid for Gaylord Hall; before winter the building was finished and occupied.⁶⁷

In the decade following Doane's founding, Nebraska Congregationalists were especially active in establishing other schools in the state. In 1880 Gates College was founded at Neligh; for fifteen years (1884-1899) Gates granted college degrees, and was something of a rival of Doane for support by Congregational Churches. But in 1889 it was recognized as an academy, and until 1914 served as a feeder for Doane and Yankton. Other academies which were part of the Congregational system in Nebraska were Franklin (1881-1922), Chadron (1885-1910), and Weeping Water (1885-1914), besides Crete Academy, which continued to function as a preparatory school for the college until 1916. Doane College remains of the system to claim the special interest and support of the Congregational churches.⁶⁸

Support of the schools has been partly from the land endowment. When Nebraska became a state the United States government gave to it, for public schools, the sections of land in every township numbered 16 and 36. In all, this land amounted to about 3,000,000 acres. The rent from the land and the interest from the money received for it was to be paid to the districts for the support of public schools. By 1897, when an act of the legislature forbade further sale of this land, over 1,300,000 acres had been sold. To help support the university and the state

⁶⁶*Bulletin of Doane College*, pp. 13-14

⁶⁷Caldwell, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

⁶⁸*Bulletin of Doane College*, p. 14.

normal school, the state gave them large endowments. The university received 12,804 acres.⁶⁹

District taxes, state taxes, various fines and licenses also helped in the support of the schools. For a long time saloon license money was the principal source of school revenue outside the general property tax.⁷⁰

There have been many improvements in Nebraska schools since those early days—normal training, domestic science, county high schools, and consolidation of schools, to mention a few. Nebraskans have always had a deep interest in the education of their youth, and despite many obstacles, have moved steadily in the improvement of their schools.

⁶⁹Sheldon, *History and Stories of Nebraska*, p. 279.

⁷⁰Caldwell, *op. cit.*, p. 252.