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Article Summary: The Nebraska School of Agriculture at Curtis graduated over 3,000 young men and women during its 55 year existence. Its purpose was to perform essentially the same function as the school in Lincoln for the southwest quadrant of the state. This is the story of the politics, the competition for its location, the bidding process, and its building and opening celebration.

Cataloging Information:

Names: A C Shallenberger, Mr Taylor, L H Eastman, Chester Aldrich, Grant G Martin, Walter A George, Addison Wait, E S Cowels, Hugh Butler, A L Johnson, Hugh Butler, Horace Crandall, E E Marsh, Walter Bonner, H J Mortensen, Thomas Shinley, Tyra Nelson, W W Keith, N J Hall, Fred Heckelman, J R Cooper, E W Roberts, Peter Kiewit, L O Pomerene, Brad Miller, C J Martin, L E Hagans, Samuel Avery, R Baker, C W Williams, John Morehead, Cyrus V Williams, Ellis Rail, Edward Gross, Edward Hodapp, Anne J Beams, Grace Richards, Ellen Aneheuser, Mrs Frankie Schneider, William Merrill, George Ward,

Place Names, all in Nebraska:

Counties: Custer, Lincoln, Keith, Garden, Cheyenne, Kimball, Sherman, Buffalo, Kearney, Franklin, Furnas, Thayer

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Photographs / Images: Map of Area of Southwestern Nebraska School of Agriculture; construction of Agriculture Hall, 1912; Agriculture Hall, 1915; Advertisement from *Curtis Enterprise*, August 1, 1913, for the Dedication of Nebraska School of Agriculture at Curtis, Nebraska; Nebraska School of Agriculture catalog, April, 1913

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEBRASKA SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE AT CURTIS, 1911-1913

By Horace C. Crandall and Donald E. Ringstmeyer

The Nebraska School of Agriculture at Curtis had its origin in an unlikely series of political moves which established the school. In about 1924 former Governor A. C. Shallenberger related the following story to Horace Crandall, who served 44 years as administrator and faculty member of the school: Governor Shallenberger, a candidate in 1910 for a second term, and Democratic Party members met in the Lindell Hotel in Lincoln to draw up planks for their campaign platform. They decided something must be inserted in the platform to please the farmers, and a Mr. Taylor suggested that they propose the establishment of four agricultural schools similar to the one on the "state farm" (the College of Agriculture) here in Lincoln. The state was to be divided into four areas and a school located in each. Governor Shallenberger laughed and said, "Of course we never intended to do it."¹

Governor Shallenberger failed in his re-election bid, but the idea caught on. In the 1911 session of the Legislature, Representative L. H. Eastman of Thayer County introduced House Roll No. 2 for the establishment of one such agricultural school, not four as first suggested. The location was to be west of Longitude 99 and south of the 24th Standard Parallel. This area included all of southwest Nebraska extending from a northern line dividing Custer County in half (north and south), passing through Lincoln, Keith, southern Garden, Cheyenne and Kimball Counties. The western portions of Sherman, Buffalo, Kearney, and Franklin Counties composed the eastern boundary of the proposed area.²

The placing of the school in the southwest quadrant of Nebraska left roughly one-half of the state with no "ag" school, if it is considered that the school at Lincoln served

primarily the southeast quarter. The statute proposing the school indicated it would perform essentially the same function as the school in Lincoln: "furtherance and promotion of agriculture and stockraising interests."³

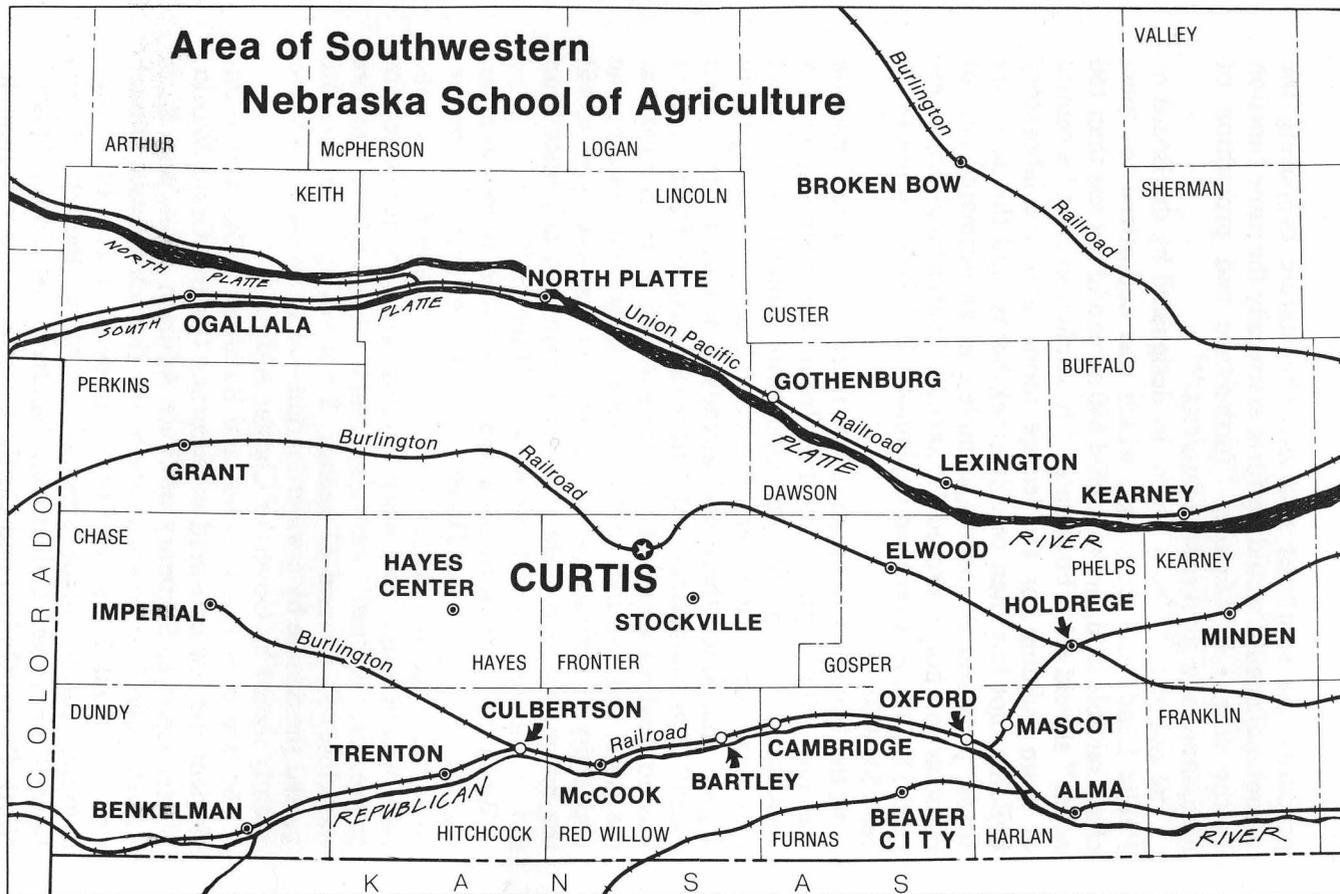
The site of the school was to be designated by the Board of Public Lands and Buildings, which was authorized to "purchase suitable land, not to exceed 640 acres and not less than 160 acres," should HR 2 be adopted.⁴ It would also erect "a central or main building for the lecture rooms and one laboratory building, not less than two livestock barns, and the necessary sheds, pens and enclosures, complete at an estimated cost of construction not to exceed \$75,000.00," furnishings not to exceed \$10,000, and farming implements and livestock not to exceed \$15,000.⁵

In the House of Representatives there was heated debate on the bill with support coming from the state's primarily agricultural western districts. Opposition came from the more industrially oriented eastern districts. Those opposed to the bill argued that since there was already a school at the "State Farm" (Lincoln agricultural college campus) for farmers, there was no need for a second one. Supporters in turn charged that the state "educational lobby," supposedly controlled by the University of Nebraska and Lincoln interests, was trying to kill the bill purely to prevent the establishment of any institution that might compete with the school at Lincoln.⁶

When the bill came up for a final House vote, there was a motion for a "call of the House," and the sergeant at arms instructed to account for all members. A motion to "raise the call" was defeated, and when all members were accounted for or present, the "call" was raised and a vote so taken. The vote was close: 51 for and 47 against, 2 not voting.⁷ The measure passed the Senate by a wider margin—25 to 6—and was subsequently signed by Governor Chester Aldrich.⁸

The Board of Public Lands and Buildings authorized to implement the law consisted of Attorney General Grant Martin, Walter George, Secretary of State Addison Wait, and E. S. Cowels. The first town to apply for the school was Minden which is about 2 miles east of longitude 99. Eleven other communities quickly made application: Alma, Bartley, Broken Bow, Cambridge, Culbertson, Holdrege, McCook, Mascot, North Platte, Oxford and Curtis. Citizens of every community

Area of Southwestern Nebraska School of Agriculture



Portions of Deuel, Garden, Cheyenne, and Kimball Counties not shown.

advanced arguments for locating the school in their town.

Holdrege was one of the strongest contenders. The March 23, 1911, *Holdrege Citizen*, announced shortly after Governor Aldrich signed the measure: "Already Holdrege is lining up to put forth the strongest possible claim for the school. We are going to work to land the school with a vim that will make the other places which desire the institution jealous."

Similar efforts were put forth by other communities vying for the college. McCook advertised itself as an excellent place for western Nebraska agricultural students to study sugar beet culture and stock raising.⁹ Broken Bow urged board members to consider that it was a "temperance town and this means much to the student and the parents of the student who attends the school."¹⁰ The April 6, 1911, *Minden Courier*, in a special "Agricultural School Supplement," termed establishment of the college "the richest, rarest opportunity ever offered to western Nebraska" and enumerated "Minden's many advantages over Holdrege" as a prospective site.

The board decided to visit each town to acquire more information for the best location. The first inspection trip took members to the communities of Holdrege, Cambridge, Oxford, Mascot, Culbertson, Alma, McCook, and Bartley. On their second trip they visited Curtis, North Platte, and Broken Bow.

Curtis, one of the last towns to apply, made a strong bid under the leadership of Chamber of Commerce President Hugh Butler, later US senator. In applying for the institution, the community agreed to provide the land and otherwise to help establish the school. Funds were solicited from residents to purchase the land. Several of the men who agreed to contribute did not think that Curtis had a chance or that they would ever be asked to make good on their pledges. When time came to give the money, it was a sacrifice for some families, but the record indicates none failed to make good on a promise. A survey of 192 businesses and individuals who gave financial support, shows contributions ranged from \$5.00 to above \$1,000. The solicitations were entered with enthusiasm, and the grand total collected amounted to \$29,733.04, a large amount during the series of "dry" years of the early 1900s.¹¹

One of the arguments advanced by the Curtis Commercial Club for locating the school in Curtis was its proximity to the geographical center of the area served: 80 miles west to the Col-

orado line and about the same distance to the 99th meridian. As to the north-south distances, Curtis was also close to the center. Another point in the town's favor: Curtis was on the Highline of the Burlington Railroad midway between the main line of the Union Pacific about 40 miles to the north and the main line of the Burlington Railroad about the same distance to the south. In 1911 there were no improved roads and automobile travel was not a consideration.

Curtis had agreed to provide the land for the school. The people in the community promised to sell certain town lots for the location of the school buildings and more than enough farm land adjoining the campus was also optioned.

After visiting each of the 11 towns considered in the location of the School of Agriculture, the Board of Public Lands and Buildings met in Lincoln to decide on the location. Board members, having been strongly lobbied by the various communities, had difficulty arriving at a decision at the board's first meeting, although many votes were taken. The board met again on May 30 and on the 33rd ballot Curtis received all four votes as the site.¹²

Several years later, a member of the Board of Public Lands and Buildings told Horace Crandall that after 32 ballots members were getting tired of the selection process and it was suggested cynically that Curtis be selected and "it would kill itself within a short period of time."¹³

About 3 o'clock, Wednesday morning, May 31, 1911, a telegram was sent from A. L. Johnson of Lincoln to Hugh Butler stating that Curtis had been awarded the college.¹⁴ (In the newspapers of 1911, the school is always referred to as the college).

The June 2, 1911, *Curtis Enterprise* reported the happy scene in Curtis shortly after the telegram's good news among its citizens:

Whistles blew, bells rang, and the people shouted. By the light of a magnificent bonfire which had been constructed in the middle of the square, the Lake City Band played for an hour or more. Giant fire crackers and the shooting of anvils could be heard far and wide. The spectacle took on the appearance of an early Fourth of July celebration. But the jollification was simply the gratitude as shown by the people for being awarded this prize—the Agricultural College. Nearly every man went home to breakfast that morning bare-headed, his hat having gone to feed the flames—one man even contributed his shirt to the cause. Everybody wore a smile which didn't come off for the day and hasn't yet.

About 9 o'clock Wednesday morning, a telegram was received from Secretary of

State Addison Wait, chairman of the Board of Public Lands and Buildings, substantiating the first telegram.¹⁵

Holdrege boosters reacted with undisguised chagrin. The June 1, 1911, *Holdrege Citizen* reported:

The news was first announced here by manager of the opera house and chief booster for the school Clarence E. Harman at the band concert Tuesday evening. The news was received with incredulous questions, exclamations of astonishment and then with jeers because the audience believed Clarence had perpetrated a joke upon them. . . .As we are desirous of getting this issue through the mails without being debarred we refrain from printing any quotations of what was said by the Holdrege boosters upon the verification of the report.

The *Citizen* blamed "the powerful educational lobby of the state. They did not want a second agricultural school. . . .If it must be established it must go to some third-rate town which would never develop it and be left to struggle along and probably die." Members of the Board of Public Lands and Buildings were satirized in rhyme:

Sing a song of politics
 Board members on their jobs,
 Don't know who to vote for,
 Bless their empty knobs.
 But they think that school
 Must land feathers in their cap.
 So they vote for every dot
 Discovered on the map,
 But one bunch yet to please,
 "Mustn't let that lobby hurt us,
 "So all together now—
 "We vote for Curtis."¹⁶

The *Beaver City Times* in the nearby county seat of Furnas County bannered its June 9 front page "Struck the Key Note" and commented on regional jealousy:

The location of the Agricultural College at Curtis bears out the *Times-Tribune* in the assertion that there has been too much incrimination and recrimination among the towns in the valley from Holdrege west [over selection of the site]. This had not existed among the towns of Furnas County, and it is especially true of Cambridge that a clean and acceptable canvass was made. But from Holdrege came claims that McCook was immoral; from McCook that Holdrege had submerged the liquor question temporarily pending the location of the College.

Holdrege was particularly bitter of everybody in the valley, accusing every town of something or other, and claiming the College by Right of Discovery. It even undertook to inject future politics into the consideration. Such tactics were sure to lead to but one result—the selection of a site outside of the district in which such turmoil existed.

Curtis got into the game at the psychological moment. She had the advantage of an ideal location, geographically, being almost in the exact center of the district. The local surroundings are pleasant, moral atmosphere good, and the soil condition proper. Although she had not much wealth to offer, the other things outweighed, and the prize is hers.¹⁷

The Curtis Commercial Club made an attempt to gain area support by sending out 75 to 100 invitations to businessmen in the neighboring towns to meet in Curtis the first Friday evening in June for a jubilee and reception for the state committee which would be present to decide on the building site. A dinner was served to the visitors at the Lakeview Hotel. Afterward the general public was invited to the auditorium to listen to toasts and speeches.

The club also had previously requested the town board to spruce up the town—to cut weeds “in the streets,” to grade the roads, to see that walks were in good shape, and to remove rubbish from alleys. “The idea is to have our town look as attractive as possible to visitors from abroad.” Curtis felt good over the fortunate turn of events which meant “much to Frontier County and the growth of this little city in the future. Hurrah for Curtis and the Curtis hustlers.”¹⁸

The State Board of Public Lands and Buildings members, Grant G. Martin, Walter A. George, Addison Wait, and E. B. Cowels of Lincoln, arrived in Curtis June 13 to select the site for the school. After dinner at the hotel the state board and members of the local committee drove by auto to the various sites from which the board was to make a selection. The site for the buildings and the farm of 463 acres adjoining the campus, both adjacent to the town on the north, was confirmed. The campus included vacant lots held by E. E. Marsh and the property of Walter Bonner, H. J. Mortensen, Thomas Shinley, Tyra Nelson, and W. W. Keith. The state committee selecting the site expressed satisfaction with the site as “by far the most suitable for the purpose from the many offered. . . in the campaign for the school’s location.

Besides the above property, the state will receive 103 acres from the Lincoln Land Company and the remaining acres principally from N. J. Hall and Fred Heckelman, making in all 463 acres that the Curtis citizens donated to the state for this school.”¹⁹

Still, Board member Martin was forced to defend the Curtis location. Replying to an invitation from one of the newspaper publishers at Holdrege, Attorney General Martin wrote a letter explaining in considerable detail the steps taken by the Board of Public Lands and Buildings in locating the school at Curtis. The communication, dated June 17, was addressed to J. R.

Cooper of the *Holdrege Progress*. He first restated the questions put to him by the publishers:

The people of this section of the State have been awaiting some statement from the Board of Public Lands and Buildings. . .giving the controlling reasons for the location of the Nebraska School of Agriculture at Curtis. We have noticed statements from Mr. George and Mr. Wait to the effect that each gentleman favored a certain [town] as the location. We understand that you are not bound to explain your vote and yet in justice to yourself, don't you think it would be the best thing to do. From authority, which we believe to be reliable, we understand that but for your influence the school would have been located elsewhere. . . .On account of the inaccessibility of the town of Curtis we cannot believe that its central location geographically carried any weight in favor of its choice by your Board."

Then Martin made his case. It is quoted in its entirety, since it answers the question of many persons: "Why was an adjunct of Nebraska University placed in Curtis?"

I shall speak for myself only. The Democratic State Platform pledged the establishment of an Agriculture School in Southwestern Nebraska. The Legislature fixed the boundaries within which it should be located, making the 99th meridian, which passes about two miles west of Minden, the east line and making the 4th Standard Parallel, which passes along the edge of Broken Bow, the north boundary. The Legislature left the selection of the site to four members of the Board of Public Lands and Buildings, of which I am a member.

I thought the purpose of the Legislature in fixing these boundaries was especially to provide a school for the people of the prescribed district. Had there been no boundaries fixed and the State as a whole considered, no doubt the results would have been different. The county seats in the extreme eastern part of this territory are Broken Bow, Holdrege, and Alma. Those in the extreme west are Kimball, Grant, Imperial, and Benkelman. The greatest distance east and west across this district is 261 miles. The shortest distance across it to the Colorado line is 161 miles. The population of the entire district is approximately 156,000. Broken Bow is 33 miles, Alma is 20 miles and Holdrege is 19 miles from the eastern line of the prescribed district; all three cities being 229 to 242 miles from the extreme western line and from 248 to 142 miles from the Colorado line.

When confronting the fact that the district is from 161 to 261 miles in length, it seemed that the school ought to be located farther west than any of those cities. Approximately the population east of those cities in this district is 40,000 and west is 115,000. Besides, there was a State Normal School located almost on the east line at Kearney and only a few miles distance from those cities.

Curtis is 80 miles from the east line, 81 miles from the Colorado line and 181 miles from the extreme western line. Approximately the population of the district west of Curtis, leaving out the county in which it is located, is 45,000 and east of it 110,000. Three lines of railroads traverse this territory east and west. To locate the school on the Union Pacific would leave two parallel lines to the south; to locate it on the Burlington main line anywhere west of Holdrege would leave the parallel lines to the north. The Highline of the Burlington running between the other two more nearly traverses the center of the prescribed district. Curtis is situated on the Highline, and while it is considerably east of the geographic center of the district, it is much nearer the center than any of its competitors. I regard this as a point very much in its favor.

This school is to be established with reference to the future development of the country as well as present conditions. Curtis offered a proposition which combined all kinds

of soil. The site donated consists of 463 acres, composed of bottom land, second bottom, level table and hilly land. Through a portion of this tract runs the Fox Creek, which I am informed never fails of water. On its banks there is quite a growth of timber and among it some elm trees which are as beautiful as may be seen anywhere in the west. This tract includes about 30 acres adjoining with the village, a portion of which was purchased by the Curtis people from citizens who had their homes erected thereon. In my opinion this tract of land is an ideal one for agricultural experimentation; it certainly is representative of the character of the soil in the prescribed district. On this tract is situated a water supply sufficient for the use and fire protection of the school. Within two blocks of the proposed site of the school buildings is a side track, which the Curtis people offered to place at the coal bins of the institution.

Curtis is located on the Medicine Creek, the only constant stream, I am told, that one crosses after leaving Crete for Curtis, on the Burlington, a distance of 204 miles. A lake of 65 acres and a beautiful grove adjoin the corporate limits. All these things combine to make Curtis an attractive location.

You suggest that Curtis is inaccessible. I do not regard it so. It is located on the Burlington Highline which tranverses the entire territory from Holdrege on the east to the Colorado line on the west and reaching Sterling, Colorado a distance of 230 miles, at which it connects within the lines enabling the whole of northeastern Nebraska as far north as Harrison, Chadron, Alliance and points south thereof to reach Curtis by rail. The Highline is easily reached from points on the Union Pacific in from one to three hours ride by automobile. The same is true for towns on the Burlington main line. Conveyances are kept for this purpose at a number of towns. (I rode from Lexington which is on the U.P. to Elwood which is on the Highline by auto in one hour and from Curtis to North Platte in two and one half hours). The public is accustomed to travel by team and nowadays by automobile from one railroad line to another. Any student residing in this prescribed district may reach Curtis within a few hours at an expense ranging from a few cents upward and not exceeding \$6.00. The fare from Holdrege to Curtis is only \$1.46. Under present arrangements those going by way of Holdrege would be required to remain over night in Holdrege at an additional expense of a night's lodging.

I judge from the tone of your letter that you wish more particularly to know how I voted with reference to Holdrege and what influence I exerted in fixing the location. My influence amounted to one vote on the question. Anyone who is acquainted with the men on the Board will know what that means. The selection was made by ballot, exactly in the manner published in the press. The vote is recorded in detail and is public property and shows the exact vote each town received. The first night 23 ballots were taken and the various towns discussed. No town received more than two votes. The second night 10 ballots were taken, making 33 in all. Two of the Board voted thirty times for the towns of their choice. I was willing to agree to any one of the eleven of the applicants and stated so to the Board. In an effort to agree, I voted three times for Holdrege. These were the only times Holdrege received more than one vote. I am satisfied an agreement could not be reached on Holdrege after a full discussion. In all, I voted twelve times for Curtis and the remaining votes were cast for some one of the other applicants.

On the 30th and 31st ballots, Curtis received two votes and on the 33rd ballots, all four votes. The members of the Board differed widely in their ideas and an agreement on one of the eleven applicants had to be reached. This, no doubt, brought disappointment to the other ten. Honest consideration was given to the claims of every town. An unbiased effort was made to make a selection that would be for the best interest of all people in the part of the State which the Legislature designated as the site of the school.

I regret that many of my friends should suffer disappointment in this action of the Board. I have great faith in the future development of that part of our State and firmly believe that this school will grow and be of great benefit to the people of the prescribed district and the State at large.

If you see fit to publish this letter, I hope you will use it in full. Yours Very Truly,
Grant G. Martin, Lincoln, Nebraska, June 16, 1911.²⁰

The *Lincoln Daily Star* was not dissatisfied with the location, terming it an enviable site for a new school with several kinds of soil, acreage including bottom lands, table level, and hills with a stream and a strip of fine timber running through one side; all located in one continuous tract of 463 acres adjoining the town of Curtis. The paper reported that the Burlington, which already ran within two blocks of the campus, would build a spur to the building area as structures were built.²¹

Land Commissioner Cowels reported expansively:

We found the grass greener and the crops generally better around Curtis than some other places which have suffered from dry weather. This of course shows that the location of the school there has had a good effect already. We drove by automobile from Lexington to Curtis. [The trip to Curtis had been made over the UP from Lincoln to Lexington, where an automobile awaited them.] That part of the State is looking pretty good. Rain fell several days ago and helped the crops considerably. Fields are green even though the Platte River has already gone dry.

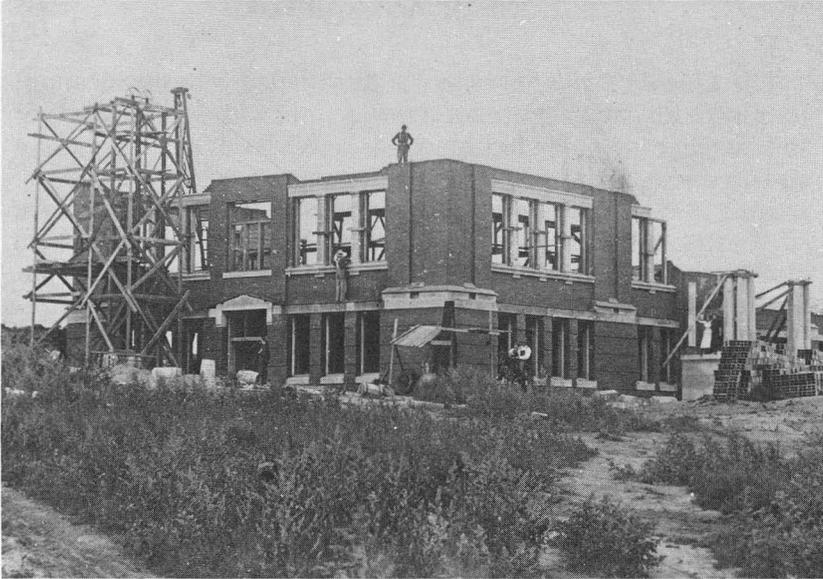
Returning to Lincoln the board took the Highline (Burlington). The board stopped at Holdrege between trains. They were not met at the station with a brass band or reception committee. No violence was offered, much to the relief of the members, but businessmen expressed disappointment over failure of their city to land the school. They did not appear as wrought up as had been reported. Among those with whom they visited was State Representative E. W. Roberts, who worked hard for the bill creating the school in hopes that it would go to Holdrege.

Back in Lincoln the board turned its attention to the letting of contracts for the buildings at the new school, hoping to complete the task by July. Some members tried to give the Nebraska University Board of Regents the job, but the bill made it incumbent upon the board to locate and equip the school. The regents were to administer it thereafter.²²

The *Lincoln State Journal* of August 13 headed a news story, "Curtis Again Selected." It was only a formality by the board to insure the validity of the choice.

The Board accepted the 10 deeds covering a total of 463 acres of land. Tentative plans were for a main building, lecture rooms and dormitory, laboratory building, not less than two livestock barns, and the necessary sheds, pens and enclosures. Cost was not to exceed \$75,000. The board conferred with the regents of the university in regard to building plans.²³

Brad Miller, state architect, presented plans for the Curtis



Construction of Agriculture Hall, 1912. . . .(Below) Agriculture Hall, 1915. Photos courtesy of Nebraska School of Agriculture.



school in September. A three-story structure with stone trimmings and four pairs of stone columns on the front was the first building planned. The Board of Public Lands and Buildings had advertised for bids on the building to be opened December 1.²⁴ It was to be an ultra-modern building for its day. In the days preceding air conditioning, it included a forced-air ventilation system. Each room in the building had a ventilating duct to bring in fresh air and expel foul air. The building was also equipped with a system for vacuum cleaning. On each floor outlets connected a vacuum pump and a suction hose could be attached for cleaning purposes. Horace Crandall says the vacuum system was never used.²⁵

Special provisions were made for fire protection with water connections and fire hoses on each floor. No fire escape was provided, the rationale being that the fire hoses provided protection and the building was nearly fireproof. Construction plans called for the installation of a coal-fire low-pressure boiler in the basement for heating the building. Coal was shipped in by rail and hauled to the school by team and wagon.²⁶

Gould and Son of Omaha were awarded the contract to build the structure for \$57,150.00, with a deadline for its completion set at September 1, 1913. The building was to be 60 feet x 120 feet with walls of brown vitrified brick and cement floors and fireproof materials throughout. Of eight bids on the building, the highest, \$66,950.00, was submitted by Peter Kiewit of Omaha. L. O. Pomerene of Lincoln got the contract for heating and plumbing at \$6,485.00. Because of some confusion in the wording of the electrical contract, it was not let at the time.

After the bids were opened, Hydraulic Press Brick Company of Omaha and a Hastings firm protested that Architect Brad Miller had called for a kind of brick made only by the Sutherland Brick Company of St. Louis. They asked to submit for consideration their brick, which was larger and cost half as much. Miller said he had nothing to do with the bids and that he did not care who made the material just so it was of the desired color. He had a color scheme which he wished to carry out and the board allowed him to do so. The board consulted the regents and decided that a change of brick color would not negate the contract of Gould and Company.²⁷

Excavation work for the school went to C. J. Martin of Curtis though his bid of 16 cents per yard was tied by L. E. Hagans,

You are Cordially Invited to be Present at the

Dedication of Grounds and Buildings

of the

NEBRASKA SCHOOL OF AGRICULTURE

AT CURTIS, NEBRASKA

FRIDAY, AUGUST 15, 1913.

Big Program

FOLLOWING ARE THE SPEAKERS OF THE DAY:-

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR S. R. McKELVIE

SAMUEL AVERY, Chancellor of the State University

E. A. BURNETT, Dean of the College of Agriculture

GEORGE COUPLAND, Member of the State Board

of Regents; also short addresses will be made by the following state officers: Attorney General Grant G. Martin; Auditor W. B. Howard; Treasurer W. A. George, and Supt. J. E. Delzell.



Main Building.

Monster Barbecue 2 fat oxen will be roasted and all given a Treat.



Horse, Cattle and Dairy Barn.

Special Trains

Leaves Holdrege at 6:50 A. M. Returning Leaves Curtis at 10 P. M.
Leaves Holyoke, Colorado, at 6:00 A. M. Returning Leaves Curtis at 10:00 P. M.

Special Music by the
LAKE CITY CORNET BAND

Fine boating; Beautiful Shade and Plenty of It.

BALL GAME, ETC.

FOLLOW THE CROWD on the

Morning of August 15th. You'll be Royally Entertained.

The Biggest Event of the Year 1913 for the People of Southwest Nebraska

AT CURTIS

FRIDAY, AUGUST 15th, 1913.

Advertisement from Curtis Enterprise, August 1, 1913.

also of Curtis. The winner was decided by the flip of a penny.²⁸

On October 11 the people of Curtis and the surrounding area welcomed Chancellor Samuel Avery of the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, who had come to inspect the new addition to the state educational system. The chancellor's coming brought out a large crowd in "perfect weather." Avery stepped off the passenger train before noon and was escorted to the Lakeview Hotel. While awaiting dinner, a large number of citizens from Curtis, Maywood, Stockville, and Moorefield chatted with him. There were 40 guests at the dinner served in the hotel auditorium. Between 1 and 2:30 p.m. an auto procession took Chancellor Avery and others to the site of the school, drove around town, and visited Mill Park and Lake.

At 2:30 "an army of school children, headed by the Curtis band, marched from the school house to the hall and took seats in the front ranks" to hear the chancellor speak. Stage decorations had been provided by the high school class of 1912. At once it was demonstrated that the auditorium seating capacity was insufficient. Late-comers were unable to get into the hall but stood outside.

Professor R. Baker introduced the chancellor, who spoke for an hour. Avery's speech reported on the practical education offered by agricultural colleges and schools. He said, "The most practical school of today is in agriculture." He outlined what the work of the school would be and with drawings showed the construction of the main building.²⁹

The main building neared completion in the spring of 1912 as work commenced on the smaller laboratory building and the superintendent's residence. Professor C. W. Williams of the University of Nebraska had been chosen the first superintendent of the Curtis school. Superintendent Williams with the assistance of some new faculty members of the Agriculture College and University of Nebraska personnel worked on the development of the first school calendar. Ads were placed in newspapers circulated in southwestern Nebraska outlining the entrance requirements. The first school catalog was ready for distribution on May 1, 1913. Excerpts follow:

Aims and Purpose: This school is different from any other school in Nebraska. Its problem is that of the farm and home in this semi-arid section of our state. Dry land farming methods are emphasized in all farm crops studied. The problem of dairy and animal husbandry is very different from that of eastern Nebraska.

Entrance Requirements

FIRST:—Any student who is a graduate from an eight grade district or city school, who is at least fourteen years of age, will be accepted upon presentation of certificate.

SECOND:—Any pupil with an eighth grade certificate under fourteen years of age will be accepted only upon special arrangement by superintendent.

THIRD:—Any student sixteen years or older, who may not be a graduate of an eight grade district or city school, may enter by an examination and arrangement through the superintendent.

Courses Offered

A strong and practical course in agriculture and manual training and regular high school subjects are offered for the young men who wish to go back to the land. A course will be offered for young women in sewing, cooking and the art of housekeeping, along with the regular high school subjects.



HORSE, CATTLE AND DAIRY BARN.

Admission to University

Students selecting the proper studies will, upon graduation, be admitted to the Freshman class of the Agricultural College at the State University.

Every boy or girl in Southwestern Nebraska who is interested in industrial education should watch for the announcement of the catalogs, which will be ready for distribution about May 1st.

The town of Curtis will make special effort to accommodate all outside students and furnish them with suitable homes.

All instruction offered along industrial lines as given the boys and girls or school teachers is adapted to the immediate needs peculiar to this region. This is not a high school in any sense, although all the required high school subjects are offered, in addition to the industrial work. . . .

To meet the needs of the people to the fullest extent, the school must offer training to the farmer's son and the farmer's daughter. This is done in a nine-month term opening in September. It must offer a "Short Course" for the farmer himself and his busy sons, and this is met in a three month's term opening in December. In addition, we try to carry our instruction to the rural schools of western Nebraska by offering a summer term for teachers in which instruction in both agricultural and home economics is so adapted to give the rural teachers the help needed in putting the teaching of agriculture in our rural schools on its proper basis. . . .

Admission: Students 14 years of age or older, who have completed the eighth grade and hold an eighth grade diploma are admitted without examination to the regular year's work. Any student younger or without a diploma will be admitted only on special arrangement with the superintendent. For the short course no scholastic requirement is laid down. . . .

Costs: This is a state school, hence no tuition is charged, only small fees for materials used in the different laboratories. These are nominal and barely make the department self supporting in supplies used. For the summer normal session a matriculation fee of \$5.00. . . . Board and room may be had at \$4.00 per week in the best homes in Curtis.

Admission to the University: The Nebraska Agricultural School is not primarily a preparatory school, but rather a technical finishing school. Men and women who complete the four years course in agriculture or home economics in the University preparatory groups may enter any of the undergraduate colleges without examination.

Social Life: The social life of the school is under strict supervision of the faculty. Each class has its sponsor and class events which are held on Friday and Saturday evenings are carefully sponsored.³⁰

Literary societies, a chorus, band, orchestra, athletics (football, basketball, and baseball) were provided for in the catalog. An incidental fee of \$3.00 per semester was charged. Only chemistry students were charged for classroom work—a breakage fee of \$1.50.³¹ In April the Curtis Commercial Club canvassed the town to find housing for prospective students.

The Curtis Commercial Club received communication on June 13 from Nebraska Governor John Morehead, that he would be in Curtis on August 15 to participate in the dedication ceremonies for the new agricultural school.

On June 20 Charles Johnson was reported to have sold his residence property near the agricultural school building to the state. The building was to be removed and a new \$5,000 residence built for superintendent Cyrus V. Williams.³²

Faculty members, who began arriving in June, were: Superintendent Williams; Ellis Rail, animal husbandry; Edward Gross, farm mechanics; Edward Hodapp, sciences and instructor in vocal and instrumental music; Anne J. Beams, English and history; Grace Richards, home economics; Ellen

Aneheuser, mathematics and language; Mrs. Frankie Schneider, clerk and secretary to the superintendent; William Merrill, farm foreman and professor of agriculture; George Ward, superintendent of buildings and grounds.³³

The last day of teachers' institute on August 15 coincided with the dedication of the new school. Chancellor Avery and Dean Burnett of the University of Nebraska and University Regent Copeland attended.³⁴ The Burlington Highline ran special trains into Curtis from Holdrege and Holyoke, Colorado.³⁵

The following three items appeared in the August 11 edition of the *Curtis Enterprise*:

Dedication Day, August 15th, 1913. The entire program, with the exception of the school dedicatory ceremony, will be held in the Chautauqua [city] Park. The park is being put in fine shape under the direction of Mr. Rees Heaton and it will be possible for the crowd to find comfort and enjoyment in the beautiful grove. Come and enjoy at least one day in the largest and most beautiful grove in the state.

Oxen bought for the 15th. Donald Nelson reports having on hand now the two beeves for the ox roast for the barbecue on August 15th. He bought them from T. M. Dempsey, and they are dandies. Next week they will be given to the roasting process. You can sample the barbecue committee's roasting efforts on August 15th.

Bank Notice. The banking houses of Curtis will close at noon and remain closed the remainder of the day on August 15th which is the dedication day for the new Agricultural School Building.³⁶

The August 15 dedication of the grounds and buildings of the Curtis school included oratory, a baseball game, free barbecue, boating on the lake near Mill Park, and the camaraderie of such an occasion. This was the culmination of the campaign which brought the Agricultural School to Curtis. Its basic purposes were to assist in the educational growth of the populace of southwest Nebraska, to improve their farming and ranching techniques, and to make more pleasant their rural life style. But it also was a "plum" for the little town of Curtis.

The September 6, 1914, Sunday *State Journal*, in its announcement of the commencement of the school's second term, chronicled some achievements of the preceding school year:

The state farm silo was filled this week and the quality of silage resembled the brand that Indiana or Ohio farms produce. The corn was raised on the bottoms and would yield from fifty to sixty bushels per acre and well matured for this period of the year. . .

The forage crops raised on the experimental plots of the state farm here have shown some very excellent comparative results. More than a dozen varieties of kafirs and sorghums being urged by the department of agriculture were grown under their direction. . . A number of the forage products of the state farm accompanied the Frontier County exhibit at the Nebraska State Fair at Lincoln this week.

Fifty-five years later in June of 1968, the Nebraska School of Agriculture at Curtis closed its doors after having graduated over 3,000 young men and women during its existence. What has taken its place is the University of Nebraska School of Technical Agriculture, a post-secondary educational school which teaches agricultural technologies in the area of business, land and conservation, machinery mechanics, commercial horticulture, production on the farm and ranch, and veterinary science.³⁷ In many respects the overall goals are similar to those pronounced on August 15, 1913—the improvement of agricultural techniques and the continual improvement in the life style of all Nebraskans.

NOTES

1. Interview of Horace C. Crandall, of the school's faculty; teacher/superintendent from 1920-1964.

2. Nebraska House of Representatives Bill No. 2, 1911 Session Statute Establishing the School: 85-121. School of Agriculture: creation, location; purpose. For the furtherance and promotion of agriculture and stockraising interests of this state, an additional school of agriculture, the location of which had been established by the Board of Educational Lands and Funds, pursuant to law, near the town of Curtis in Frontier County, Nebraska, shall be maintained under the conditions hereinafter prescribed, and known as the Nebraska School of Agriculture. Such school of agriculture shall be under the control and management of the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, and it shall perform the same duties and exercise the same powers with reference to the Nebraska School of Agriculture as such board by law may be authorized to perform or exercise with reference to the present College of Agriculture of the University of Nebraska, so far as the same may be applicable. Source: Laws 1911, c. 138, 1, p. 449; R.S. 1913, 7130; C.S. 1922, 6762; C.S. 1929, 85-148.

3. Excerpt of H. R. No. 2, 1911 Legislative Session.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Holdrege Citizen*, February 16, 1911.

7. Nebraska House of Representatives, Minutes, 1911 Legislative Session.

8. *Holdrege Citizen*, March 6, March 23, 1911.

9. *McCook Tribune*, April 6, 1911.

10. *Custer County Chief*, May 5, 1911.

11. Curtis Commercial Club, Financial Minutes, July, 1911.

12. Board of Public Lands & Buildings, Minutes, May 31, 1911.

13. Statement of Horace C. Crandall.

14. Telegram from A. L. Johnson, June 2, 1911.

15. Telegram for Secretary of State Addison Wait, June 2, 1911.

16. *Holdrege Citizen*, June 1, 1911.

17. *Beaver City Times*, June 9, 1911.

18. *Curtis Enterprise*, June 9, 1911.

19. *Ibid.*, June 16, 1911.

20. Letter of Attorney General Grant G. Martin, in reply to criticism by editor of *Holdrege Progress*, June 16, 1911.

21. *Lincoln Daily Star*, May 31, 1911.
22. *Ibid.*, June, 1911.
23. *Nebraska State Journal* (Lincoln), August, 1916.
24. *Curtis Enterprise*, September, 1911.
25. Interview of Horace C. Crandall.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Curtis Enterprise*, September, 1911.
28. *Omaha World Herald*, November 13, 1911.
29. *Curtis Enterprise*, October 13, 1911.
30. First School Catalog, Nebraska School of Agriculture, April, 1913.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Curtis Enterprise*, June 21, 1913.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*, June 28, 1913.
35. *Ibid.*, August 4, 1913.
36. *Ibid.*, August 11, 1913.
37. *Omaha World-Herald*, March 20, 1980.