



## **The *Nebraska Statesman*: The People Behind the Picture**

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

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Article Summary: An iconic Solomon Butcher photograph portrays a frontier newspaper office in Broken Bow. But the story of the two men who founded the short-lived paper has not been told until now. They came to central Nebraska full of ambition, but their lives soon went in very different directions.

### Cataloging Information:

Names: John S Dellinger, Robert E Martin, Francis E (Frank) Martin, Solomon D Butcher

Nebraska Place Names: Broken Bow

Custer County Newspapers: *Nebraska Statesman*, *Custer County Leader*, *Custer County Republican*, *Broken Bow Times*

Photographs / Images: *Nebraska Statesman* office, Broken Bow, 1886 (Solomon Butcher photograph); the first train to arrive in Broken Bow, 1886; advertisement for the *Nebraska Statesman*, *Nebraska State Gazetteer* for 1886-87; Broken Bow's main street in 1887; *Custer County Leader* office with detail showing an 1888 Benjamin Harrison campaign poster; *Custer County Republican*, another rival newspaper in Broken Bow



The *Nebraska Statesman*, Broken Bow, Nebraska, 1886. NSHS RG2608-2457a



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# THE NEBRASKA STATESMAN: THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE PICTURE

BY PATRICIA C. GASTER

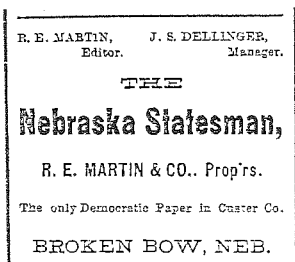


The first train to arrive in Broken Bow in 1886.  
NSHS RG2608-2217

Perhaps the most memorable thing about the *Nebraska Statesman*, published in Broken Bow from 1885 through the end of 1890, was Solomon D. Butcher's arresting photograph (left page), taken in 1886 when the town was booming. The *Statesman* may not have been one of Nebraska's most notable newspapers, but because of this iconic photograph, it is one of the most visually recognizable. What's the story behind the picture and the people (not identified by Butcher) who stare confidently at the viewer from the entry and the board sidewalk in front of the newspaper office across a span of 125 years?

Broken Bow was platted by Jesse Gandy in 1882, only three years before the birth of the *Statesman*, and grew rapidly. It won the Custer County seat from Westerville that year and in 1883 shared the county fair. By the spring of 1884 it was incorporated, and there were rumors of a railroad. A Burlington and Missouri River Railroad survey was made in 1885, and the first train arrived in August 1886. The *Omaha Daily Bee* in September credited the town with a population of one thousand, eight general stores, four drug stores, three hardware stores, three hotels, and three well edited newspapers.<sup>1</sup>

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**Nebraska State Gazetteer for 1886-87, p. 107.**

The two Broken Bow newspapers sharing the journalistic field with the *Statesman* in 1886 were the *Custer County Leader* and the *Custer County Republican*. The *Statesman*, established in late 1885 as a "red hot Democratic paper" by John S. Dellinger and Robert E. Martin, prospered briefly because it enjoyed the patronage of the land office at Grand Island. First located on the south side of Broken Bow, it moved to the railroad addition on the north side of the tracks after the train arrived in town. Dellinger and Martin established a branch paper at Mason City, the *Mason City Transcript*, in June 1886. The pair later dissolved their partnership, with Martin retaining the *Statesman*.<sup>2</sup>

In 1888 the *Statesman*, edited by Martin, claimed a circulation of 1,100 with an annual subscription rate of \$1.50. In June it was consolidated with another local paper, the *Broken Bow Times*. In the only surviving issue—that of December 6, 1888—the four pages of the *Statesman* carried little local news, but a great deal of advertising and many final proof notices from the Grand Island and North Platte land offices.<sup>3</sup> The newspaper ceased publication when editor and publisher Martin left Broken Bow in early January of 1891. A. Z. Lazenby

purchased the plant of the defunct *Statesman* later that year in November and hauled it to Merna, where he established the short-lived *Merna Reporter*.<sup>4</sup>

Although the figures in Butcher's 1886 photo of the office of the *Nebraska Statesman* (including the young woman, probably an employee, holding a typeset) are not identified, Dellinger and Martin may be among them. Martin, described by Butcher in his history of Custer County as "an ex-Confederate soldier and forcible writer," was a native of Missouri. Born April 26, 1841, he served with the Fifth Missouri Infantry, Company H., during the Civil War, attaining the rank of sergeant.<sup>5</sup>

By November of 1870, Martin was in Nebraska, where at the age of twenty-nine, he married a daughter of Jesse Reeves, a pioneer Douglas County settler, at Omaha. A son, Francis E. "Frank" Martin, was born at Fort Calhoun in 1873. In 1882 Martin was in Kearney, and from August to November 1884, he edited the Democratic *Free Press*, a weekly, at St. Paul in Howard County. By late 1885, Martin was in Broken Bow, where he and Dellinger established the *Statesman*.<sup>6</sup>

**Broken Bow's main street in 1887, showing the new and larger Nebraska Statesman building under construction. NSHS RG2608-2457**



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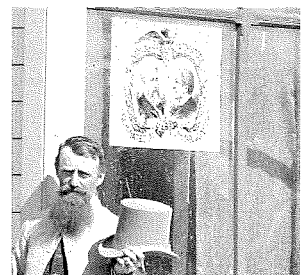


Brief glimpses of his activities in Broken Bow are revealed in the pages of local histories and contemporary newspapers. Martin shrugged off a conviction for libel in early 1887 (maintaining that “there is not a political newspaper in the state of Nebraska, that has been published for five years, whose files will not furnish legal ground for fifty criminal libel suits”), and he and his family seemed well respected. His wife was a charter member of the town’s Presbyterian Church, first established in her home. Son Frank Martin, a local cyclist, was in March 1888 the editor of the six-page *Broken Bow Weekly Amateur*, devoted to cycling.<sup>7</sup>

Martin used the *Statesman* to publicize his political views, noting in May 1888 that “Nebraska republicans are making a record this year, at which honesty and intelligence may well hide their

modest faces and blush. . . . Their delegates to the national convention do not represent anything in the world but the different railroad corporations doing business in the state.” He became active in local and state politics, serving on the Democratic State Central Committee in 1889, and supported the wets during the unsuccessful drive in 1890 to amend the state’s constitution to outlaw liquor.<sup>8</sup>

In early January of 1891, Martin suddenly left Broken Bow, his destination reported in the local press to be Hot Springs, Arkansas. His family remained for the time being in Broken Bow. For the next decade he worked as a traveling salesman, making Edina in Knox County, Missouri, his nominal home. In April 1896 Martin surfaced in Iowa, where he was accused of assaulting a young girl at Eddyville while engaging in door-to-door sales



**The Custer County Leader** was a Republican paper; the detail shows an 1888 Benjamin Harrison campaign poster. NSHS RG2608-2537





The *Custer County Republican* was another of the *Statesman's* rival newspapers in Broken Bow. NSHS RG2608-1063

work and narrowly escaped a lynch mob. Information published shortly thereafter in the Nebraska press about the incident indicated that similar charges had prompted his abrupt 1891 departure from Broken Bow.<sup>9</sup>

Information about Martin's later years is sketchy. In June 1901 he was admitted to the Confederate Home of Missouri north of Higginsville in Lafayette County because his "rheumatism and eczema" made it difficult to support himself. By 1910 he was living as a boarder in the household of Henry C. Pieper at Richmond in Ray County. His name next surfaces in 1911, when area newspapers noted briefly that a body recovered from the Missouri River near Lexington, Missouri, had been identified as that of "R. E. Martin, a former inmate of the Confederate Home at Higginsville."<sup>10</sup>

Dellinger, the more prominent of the two men associated with the *Nebraska Statesman*, tried his hand with another local newspaper, the short-lived *Broken Bow World*, established with J. P. Walters, after he dissolved his partnership with Martin on the *Statesman*. Ever restless, he moved on from Broken Bow to what would shortly become Grant County and played an active role in the county seat fight there between Whitman, the first county seat, and the more centrally located Hyannis, platted in April 1887 on land Dellinger owned. The first proposed name for the new town site was Dellinger, although it is unclear which of two Dellingers—John S. or his father, settler Henry R.—was the intended namesake. John S. Dellinger served as the first Grant County clerk, appointed by the governor, until elections could be held to select county officials.<sup>11</sup>

Dellinger went on from Nebraska to Oregon via Chamberlain, South Dakota, where he published the *Chamberlain Daily Tribune*. His newspaper career in the Northwest began in Bay City, Oregon, in 1890 and included the establishment of the first daily newspaper in Alaska, the *Morning Alaskan*, in Skagway in 1898 during the Alaskan gold rush; and the publication of the *Morning Astorian* in Astoria, Oregon, from 1903 until his death in 1930. He was also active in Republican Party politics and widely known as a cranberry grower.<sup>12</sup>

Although best remembered for his career in the Northwest, Dellinger never forgot his early days in Nebraska. In an autobiographical sketch published in 1912, he recalled brief stints on newspapers in Fremont, Arlington, Scribner, Valentine, Hooper, Anselmo, Hyannis, and Marsland as well as Broken Bow, Mason City, and Alliance, his last Nebraska stop before moving to South Dakota. All were relatively short-lived. (A rival newspaper once derisively called his Saturday evening *Journal* at Fremont the "Twilight Fizzle.")<sup>13</sup> Perhaps significantly, Dellinger failed to mention Martin's name in connection with the *Statesman*, although the latter was associated with the paper from its birth in 1885 until its demise in early 1891.

Like Dellinger's other Nebraska ventures, the newspaper he and Martin established at Broken Bow was not prominent or long-lived. It would have been hard pressed to compete with the growing number of newspapers in town even if Martin's hasty departure in 1891 hadn't abruptly ended its brief life. But Solomon D. Butcher's arresting photograph assures the *Nebraska Statesman* of at least a footnote in state history. ■

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jane Graff, *Nebraska, Our Towns: Central & North Central* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Co., 1989), 69-75; "Omaha and Broken Bow," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Sept. 11, 1886, 8.

<sup>2</sup> "The State's Prosperity," *Omaha Daily Bee*, June 20, 1887, 5; *McCook Tribune*, Nov. 19, 1885, 2; *Fremont Weekly Herald*, Nov. 12, 1885, 6; Solomon D. Butcher, *Pioneer History of Custer County and Short Sketches of Early Days in Nebraska* (Broken Bow, 1901), 329, 361-62; "History of Custer County Newspapers," *Custer County Chief* (Broken Bow), Nov. 26, 1942, D4.

<sup>3</sup> N. W. Ayer & Son's *American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer & Son, 1888), 295; Butcher, *Pioneer History*, 362; *St. Paul Press*, June 29, 1888, 4.

<sup>4</sup> "Town and Country," *Custer County Republican* (Broken Bow), Jan. 8, 1891, 1; "From 'Round About Us," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Nov. 11, 1891, 7; "History of Custer County Newspapers."

<sup>5</sup> Butcher, *Pioneer History*, 361; Robert E. Martin to Superintendent, Confederate Home of Missouri, Jan. 27, 1901, with

"Application for Admission to the Confederate Home of Missouri," and accompanying materials, No. S1085, Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, Missouri [hereafter Robert E. Martin to Superintendent].

<sup>6</sup> Greater Omaha Genealogical Society, comp., *Douglas County, Nebraska Marriages, 1854-1881* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 2002), 97; "Pioneer B.C. Editor Passes on," *Battle Creek Enterprise*, Feb. 12, 1953, 1; A. T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska* (Chicago: The Western Historical Co., 1882; reprint Evansville, Ind.: Unigraphic, Inc., 1975), 683, 816; *Fremont Weekly Herald*, Aug. 21, 1884, 6; "Valedictory," *The Free Press* (St. Paul), Nov. 12, 1884, 4.

<sup>7</sup> "Nebraska Jottings," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Mar. 28, 1887, 4; "Will Celebrate 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Presbyterian Church Here Sunday," *Custer County Chief*, Oct. 15, 1936, 1; *Omaha Daily Herald*, March 28, 1888, 4; "Frank Martin the Winner," *Custer County Republican*, Oct. 9, 1890, 1.

<sup>8</sup> "Voice of the State Press," *Omaha Daily Bee*, May 21, 1888, 4; *Nebraska Blue Book and Legislative Manual for 1889* (Lincoln: State Journal Company, 1889), 87; "W.C.T.U.," *Custer County Republican*, Aug. 28, 1890, 8.

<sup>9</sup> "Town and Country"; "Short Bits," *Omaha World-Herald*, Apr. 15, 1896, 5; "Threatened by a Mob," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Apr. 14, 1896, 3; "He Has a Nebraska Record," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Apr. 16, 1896, 3; *Custer County Beacon* (Broken Bow), Apr. 23, 1896, 4; Robert E. Martin to Superintendent. See also Michael J. Pfeifer, "Near Lynchings in Iowa, 1878-1909." <http://academic.evergreen.edu/p/pfeifer/lowanearlynchings.html>, accessed Jan. 14, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Robert E. Martin to Superintendent; "Floater Identified," *Higginsville (Missouri) Advance*, July 14, 1911, 5; "Dead Man Identified," *Higginsville (Missouri) Jeffersonian*, July 14, 1911, 8; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, United States Census, 1910 for Robert E. Martin," in FamilySearch at <https://www.familysearch.org>, accessed Jan. 14, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> "The State's Prosperity"; "Grant County," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Apr. 14, 1888, 5; "A County Seat Controversy," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Aug. 15, 1888, 4; Grant County Historical Society, *Grant County Neighbors and Friends* (Hyannis: Grant County Historical Society, 1980), 10, 46; Lilian L. Fitzpatrick, *Nebraska Place-Names* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1925; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), 68, 165; Elton Perkey, *Perkey's Nebraska Place Names* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1982), 88; Butcher, *Pioneer History*, 362.

<sup>12</sup> *The Centennial History of Oregon, 1811-1912* (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1912), 3:213; Peter B. Smith, "The Bay City/Tillamook Newspaper Wars of 1891-'93," *Bay City Grapevine*. <http://www.baycitygrapevine.com/index.html>, accessed Jan. 14, 2011; "Publisher of First Newspaper in Alaska Dies at 63," *New York Times*, Feb. 24, 1930, 21.

<sup>13</sup> *Centennial History of Oregon*, 3:213; *Fremont Weekly Herald*, June 11, 1885, 3; *Lincoln Weekly Herald*, Apr. 26, 1890, 5.