



Postscript: Building the First Nebraska State Capitol

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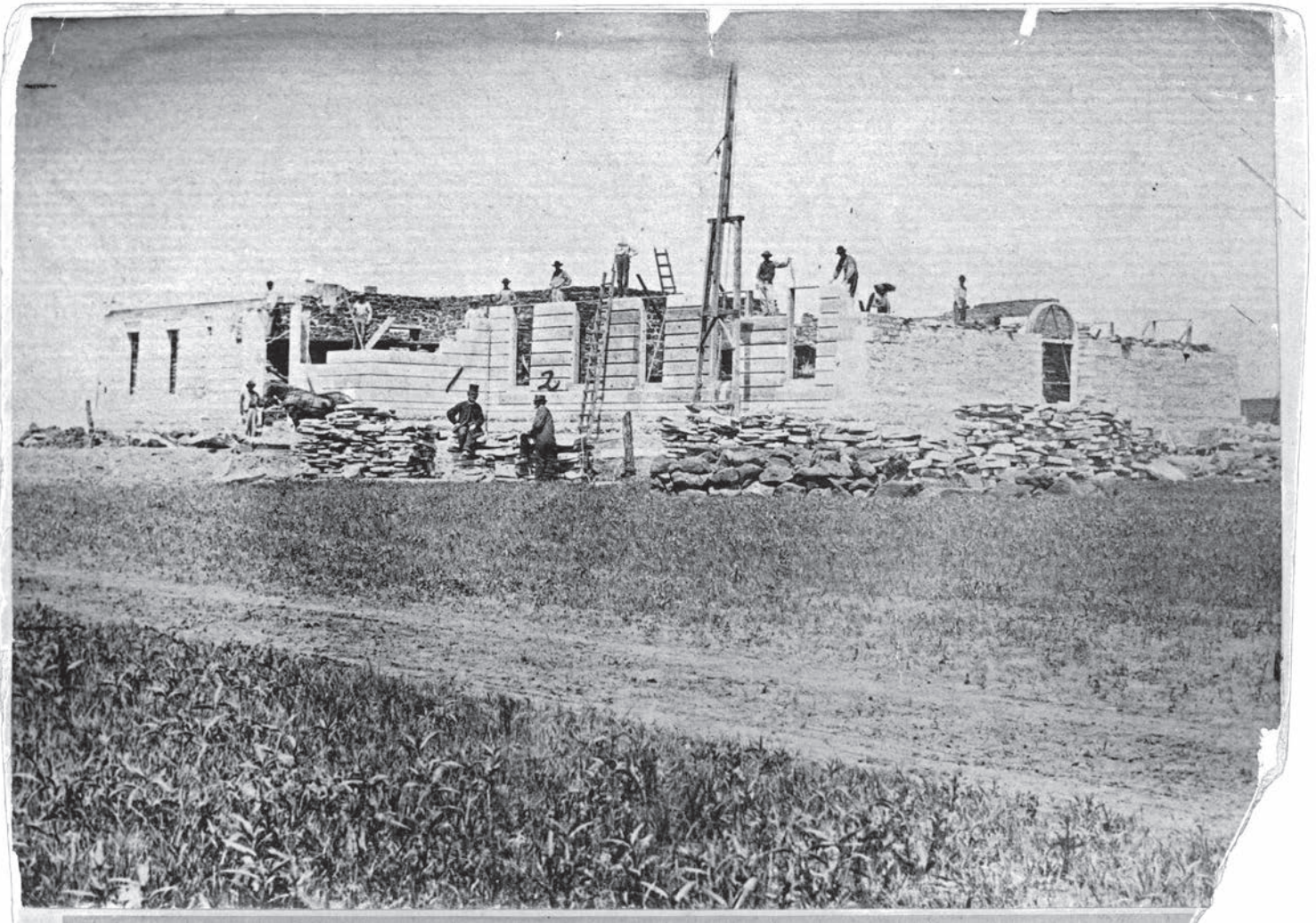
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Building the First Nebraska State Capitol



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At the time of its designation as the state capital in 1867, the town of Lancaster was composed of two stores, one shoe shop, six to seven houses, and approximately thirty residents. Forces opposed to removing the capital from Omaha now focused their invective on the newly renamed Lincoln.

"Nobody will ever go to Lincoln, who does not go to the Legislature, the lunatic asylum, the penitentiary, or some of the State institutions," said the Omaha Republican. "It is founded on fiat, no river, no railroad, no steam wagon, nothing. It is destined for isolation and ultimate oblivion," said another. Governor David Butler feared that unless the new

capitol was completely built and ready to receive the state legislature in January 1869, Lincoln would lose its status and the plan for capital removal would fail after all.

This 1868 photo shows construction at an early stage, with State Auditor John Gillespie and contractor Joseph Ward as the numbered figures. Despite difficulties in obtaining an architect, contractor, and suitable building materials, by December 1, 1868, the building was ready to receive the next month's legislative session (see photo on p. 85). Poorly built, the capitol was replaced just twenty years later. But by then it had served its purpose, that of securing Lincoln's role as the seat of state government.