

1934

1

My first recollection of the Nebraska State Historical Society dates back to 1898 when I began visiting the rooms while doing some research work. The Society had just moved their possessions into the basement of the new library building and J. Amos Barrett was in charge. He had taught in some branch of the City Schools - Greek, if I remember rightly. Because of my association with the N. S. H. S. for so many years, I am constrained to write my recollections of this institution and my impressions of the personnel - this is but an impression on my mind - it is not intended to be a formal history of that institution, but it may throw some light upon the careers of this institution which will help to give you the 'low down' on a lot of things which have made its history.

The father of J. Amos Barrett was once Superintendent of the Lincoln City Schools, and J. Amos Barrett was educated there and in the University of Nebraska. He had a natural aptitude for historical research work and when the Society was given quarters in the basement of the new library building he was given a meager stipend and allowed to sleep in the new quarters where he worked at building shelves for the books they had. He also used his type writer during these night hours, and soon had all the available publications put out by public institutions coming into the State Historical Society library. He prepared paper cartons to hold them - filled all the shelves he had - then built (or begged) more shelves.

All this work, a work of love, was done after his days work, teaching in the City Schools. He was a young, vigorous man, and enjoyed this activity and night work.

All this he had done before I knew him, but later I saw and appreciated his efforts. I came in direct contact with him - came to know him intimately and appreciated his devotion to the interests of the little Society.

The legislature appropriated \$ 500 a biannuam for the support of the Society in those early days, - scarcely the postage he used, but the head of the history department of the University Howard W. Caldwell had been made Secretary of the Society in place of and his interest grew with the years. During his whole life he had the interest of the Society at heart. He was Secretary of the Board, but about 1905, when I came to work with the Society, J. Amos Barnett, acting head of the Society interested was "Assistant Secretary and did all the business except sign the vouchers - Caldwell did this and received a hundred dollars a year, while Barnett was paid a salary of \$1400 a year.

While Barnett was always considered the head of the Society Caldwell never would allow him to be elected to that place. After he married, Mrs Barnett was always chagrined because of "Caldwells Selfishness" as she expressed it; and eventually she succeeded in getting Barnett to sever his connection with the Society.

When Barnett was building up the library and teaching Greek he was a Sunday school man too. Either as a teacher or as Superintendent of a Sunday School, he spent those early days before his marriage.

Mrs Barnett was a widow with three children - one boy and two girls They lived on North 15th on the west side, a few doors north of B. street. Mrs Barnett made him a good wife, and they took part in civic affairs - she was a very intelligent -

Woman, interested in literature and in art. They maintained a modest, hospitable home at this place until her business instincts and leanings drew her to Omaha and into a business venture, where she called her husband a little later. Her business ideas were too visionary, always and ended in disaster. The society needed a building for a home. Mrs Barrett conceived the idea that if the matter was brought to the attention of Andrew Carnegie, who lived in Scotland, that the great philanthropist would immediately construct such a building for the society. At that time he was spending millions on similar enterprises and both Mr & Mrs Barrett were so enthused with the idea that they drew all their personal friends into a scheme by which Mrs Barrett should visit Skibo Castle, the Carnegie home in Scotland.

A purse of several thousand dollars was raised for this purpose by the Barretts as a backing for the enterprise. Of course this was an outright gift, but most every one was promised that when the scheme worked all the money they advanced would be returned to them.

I will remember the morning when all these promises had been cashed in and Mr Barrett held \$1109 in bills which he turned over to Mrs Barrett who immediately started for Scotland. The Barretts were so enthusiastic that most of the people who furnished the cash were completely sold on the proposition and actually expected her to succeed with Carnegie, as she had succeeded in getting money from them. Mrs Barrett had a pleasing person try people actually expected her to succeed, and who knows but she might have done so if she had been admitted and had actually told him her story as we all heard it - but she never got into Skibo Castle.

Mrs Barrett was "up to date" and was, herself, positive of her success. She knew just how every detail of the enterprise should be worked out - first, her wardrobe must be in keeping with the importance of the enterprise, because of the "impression" which such things make on such a man as Mr Carnegie must be.

Before she sailed from New York, she engaged a "maid" to accompany her and keep her extensive wardrobe in impeccable condition. Alas! all this great effort came to naught; she found the castle where Carnegie was residing, so thoroughly guarded that no one was permitted to see him, and after two weeks of effort on the ground, she found that no amount of coaxing or bribing would allow her admission to the great philanthropist; and she came home, discouraged, disheartened and really disgraced in the eyes of her enthusiastic backers. This is only one of her many sad business failures. Soon after this she moved to Omaha, into a big business venture which also went on the rocks. She and her husband were in Kansas City for a time and now (1934) live at Berkeley California.

Barrett had one daughter (Mary Grace) who grew to a lovely, educated woman and who became the stabilizing influence of the declining years of their lives. She married and lived a life of usefulness. James Barrett has a "green house" in Berkeley where he grows plants for the market.

He never again pursued 'historical research work'. W. E. Connelly of Kansas was elected secretary of the Kansas Historical Society, about 1916, I wrote Connelly about Barrett and his aptitude on historical work.

Councilly ^{very} knew Barrett when he was head of the U. S. H. S. - Councilly had prepared a manuscript "The first Provisional ^{Govt} Government of Nebraska", and Barrett was instrumental in getting the U. S. H. S. to publish it as vol. III of their publications. Councilly appreciated that Barrett had helped him to get his ^{first} manuscript published, and called Barrett to Topeka. He was contemplating the preparation of his "Kansas History" at that time and offered Barrett work in preparing copy - a work for which he was eminently ^{well} qualified.

Barrett went to Topeka, and promised to take up this work for Councilly, but Mrs Barrett objected because Barrett did not appear as "Editor" on the completed work, after waiting some time for Barrett to appear for this work, Councilly wrote me, and asked why Barrett had not appeared; when I asked Barrett about it; he told me that Mrs Barrett objected. He certainly needed work as they were living on the little fees Mrs Barrett earned in real estate sales, but he never took up the work with Councilly. I was very much disappointed, as this seemed a chance for him to get into work for which he had a natural bent. The Barrett family soon after this went to California and lived in Berkeley.

Barrett was a likeable fellow who made many friends and I have always lamented that he left the U. S. H. S.

The story of my beginning with this society begins in 1898, about the time Connelley was proof-reading his book. I was teaching at Roca, and doing some writing for magazines and papers. J. Sterling Morton of Nebraska City was publishing his "Conservative" and I wrote a number of articles which he used in that periodical. There were largely Indian exploration sketches, as Indian study was always my "hobby". I had determined to leave school work and devote my self to writing and research, and had refused re-employment for 1900.

Morton was a B & M lawyer. He asked me to visit him at "Arbor Lodge", sending me a round trip pass over the Burlington. We visited and talked of many subjects until he offered me a thousand dollars a year to work for him; but he would not tell me what my duties would be. I was to have a house and a pasture for my ponies. He published a paper, but when I asked what I would be expected to do he said "leave that to me. you give me eight hours a day and I will give you a thousand dollars a year for your time." Still I insisted on knowing what he expected of me before I would close with him. I told him that I had bought a home and he thought that stood in the way of acceptance. "I will buy your home of you if you will come." I came home in a week to "consider".

On Saturday I really came to Lincoln to "look up" various points in my study, and usually met Barrett at the Society rooms.

Morton was president of the society and things were done as he directed. When I came in this Saturday, Barrett handed me a letter which Morton had written him, saying "this introduces E. B., you will please arrange a desk for him as he is going to do

some work for the N.S.H.S." Barrett & I laughed over the letter when he found out that I knew nothing about it; but he showed me the desk. This was how Morton directed the Society and every body acquiesced. However, in ~~June~~ ^{June} of 1900, at a meeting of the Board, I accepted a fund for expenses and my summer was devoted to exploration, as ^{recorded} reported in my first archaeological Report printed in 1902. As you will see by the printed proceedings of the Society, Morton was president one term and Furnas the next - these two pioneers always had the Historical Society at heart and each one did all in his power to assist in the work and support of this Society so long as life lasted. Robt W Furnas was head of the State Agricultural Society for many years; this Society had a fund with which to print their proceedings and he included my archaeological Report in the 1902 Agricultural Society report. He did this again in 1904. Both Furnas and Morton during their life did much to influence the Legislature in our behalf and the appropriations steadily increased according to our needs.

By 1903 the appropriations were sufficient to pay Barrett a regular salary and my employment was continuous. The library had grown under Barrett's efforts and he had full charge of its expansion, in spite of the fact that Caldwell was "Secretary" and Barrett merely "assistant-sec" who did all the work.

A. E. Sheldon, who was elected representative, made the Society rooms his head quarters and was given the "news paper department". Barrett had secured nearly every news paper published in the State. These came regularly by mail - were checked on cards and

filed in regular volumes of two years to the book and bound for future reference. Mr Sheldon had this work in hand, and he did, also, what Caldwell called "field work". This consisted of special historical items of research and study.

About this time there came to the rooms Mr C. S. Paine, who was becoming identified with a new history of Nebraska which was to be edited by J. Sterling Morton, president of the N.S.H.S., and Dr Geo. R. Miller, then Editor of the "World Herald" of Omaha, Dr Miller was also much interested in the history of the State. Paine came into active control of the business end of this history; Barnett allowed him a desk and "headquarters" in the rooms of the N.S.H.S. and we were soon interested in his pleasing personality. Incidentally it may be said here, that Paine through his industry and business occurrence made the "Morton History" as it became known in later years a business success. It had been twice wrecked before he took it in charge with its many debts and contract embarrassments; when its business was finally settled Paine had nothing for his efforts, but he "made good" on all contracts. Some people whispered that Paine was a "grafted" but when his estate was at last settled no one could find that which he "grafted" after he had been in the rooms long enough to see how matters stood, Barnett was contemplating a move to Omaha and Paine said he would come into the Society if he was elected secretary, and manage its affairs without cost to the society, as he appreciated the value such a position would be to the Morton's history.

at the next annual meeting he was nominated for secretary against Caldwell. The meetings were never well attended, so he beat Caldwell by three votes.

9

filed in order for future reference. They were bound and preserved. The various departments began development as soon as the Legislature began to appropriate money with which to pay the cost of maintaining the departments - The Museum was made the first department and the Quadian remains of the State were studied and by 1902 I was devoting my entire time to museum interests, Sheldon had the newspapers, and various field activities in hand. Barnett supervised all the Historical Society interests and Caldwell signed all vouchers. This was the line-up when C. S. Paine came on the scene. He was a young active business man with a fine personality and every one liked him. He was interested in promoting the Morton History and was allowed desk room in the Society.

About this time Barnett expected to leave the society and Paine said he would do his supervision for nothing if he was made secretary in Caldwell's place. The annual meetings were sparsely attended and at the next meeting Paine was elected secretary which, at that time carried with it the entire management of the Society, and a salary of \$1400 a year. - This he took with the management and soon Caldwell with Sheldon's assistance, clashed with Paine's process of doing business, and the first "discord" ever known in the Society began to develop. Soon an open rupture shown plainly. Paine was a hot headed fellow who said disagreeable things to both Sheldon & Caldwell. Sheldon said very little but he could quietly do a lot of aggravating things. About the time for Paine to sell his new history, Sheldon edited a commercial history for an Eastern concern - it was a brief short history but was sold so it lost many patrons who actually thought they were getting the real Morton History.

The controversy continued between these two men for a number of years, until the entire Society naturally aligned on one side or the other. Until Paine died of pneumonia about 1917. He left a second wife and three children. The Society elected a E. Sheldon to fill Paine's place as secretary.

Paine made a good secretary - some people accused him of being a "grafted" but he left no estate, and no one ever pointed to a single dishonest act that made him money. I could not get along comfortably with Paine - this was largely due to his controversy with Sheldon, and the open break came when Paine demanded that I "never speak" to Sheldon again - I left the Society and went to Kansas City, after Paine's death Sheldon called me up and asked me to come back and take charge of the museum.