



A FARMER'S PASSION FOR KNOWLEDGE



*Benton Aldrich and the
Clifton Library Association*

BY JOHN IRWIN



The subscription library association created by Benton Aldrich on his Nemaha County farm in 1876 was one of the most unusual rural circulating libraries in nineteenth century America. It was the unlikely conjunction of an eccentric nonconformist, his obsession for books and learning, a conflict with neighbors, and an idealistic desire to share knowledge with others to raise “moral” standards.

Historians have often noted the considerable hurdles on the frontier to cultural ventures that did not serve the most immediate practical ends. “Almost overwhelming obstacles thus stood in the way of the growth... of intellectual life in the early West; the inadequate communications, the sparseness of population, the lack of homogeneous background on the part of settlers in a given community, the great number of illiterate or semi-literate people that sought the new country, the anti-intellectualism of great number of plain folk and some preachers.”¹ Nebraska historian Everett Dick further commented: “On the Prairie in the sixties and seventies as a rule brawn and nerve were more respected than brains and culture. Often men felt themselves sufficiently educated if they could read some, write a crude hand, and ‘figger.’ ...On the edge of the prairie frontier a person with a meager college experience had at times to be tactful about it to avoid being dubbed ‘stuckup’ or a ‘smart Aleck.’”² Yet in spite of such daunting challenges, a desire for education and culture flourished in some frontier localities.

Nemaha County, adjacent to the Missouri River in southeastern Nebraska, was among the first Anglo-settled areas in the mid-1850s. Even from its beginning, the small population that by 1860 was only barely more than 3,000, supported a surprising number of cultural initiatives. In Brownville, a public school opened in 1856, followed by the short-lived Brownville College with its medical school in 1857, while a high school commenced in 1859.³ In 1857 the Territorial Legislature incorporated the Brownville Lyceum, Library and Literary Association, in spite of the national economic panic of that year. Its first debate addressed a burning contemporary topic: “...as to whether the Indian had a greater right to complain of whites than the Negro.”⁴ The association underwent ups and downs common to a private library organization. In 1864 it suspended operation for a time after a fire, but interest revived and it flourished in the 1870s. Ten miles north of Brownville at Peru, a library and reading room were part of the Methodist-sponsored Mount

Vernon College that opened in 1866. The following year this became the state’s first tax-supported normal school and later Peru State College, the oldest academic institution in the state.⁵

There were libraries elsewhere in Nemaha County. The 1860 federal census recorded ten private libraries with a combined total of 1,005 volumes just six years after initial settlement. Ten years later in 1870, the census still listed ten libraries, but the number of volumes had tripled with three Sabbath school libraries, and seven private libraries containing 3,000 volumes.⁶ Some of these libraries may have stemmed from the extensive local interest in improving agriculture and stock breeding. As early as 1857 the Territorial Legislature passed an act incorporating the Nemaha County Agricultural Society, and precinct farmers’ clubs also organized. In the 1860s and 1870s there were numerous articles in such publications as the *American Agriculturist* exhorting farmers’ clubs to create libraries, because in the practical application of agriculture the proper method was “to go to the bottom of every subject, to understand its theory, its history, and the conclusions to which science and wide experience lead. These things can best be got by books.”⁷ In 1866 the editor of the *Brownville Advertiser* collected \$70 from Brownville merchants for a competitive distribution of agriculture books to local farmers’ clubs. Likewise, in 1860 the clerk of the Board of Education promoted the establishment of school libraries.⁸ While there was indeed an early interest in education and libraries in Nemaha County, Benton Aldrich’s creation of the Clifton Library Association twenty years after its first settlement marked the most curious and extensive development of the rural library movement in Nebraska.

Benton Aldrich’s ancestors, early Puritan immigrants from England to Massachusetts in 1631, were pioneer settlers at Westmoreland in western New Hampshire in 1741. It was at this homestead ninety years later that Benton Aldrich was born on May 3, 1831, to Alfred and Mary Farrar Aldrich.⁹ His New Hampshire ancestors were prominent in local affairs, and were a close-knit, individualistic, and self-conscious family that snobbishly prided themselves on their early New England ancestry. This emphasis on family and lineage exerted a profound influence on Aldrich’s later life in Nebraska.

As a child Aldrich’s meager formal education was at a common school for eleven weeks each year. However, his reading habit and

Left: Along with other Aldrich family materials, some of the books from the Clifton Library are now in the collections of History Nebraska.



Alfred and Mary Farrar Aldrich, parents of Benton Aldrich. RG2411

thirst for books formed at an early age with the encouragement of his high-minded parents, who could recite long poems from memory. In his youth, Aldrich would have known of libraries and their value. There were six libraries alone in nearby Keene, New Hampshire, and perhaps he used one or more of them.¹⁰ Similarly, twenty miles east of Westmoreland is Peterborough, which—already supporting several private subscription libraries—in 1833 became the location of the first tax-supported free public library in the modern world.¹¹

When he was “about eighteen” Aldrich studied for a full term at the academy high school at Saxtons River, Vermont, and excelled in advanced mathematics that he studied for pleasure. He also learned the art of surveying on his own with only the aid of a book and a surveyor’s compass and chain his father purchased for him. In 1851 at the age of twenty, Aldrich was offered a lowly bank position, but like many of his generation of young New Englanders, he left instead for the alluring West with the enticement of better opportunity and adventure.¹² First he journeyed to Hudson, St. Croix

County, Wisconsin, where for several years he was a hired farm laborer, and where in 1854 he wed Martha Jane Harshman, a native of Washington, Pennsylvania, one of fourteen children of John and Hannah (Smalley) Harshman.¹³ They moved further west to Winona County, Minnesota, and settled on sixty acres of land, where Aldrich operated a post office in his log cabin for the rural settlement of Wiscoy.¹⁴ Seven years later in 1862, Aldrich sold his land and the family moved east to Dunn County, Wisconsin.¹⁵

Dissatisfied with their prospects, in the autumn of 1864 Benton Aldrich was again exploring new lands while Martha Aldrich single-handedly plowed their Wisconsin farm with yoke and oxen. Walking across Iowa, he crossed the Missouri River on a ferry below the mouth of the Platte River. He passed through Nemaha County on his way to Doniphan, Kansas, where he had intended to settle. Disenchanted, however, in discovering most men carried revolvers in this Civil War border country, he returned to Nemaha County and stayed the first night in the home of William Hawley, one of the first settlers in the area. After

scouting prospective homesteads for two days, Aldrich selected forty acres in Washington Precinct, one mile south of Hawley and three miles southeast of the village of Howard, later renamed Brock. The county had been inhabited for ten years, but this less desirable land was not taken because of the scarcity of timber.¹⁶ Even for the time it was an unusually small farm to support a family.

Choosing not to lie about his already filed homestead in Minnesota, Aldrich thus needed \$50 for the full price that he did not have with him. After returning to Wisconsin, he sent the money to William Hawley with the unusual instruction to file the title at the US Land Office in Brownville in Martha Aldrich's name. From the beginning, this unpopular act set the family apart from their neighbors. "I was known far and wide as 'the man with only forty acres of land, and his wife owns that.' And she was a land owner and had children of school age, she could vote in school meetings. This condition was abbreviated into 'Two on a forty.'"¹⁷

After a six-week journey by wagon and oxen, the Aldriches arrived at their land on April 11, 1865, their home for the remainder of their lives.¹⁸ That spring the family dug limestone and constructed a half-underground dugout-grotto dwelling. The stones were stacked, chinked with smaller stones, and banked with dirt on the north. The dugout, 11 ½ feet by 16 ½ feet with a dirt floor and wood-shingled roof, was divided into two rooms: the east a kitchen, and the west for "study, relaxation and sleeping."¹⁹ Aldrich purchased a cookstove and lumber in Brownville and from this fashioned the meager household furnishings. Some years later the Aldrich's added a two-story addition to the southeast corner of the dugout, but his grandson Hugh Stoddard recalled that this section was seldom used by 1900. This original crude structure was the center of Aldrich family activities until 1911.²⁰

As in Minnesota, Aldrich took the initiative and in May 1868 became the postmaster for the rural vicinity named Clifton because of its uneven, rocky geography.²¹ To remedy the lack of local timber, in 1866 Aldrich embarked on a manic lifelong career of tree and shrub planting, which would make him one of the most zealous horticulturists in Nebraska. Even though his efforts are now largely forgotten, he did as much to make Nebraska the "Tree Planter State" as some of his more famous contemporaries, such as J. Sterling Morton in nearby Nebraska City (his exact opposite in attitude and lifestyle),

Robert Furnas, and his friend Charles Bessey of the University of Nebraska. Aldrich solved the fencing problem before the wide-scale use of barbed wire by planting a vast number of osage orange plants close together. In 1870 alone, he and his family planted 100,000 seedlings.²² He also began a nursery that became the largest in Nemaha County. Between 1869 to 1871 he planted 3,700 apple trees, as well as many cherry trees and extensive patches of raspberries and gooseberries. Eventually he planted a total of 6,000 apple trees. His home was described as "...one of the prettiest sites to be found anywhere... surrounded with groves of ornamental and fruit trees, retired from the dusty road and reached though an embowered driveway between a colonnade of maples..." This brought him a great amount of "company" from throughout southeastern Nebraska to purchase his plants, produce, and fence posts. In one season alone he sold almost sixteen train carloads of apples.²³

It would be misleading to think that Benton Aldrich led a complacent, isolated life in frontier Nebraska. Along with American and European



Head of a manure fork, made in Vermont in 1820, brought by Benton and Martha Jane Aldrich to Nebraska and used on their Nemaha County farm. It was donated to History Nebraska by their son, Alfred. History Nebraska 3265



Handwoven, double weave coverlet, made by Hannah Smally Harshman of Washington County, Pennsylvania, circa 1810-25. Hannah's daughter Martha Jane Aldrich brought it to Nebraska in 1865. History Nebraska 5137

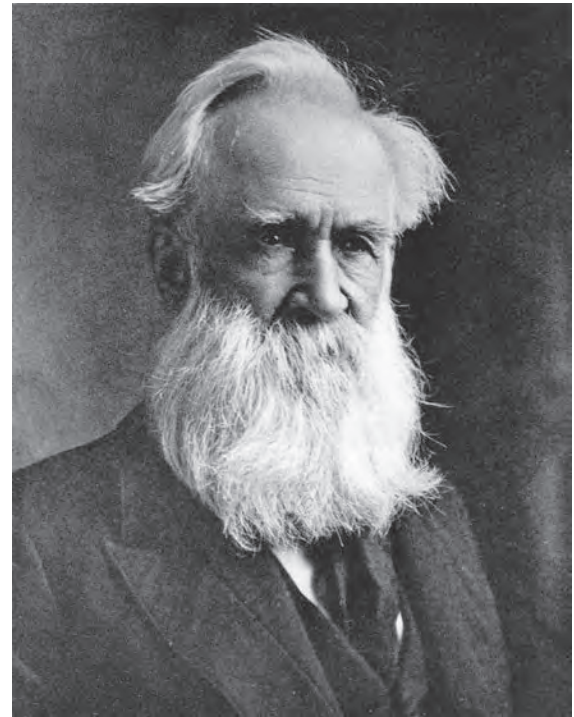
Top: Benton Aldrich.
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Bottom: Martha Jane Aldrich with unidentified child. RG2304-10-33

intellectuals, and society as a whole, he was caught up in one of the most significant issues of the Victorian era, the fiery controversy of Darwinism. The idea of natural selection, adaptation, and survival of species, conflicted with a traditional belief that humans were created by God in his image by single act of creation. For many, this new theory of evolution threatened their conception of an ordered world, in the same manner that Galileo and the Copernican cosmology had unsettled European society two centuries earlier.

For Benton Aldrich, however, these were liberating ideas, and he was a vehement lifelong disciple in promoting them. "The old beliefs are gone, being driven away by science which has become so irresistible in the last half of century. I have no fellow feeling of this suffering. I had in my younger days no hope of Heaven or fear of Hell, no belief of there being any such places. I have up to date no desires as to whether I live another life or not. I do not expect to live another life. I see no possibility of it."²⁴ He rejected the idea of an anthropomorphic godhead. "As man rose from savagery, through barbarism, to civilization, the gods became less in number continually, until now the older idea of a personality is dropped."²⁵ Aldrich however subscribed to a deistic belief in the "Universal Power" that he sometimes referred to as "The Planter of Trees," as it related to evolution, which he saw as the primary law of the universe. For him the scientific method revealed and supported this law, and he believed it was foolish to have "beliefs without knowledge." At the age of eighty-two he summed up his lifelong creed: "...all our knowledge is to be based on science, not in a belief invented by men who have axes to grind ... [I have] obeyed the laws of Nature as far as I was informed, and always with benefit and happiness."²⁶

As a corollary, Aldrich, along with many others who would later be derogatorily called Social Darwinists, was convinced that the human species was grouped according to family origin. The method by which human society rose from barbarity, the "survival of the fittest," was for him the survival of the "moral" fittest. As his parents had believed, he was convinced that his own family was located on a high position on this evolutionary scale. "All that came to America were the morally elite of Europe at that time, and our folks the front rank of these—have been so since, and are so now..."²⁷ For him it was the family unit that provided the identity and creative potential of the individual with each new generation. "Each



of us is the sum total of his lineage. Each one can in a slight degree vary his inheritance received so that transmitted will be for better or worse. This is the great aim and object in life."²⁸ With a mystical attachment to the land, Aldrich embraced the idea



that his family's evolutionary destiny was bound up in its wise stewardship through cultivation. He also believed his family was endangered on one side by values of the "lower classes." Conversely, with an arch anti-aristocratic snobbishness, he was convinced an even greater hazard to his family was its vulnerability to corrupting materialism and the degeneracy of the wealthy thorough idleness, frivolity, and luxury. For Aldrich these were not abstract doctrines, but ever-present threats. He fervently believed living an otherworldly life of hardship and austerity was character building, and a necessary moral virtue he imposed on his family as a role model for others.

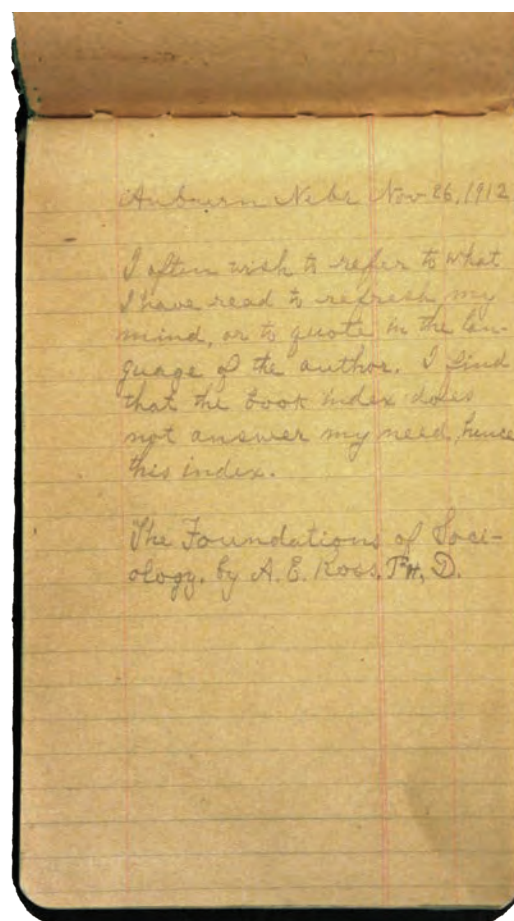
The best example of the application of his resolute principles is in his family's home. Beginning in 1865 with a small acreage and little money, by 1893 he, his wife, and son Karl through hard work and frugality were worth \$12,000 beyond

their indebtedness, and five years later they owned 450 acres of land. However, even though they could have afforded a more substantial dwelling, by voluntary self-denial Benton Aldrich's primary residence for almost fifty years was the original two-room crude dwelling, described in 1904 as "a composite of grotto and dugout...curious in appearance." This was decades after his neighbors vacated their first primitive dwellings as soon as they had the means for larger, more comfortable homes. As a contrarian, throughout his life Aldrich virtuously bragged that he lived "in the cheapest house of any couple in Nemaha County."²⁹

His unconventional, iconoclastic ideas set Aldrich apart from his neighbors in many areas. He had been an outspoken abolitionist, but as a pacifist chose not to participate in the Civil War. A 2001 *Nebraska History* article describes his hiring black farm workers in 1880 who were former

Benton and Martha Jane Aldrich and their children and grandchildren at their dugout home, 1903.
RG2304-10-06

One of Benton Aldrich's memorandum books. With an apparent view to history, he writes on the first page, shown here: "Auburn Nebr Nov 26. 1912. I often wish to refer to what I have read to refresh my mind, or to quote in the language of the author. I find that the book index does not answer my need, hence this index. The Foundations of Sociology by A. E. Ross, PhD." The following pages contain page-by-page notes on Ross's book. RG3264.AM S3.F3



slaves from Tennessee. Almeda Greene, a widow, worked and lived in the Aldrich home, and became a lifelong family friend after she moved to Brownville.³⁰ In a period of overt racism, this unusual action may have made him unpopular with his neighbors. However, with a patronizing bigotry and convoluted logic, he wrote, "They [blacks] are of an inferior race and must have friends among the more able of the whites or the low whites will run over them."³¹ He also had a low opinion of Native Americans, and rationalized his ancestors' taking aboriginal lands in New Hampshire. "Our folks showed them to live better by habitual work than by their way. But the Indian chose to disregard this enlightened path, and thus were rightfully destroyed."³²

Benton Aldrich typified a brand of stern, autocratic family patriarchs in nineteenth century Nebraska. Resembling Mari Sandoz's irascible father immortalized in *Old Jules*, Aldrich's public spiritedness was contradicted by his acerbic personality. Similar to the intolerance of his Puritan ancestors, Aldrich was as Pharisaical

in his moralistic secular piety as some of the church clergy who opposed him. His grandson recalled him as forceful, domineering, and having temper tantrums. He "had few friends and little influence," because "his ideas on many subjects ran contrary to most peoples, and he was outspoken on what he believed, and spoke of other's ways in very derogatory terms. His idea of an effective organization was to keep authority and responsibility in the hands of a few selected persons."³³ Aldrich's overarching concern was exerting his influence over his family and in furthering his ancestral dynasty. However, his grandson Hugh Stoddard stated that "family relationships would have been better had they not been kept together."³⁴ Another granddaughter noted fifty years after his death that even though "his influence in tree planting and library service cannot be overlooked," she remembered him as pompous, narrow-minded, and bigoted.³⁵

Characteristically, Aldrich also had strong opinions about public education. Although he helped build schools in Minnesota and Nebraska,

and took his turn boarding teachers in his home, Aldrich was not impressed with the qualifications of teachers who at that time often had only an eighth grade education.³⁶ In general he was opposed to schools because they were a “tyranny of the individual to conform,” and his five children were mostly home-schooled. He reported that at age two his eldest son Karl learned to use a world globe, could spell at age four, and by age seven had a greater vocabulary than the local teacher and was reading the newspaper to the surprise of many.³⁷ The Aldrichs also provided musical books for their children to study harmony, and arranged for private music lessons. This intense focus on home instruction continued with his grandchildren. Hugh Stoddard reported he was using the unabridged dictionary before starting to school, and was acquainted with Mendel’s law of heredity before high school.³⁸

Like Darwinism, the idea of self-culture took the United States by storm in the nineteenth century. In the tradition of self-improvement advocated by Benjamin Franklin, the rise of popular democracy and the country’s expansion reinforced the idea that an individual of any social standing or situation had a natural right to knowledge and its social and economic advantages.³⁹ Nowhere was this belief stronger than in New England during Aldrich’s childhood, and he devoted his adult life to its idealistic pursuit. Aldrich believed that all should aspire to “... something manifestly higher, better, more lasting, introducing them to a more elevated position in science, literature, art, taste.”⁴⁰ He likewise venerated the tools and method—books and reading—by which knowledge could be acquired. For their survival, in Darwinian terms, he believed families and individuals must continually adapt to new situations through learning and acquiring knowledge. This was a moral imperative that he approached earnestly. In a characteristic statement, he wrote to his sister about his family’s 1893 journey to the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition: “We shall go to see and learn, and not to display fine cloth nor to eat fine food.”⁴¹

As a young man in frontier Wisconsin and Minnesota, Aldrich continued his manic reading habit developed in childhood. He purchased such magazines as *The Phrenological Journal*, *Life Illustrated*, and *Harper’s Magazine*, and books such as Thomas Paine’s *Political Works*, Dr. Shaw’s *Management of Children*, and a hydropathic cookbook, often at a personal sacrifice of extreme economy for his family. He wrote justifying his book purchases, “You think that it is too much for

poor folks. We live entirely on vegetables food, buy but one article of food at the store, and but 2 or three anywhere else. I think \$1.00 per week well pays the board for the three of us....”⁴² By 1856 he had collected forty volumes, including a Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary, and created a homemade index to his many magazine and newspaper subscriptions.⁴³ Nine years later, probably to the dismay of his wife Martha, the only article of furniture in their wagon bound for Nebraska was the bookcase. Only three months after his arrival at Clifton and even before he broke the sod, he purchased a book on botany for his children, and wrote, “I am as interested in the study as a man working 12 to 14 hours a day can be.”⁴⁴ In spite of grasshopper plagues, drought, and impoverishment, the Aldrich book collection of practical and literary subjects dramatically expanded over the next ten years. In 1876, however, unusual circumstances compelled the family to publicly share their private library with their neighbors.

Aldrich’s free-thinking agnosticism and belief in his own moral superiority eventually led to conflict with his neighbors. He wrote that David Berkeley Coryell, elder and preacher of the local Christian (Campbellite) Church, approached the family one day as they were hoeing their osage seedlings. “... [Coryell] told us we must join his church, or they would have you out of the neighborhood. This he said was a friendly act of his to avoid having to begin again on a new farmer. I told him that there wasn’t the least probability of our joining his church, and I doubted the church’s ability to drive me away.”⁴⁵ Fifty years later his granddaughter remembered his frequent quip: “Grandfather said, ‘Mr. Coryell prayed for him all winter and preyed on him all summer.’”⁴⁶ Aldrich’s first Clifton friend, William Hawley (also a church member), urged him to stay. For a time Aldrich became an outcast and he lamented that many of his neighbors would not even buy a stamp from him. He advertised to sell his land, but could find no buyers wanting to move into the neighborhood because the dispute was well-known throughout the county. Eventually, public opinion turned in his favor. He reminisced that the hostile neighbors became outcasts themselves and desired to leave, but they too were unsuccessful in selling their land for the same reason.⁴⁷ Aldrich admitted that “I was astonished at the turn of affairs and terribly depressed too. Whatever I might have to put up with, I resolved that the next generation should

be a little better for my having lived here, that my children should find better surroundings than I had. I failed in more than one attempt at improvement; finally I started the circulating library.”⁴⁸

Along with his stated altruism, Aldrich opened his library to unite his neighbors and thwart his enemies. Realizing the delicate situation, he approached some people whom he thought would be interested with the stipulation that any member could blackball any potential new member. From a list of twenty people in five school districts, the original library association had thirteen members. In 1876 the rules of the association were passed at the organization meeting, and Aldrich was elected librarian, secretary, and treasurer.⁴⁹ Through a yearly membership fee, a member could “choose such books as 80% of his money will buy, the other 20% goes into a ‘common fund’ which is likewise all applied to buying books or magazines for the library and are owned in common.”⁵⁰

Aldrich scrupulously maintained a ledger of fees paid and materials owned by each member. A member could withdraw his books at any time from the organization but would not lose the 20 percent paid into the common fund. This amount was the savings between the retail and discount price through purchasing materials in bulk.⁵¹ Recognizing the yearly growth of books was more desirable, Aldrich opposed paying a large initial sum for membership. Too, he was loath to allow life membership status because he feared the possibility of creating “an aristocratic dead-headed society.”

From its inception the library association was a success in spite of, according to Aldrich, it being an “Infidel Concern and denounced not by name but in unmistakable terms from the pulpit occasionally.”⁵² The income for the first year was \$40, with a circulation of 250 books among twenty-four borrowers. Six years later in 1882, Aldrich issued a printed library catalog to provide better access to the growing number of borrowers throughout the county. That year his daughter Mary presented a paper describing the association at the first farmer’s institute in Nebraska, where Professor Thompson of the University of Nebraska believed the Clifton Library was the only one of its kind in Nebraska.⁵³ The circulation rose to 900 volumes per year, and the income doubled to \$85. The members paid \$55, and the remaining amount came from non-members who were allowed to check out books at 10 cents for one month, 35 cents for three months, or \$1.00 per year. This dual system had great appeal, and gained many additional readers.

In all, more than sixty families regularly borrowed books.⁵⁴ A subscriber paid less than half the cost of purchasing a book compared to an association member. To compensate for this cost, Aldrich paid the difference himself, which in 1879 was \$40.⁵⁵ The library’s popularity grew, and by the mid-1880s volunteers hosted four branches in villages as far away as twenty-two miles. It was in effect a private county-wide library system.⁵⁶ Aldrich was particularly pleased that towns were served from a farmers’ association, and that it was conducted on ‘business principles,’ not financed by “...oyster suppers or begging. We have never asked nor received any aid from publishers nor booksellers.”⁵⁷

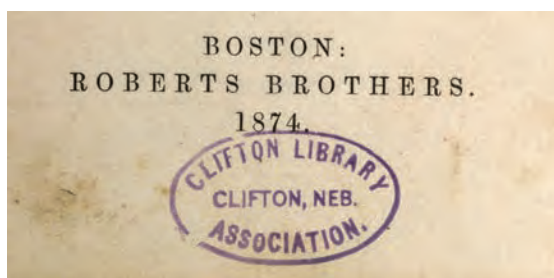
The operation of the library was simple. The majority of the materials were housed in the Aldrich home, and when a person had finished with one item, it was returned for another. Identification of the books was noted by a small oval rubber stamp on the title page with the phrase, “Clifton Library Association, Clifton, Nebraska.” There were no rules regarding how long a book could be checked out. Aldrich reported: “We find it better to depend on the want of a fresh book to return the old one. If one should be kept out entirely too long a postal card will generally insure its return. Many times it takes a busy man three months to well-read a solid book, and I do not see the propriety of asking him to hurry through it or return it half read. It does not cost any more to furnish one book fifty-two weeks than it does fifty-two books one week.”⁵⁸ Aldrich bought some books from a local bookseller, probably in Brownville, but through correspondence he also extensively patronized second-hand book stores in New York City where he purchased older editions at half price. He was a stickler for specifying books of good paper and binding and larger print.⁵⁹

In addition to purchasing book requests from Association members, he reported on his own selection criteria: “The way I do is to buy a book that I think has real fame—that is recommended by those in which I have confidence—and if I can read it to advantage, that is being uplifted by it all right, if not, I pass it to some who I hope can. It is a good book for someone.”⁶⁰ Aldrich was careful not to order books of a controversial theological character. Personally he disdained the “wasteful extravagancies” of reading merely for pleasure and entertainment instead of “...learning anything or of improving his or her condition of mind.”⁶¹ However, he was realistic and practical enough to recognize other readers’ needs and desires. “How to buy

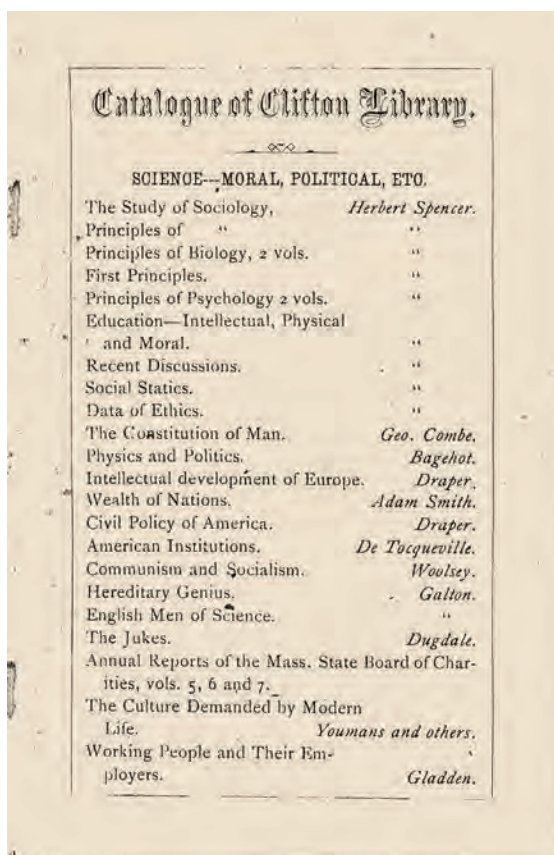
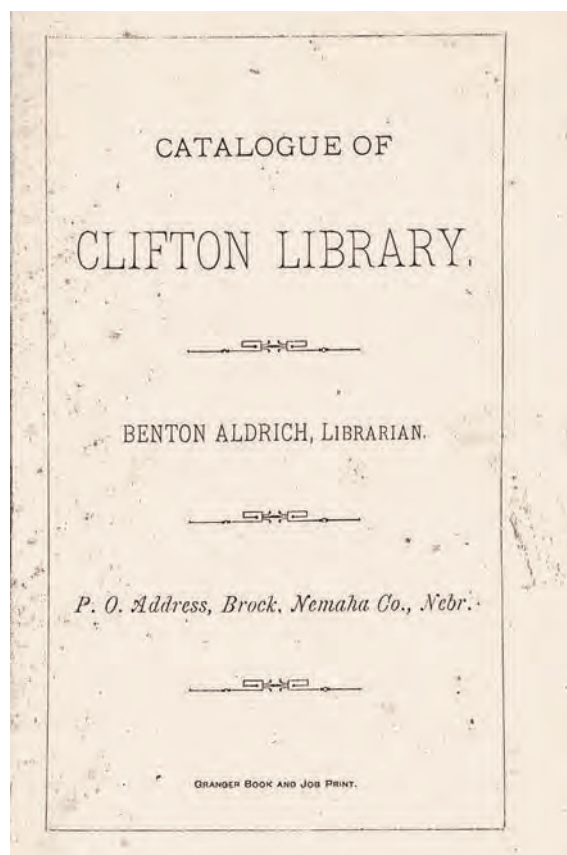
books which are interesting and still free from sensationalism is one of the most important points in library management. It will not do to buy many books which people ought to read but will not; a live library cannot be sustained with dead books.”⁶² Aldrich stressed that one of the strongest points of the library should be a large collection of juvenile books, and he urged parents to understand that children want to read fiction more than anything else. He wrote, that “... generally if the parent insists upon his child reading dry books the child will rebel and either not read anything or the first sensational trash that falls in his way.”⁶³ He was proud that the majority of readers were under the age of twenty-five, and that his “high ideals” had a direct influence upon the local youth.⁶⁴

A major reason for the library’s success was the appeal of its diverse collection, a combination of both popular literature and the extensive literary and scientific volumes in Aldrich’s personal library. The 1882 printed catalog divided the book collection of 678 titles into fifteen categories: Science—Moral, Political, etc.; Physical Science; Essays; History; Biography; Travels; Fiction-American; Fiction-Foreign; Juveniles; Magazines; Poetry; Agriculture; Health; Reference; and Miscellaneous.⁶⁵

Fiction composed the largest group with 229 volumes. The library held many of the bestsellers of the day, by such authors as Edward P. Roe, Mary J. Holmes, Louisa M. Alcott, Lew Wallace, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, no doubt reflecting the interests of various Association members.⁶⁶ Balanced with the popular was an impressive collection of American literary authors of the nineteenth century, as Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Washington Irving, Henry James, and Mark Twain. The list of European writers on the shelves was equally distinguished, with both notable writers of the day as well as classics: John Stuart Mill, Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, George Eliot, Jules Verne, John Ruskin, Anthony Trollope,



The Clifton Library stamp appears on the title page of all the books formerly in the library’s collection.



Title page and sample interior page of the *Catalogue of Clifton Library*. Herbert Spencer, well represented in the Clifton collection, was a popular and influential Victorian-era English philosopher known for his ideas about the social implications of evolution. RG3264.AM

Leo Tolstoy, Miguel Cervantes, Thomas Hardy, Thomas Carlyle, George Sand, Oliver Goldsmith, and Johann Goethe. Poets included Shakespeare, Pope, Byron, Longfellow, Tennyson, and Dante. Biography represented a wide range of subjects from Frederick the Great and Garibaldi to William Penn, Pontiac, and Aaron Burr, while worldwide travel books ranged from Venice and Turkey to Nepal, Ceylon, and Abyssinia. The travels of Cook, Livingston, Darwin, and Marco Polo jostled for space on the crowded shelves. The second largest section was the “Juveniles” with ninety-eight books, including many titles by famous nineteenth century children’s authors such as Louisa May Alcott, Elizabeth Kellogg, and Mayne Reed.

It was, however, the profusion of scientific, technical, and reference literature that made this collection unique. There were an abundance of books on mathematics, physics, astronomy, geology, geography, botany, and zoology, books on volcanoes, earthquakes, electricity, and planets, and an unusual number of chemistry volumes. Humboldt’s five volume *Cosmos* were on the shelves alongside numerous volumes by Charles Darwin, Aldrich’s favorite writer, as well as Thomas Henry Huxley, and John Tyndal, the celebrated British physicist. Similarly, the collection contained an impressive set of nine volumes by Herbert Spencer, the most famous Victorian intellectual theorist and one of the founders of the emerging new discipline of sociology. There was also an extensive assortment of current books about social, moral, and political theories by such Social Darwinist writers as John Draper, and William Sumner, the highly respected Yale professor.⁶⁷

There were books on linguistics, writing, teaching, and psychology. The agriculture section included volumes on swine and poultry husbandry, veterinary science, tree, fruit, and flower cultivation. Martha Aldrich served as a nurse/doctor in the Clifton vicinity. In the health section were such titles as *Elements of Physiology*, *Cerebral Hyperemia*, *Health for Women*, *Healthy Houses*, *Diseases of Modern Life*, and surprising for the Victorian era, *Sex in Education*, a largely forbidden topic that Aldrich strongly advocated all parents to discuss with their children. The reference section included fifteen volumes of the *Library of Universal Knowledge*, the *Young Folks Cyclopedia of Common Things*, *Annotated Statutes of Nebraska*, the *Nebraska Legislative Manual*, eleven volumes of the *Nebraska Supreme Court Reports*, ten volumes of the *U. S. Department of*

Agriculture Reports, the *Smithsonian Institution Reports*, and the *Official Gazette of the U. S. Patent Office*. Perhaps the most intriguing volume was titled *What To Do and Why*.

The magazine section featured runs of the *North American Review*, *Scribner’s*, *Popular Science*, *St Nicholas* magazine for children, four agriculture journals including *The American Agriculturalist*, and the *Reports and Transactions* volumes of the Nebraska State Historical Society, of which Aldrich was a charter member. He also subscribed to many local and national newspapers, including the *New York Tribune*.

In short, this collection represented the library of an educated—indeed an erudite—Victorian gentleman. It could have been a college library of the time, and probably contained volumes the not-much-larger fledgling Nebraska academic libraries would have liked to have in their collections. Instead of gracing a mansion of an elite city dweller, the Clifton Library was found on a small Nebraska farm in the humble dugout home of a mostly unschooled, but highly educated family.

The Clifton Library was remarkable not only for its farm origin, innovation of village branches, and unusual scope and depth of intellectual content, but also for its size in comparison with other libraries in Nebraska at the time. In 1876, the year of the library’s founding, a major federal study of American libraries revealed the paucity and meager size of Nebraska’s libraries. Of the fourteen listed, the University of Nebraska Library contained only 1,400 volumes, while the Lincoln Public Library Association had but 500 volumes, roughly the size of the Clifton Library at this time.⁶⁸ Nine years later in 1885, the Clifton Library was listed among the forty-eight libraries of all types in Nebraska. With 800 volumes, its collection was one the largest libraries available for public use in the state, the same size as the Hastings Public Library and the Beatrice W.C.T.U. Library and Reading Room, and larger than the Fremont, Grand Island, and Kearney libraries. In comparison, the nearby Brownville Public Library Association and the Nebraska City Ladies Library had had only slightly larger collections at 1,056 and 1,743 volumes. The Peru State Normal School had but 2,250 volumes. The Nebraska State Library at the State Capitol in Lincoln was the largest in the state with 24,000 volumes, but this collection held only law books and federal government publications, not books of interest for general public use.⁶⁹

The Association probably continued for at least a decade, possibly into the 1890s. It may have faded gradually, or perhaps disbanded on a specific date. A 1902 Nemaha County history stated that the Clifton Library “continued for many years.”⁷⁰ The discontinuance of the Clifton post office in the Aldrich home in 1883 may have made the use of the library less convenient for his neighbors. Aldrich’s grandson, Hugh Stoddard, suggested that after a period of years families had money to purchase their own reading material, magazines replaced book reading, and rural schools began to have their own book collections. He believed that, as stipulated by the organization’s rules, members reclaimed their own books when the Association disbanded.⁷¹

Benton Aldrich’s prickly personality may also have been a contributing factor. In spite of the library’s obvious benefits, his irritating self-righteous air of superiority and will to dominate others may eventually have been more than members and borrowers could tolerate. The Association may have hastened to its end in Aldrich’s conflict with neighbors over the joint management of the Clifton Cemetery Association in 1888, which led him to participate in organizing the rival Johnson Cemetery that was firmly under his control.⁷² Among his many writings in his later life, Aldrich only briefly referred to the library in an essay commenting on E. A. Ross’ book *Social Control*. “It goes to show me how I have failed in my efforts as I did in the Clifton Library, and also how we had success for a time.”⁷³ Although

Nebraska enacted a law in 1877 by which towns and cities could establish tax-supported public libraries,⁷⁴ library development lagged, and many Nebraskans, especially in rural areas, had limited or no access to libraries of even the smallest size. It was not until the first two decades of the twentieth century that efforts of the newly created Nebraska Public Library Commission and Andrew Carnegie’s gifts for library construction jumpstarted the modern development of tax-supported public libraries in Nebraska.⁷⁵

Aldrich focused on community betterment in other areas. One significant development was when he and a group of other farmers in Lafayette and Washington Precincts organized the first farmers institute in Nebraska at the Union schoolhouse west of Brock on February 7, 1882.⁷⁶ This became a yearly meeting in which professors from the University of Nebraska were invited to speak, often at their own expense, on various topics of interest to farmers. From its beginning in Nemaha County, the institutes became a popular method for disseminating current scientific agricultural information directly to farmers throughout Nebraska. Their appeal grew so that in 1896 the University of Nebraska appointed a Superintendent of Farmers Institutes, which led eventually to the creation of the state agricultural extension program in 1915.⁷⁷ Men, women, and children all participated, and the meeting often lasted several days. At the first institute Aldrich presented a paper on apple cultivation, while his daughter Mary presented two on the Clifton Library and



Aldrich lot in Johnson Cemetery, Nemaha County. Benton Aldrich helped organize the cemetery after his 1888 dispute with neighbors over the management of the Clifton Cemetery Association. RG2304-5-5



Photo of a neighbor's orchard from the Benton Aldrich collection. Aldrich took an interest in fruit trees, even presenting a paper on apple cultivation at a farmers' institute he helped organize.
RG2304-4-4

home education. However, Aldrich objected to the side entertainment of "select readings" and choral and band music because of the precious time it took from the discussions with the professors and because the quality ". . . was low morally and intellectually vulgar. Does it pay a sensible farmer to leave home on expense to listen to such poor stuff?"⁷⁸ Aldrich was in his element at these yearly events, and over the years was proud to have professors as well as several university chancellors visit his home. He especially enjoyed interacting with Dr. Charles Bessey, the University's famed botanist. These meetings were not one-sided. His grandson recalled an incident that Aldrich bragged about for the remainder of his life. "He told of showing a professor the paper he had prepared to

give at the Institute. The professor was surprised at some information it contained about experiments conducted in Germany because they had not been published in America. He explained that 2 men... had gone from England to learn of these, and had reported in an English publication he had read."⁷⁹


The Clifton Library was directly connected to Aldrich's participation at these institutes. From it he prepared numerous talks and essays for this and other groups. To his sister he wrote, "It is one of the pleasures of my life to study on some subject of importance, learning as much as possible, making notes fully as to my authorities in what volumes. I took up study in no subject not useful to my family. I have some fifty envelopes containing papers of this kind, some of them

never delivered in public. Hence, my reputation of being able to talk off hand at any time without previous preparation.”⁸⁰ Over the years Aldrich wrote voluminously, not only of farm topics, but also of social and political subjects that interested him. Many centered on his ideas of heredity and morality, with such titles as “Morals of Americans versus Europeans,” “Good Soil and Good Character,” “On Excesses,” and “Thoughts on the Snobbish Rich and the Envious Poor.” Aldrich once stated: “People say I read a lot. I do not read, I study.”⁸¹

Aldrich continued to add to his library after the library association ended. Books may have been lent out to those interested, and the Clifton Women’s Club used it to prepare reports and papers.⁸² It must have occupied an enormous space in the small Aldrich dwelling; just the indexed magazines and newspapers alone would have been voluminous. One room became the library when Aldrich finally tore down the dugout and built a new frame house nearby in 1911. After Martha Aldrich’s death in 1913, his son Karl moved into the house and the library became Aldrich’s bedroom, with a new book case in the living room housing the library. Stoddard believed that “doubtless older books and magazines were destroyed at this time.” In his later years, Benton Aldrich continued as a gadfly and bombastic critic of the local status quo. In 1907 he attacked Auburn, the Nemaha county seat, because it had voted against a public library. He declared that unlike Chautauqua, carnivals, saloons, and churches, a library would not be “good for trade.” “Last year Auburn put \$70,000 into churches, and this spring voted against a public library... The Churches are good for trade because they encouraged a weekly display of dress goods and millinery.”⁸³

Near the end of his life, Aldrich wrote an essay to justify that “we are not guilty of egoism.” While the lack of egoism may be disputed, his statement summarized his lifelong obsession with books and learning. “Does any reader know of a farm family that has paid more money for printer’s ink of the ablest kind than our family has? or put more time thereto, or have shown in many ways greater respect for the highly educated women and men than our family? ...I believe my family has paid \$1,000 for books and magazines; if we had been so disposed to not have paid this for the printer’s ink of the highest quality, we might now perhaps have an automobile.”⁸⁴ After Aldrich’s death at the age of eighty-six on March 14, 1918,⁸⁵ the bulk of the library remained together until the death of

his daughter-in-law, Cremora (Mrs. Alfred) Aldrich in 1955. At that time her daughter, Mary Neff of Lexington, Nebraska, dispersed it among family. In June 1956 she donated a portion of Benton’s Aldrich’s correspondence and writings, and several shelves of books from the original Clifton Library to the Nebraska State Historical Society.

In 1907 Aldrich epitomized his worldview by fusing his zeal for sowing with his passion for knowledge: “It is worthwhile to plant for that though the fruit is not gathered in the life time of those now doing the work. People to do such work are not made to order, but if one has it in his heart and has courage, moral courage, to withstand the social poison in the air, then he or she should be helped, helped to intellectual information for his noble impulses. It seems to me this information, knowledge, training, is to such a one what a pool of water is to a young duck; — poor thing at first it doesn’t know what the water is, nor how to use it, but supply the water and its instincts stored up by thousands of generations of swimming ancestors will be put to instant, graceful, and beautiful work.”⁸⁶ 

John Irwin is a retired Arizona archivist and librarian. Fifty years ago he was an NSHS employee, and this article is dedicated to the memory of Jim Potter (1945-2016), his esteemed NSHS mentor.

NOTES

¹ Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (New York: Harper, 1943), 268. See also Louis B. Wright, *Culture on the Moving Frontier* (New York: Harper and Sons, 1961).

² Everett Dick, *The Sod House Frontier, 1854-1890: A Social History of the Northern Plains from the Creation of Kansas & Nebraska to the Admission of the Dakotas* (Lincoln: Johnson Publishing Company, 1954), 316.

³ A. T. Andreas, ed., *History of the State of Nebraska* (Chicago: Western Publishing Company, 1882), 1142. The Omaha Library Association was also incorporated in 1857. See Philip A. Kalisch, “High Culture on the Frontier: The Omaha Library Association,” *Nebraska History*, 52 (1971): 410-17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1143.

⁵ John H. Dundas, *History of Nemaha County* (Auburn: John H. Dundas & Son, Publisher, 1902), 62; Ann L. Wilhite, “Cities and Colleges in the Promised Land: Territorial Nebraska, 1854-1867,” *Nebraska History* 67 (1986): 350-51, 363; Douglas S. Pitchford, “Nebraska Methodist Education Prior To 1890” (Master’s thesis, Creighton University, 1976). <https://dspace.creighton.edu/xmlui/handle/10504/84459> (accessed Sept. 16, 2016).

⁶ US Census Office, *United States Census of Population, 1860, 1870, Supplemental Schedules No. 5* (microfilm reel three).

⁷ “Farmers Libraries,” *American Agriculturalist* XX (1861): 335.

⁸ Andreas, 1133, 1142-1143.

⁹ "Benton Aldrich," *Biographical and Genealogical History of Southeastern Nebraska*, (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1904), 354-55.

¹⁰ D. Hamilton Hurd, *History of Cheshire and Sullivan Counties, New Hampshire* (Philadelphia: J. Lewis & Company, 1886), 96. The six libraries were the Athenaeum, the Theological Institute Library, the Book Society, the Circulating Library, the School Library, and the Juvenile Library.

¹¹ George Abbot Morison, *History of Peterborough, New Hampshire: Book One* (Ringe, New Hampshire: Richard R. Smith, Publisher, 1957), 257. For an overview of libraries in Aldrich's New Hampshire childhood see Jesse Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629-1855* (Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1965, orig. pub. University of Chicago, 1949).

¹² Hugh Stoddard opined, "A prominent factor in his leaving home was the intense friction between a domineering father and a self-asserting son regarding what he should do." Stoddard to Irwin, July 18, 1972. [In 1971-1972 Hugh Stoddard, Benton Aldrich's grandson, corresponded with the author and transcribed documents in his possession written by his grandfather. These letters were deposited in the Benton Aldrich manuscript collection, RG3264.AM, Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS), hereafter, "Benton Aldrich Collection."].

¹³ Andreas, 1174; Mrs. Hugh P. Stoddard, "Martha Jane Harshman Aldrich: Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska Prize Essay," *Nebraska History* 16, No.1 (1935): 2-35. Reprinted in "Builder of Nebraska," *Nemaha County Herald* (Auburn), Feb. 13, 1936.

¹⁴ *History of Winona and Olmsted Counties....* (Chicago: H. H. Hill and Company Publishers, 1883), 586; Stoddard to Irwin, Oct. 31, 1971.

¹⁵ *Biographical and Genealogical History of Southeastern Nebraska*, 356.

¹⁶ Dundas, 21; Stoddard to Irwin, Oct. 18, 1971.

¹⁷ Benton Aldrich, untitled manuscript, January 1915, Benton Aldrich Collection, series 2. Hugh Stoddard believed this act was "officious" since their children did not attend the local school. Stoddard to Irwin, Oct. 31, 1971.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Andreas, 1173.

²² Mrs. Hugh P. Stoddard, "Builder of Nebraska," 9; Stoddard to Irwin, Oct. 18, 1971.

²³ Ibid.; *Biographical and Genealogical History of Southeastern Nebraska*, 356.

²⁴ Benton Aldrich, "Some of the Thoughts of Benton Aldrich," manuscript, [posthumously postdated] Dec. 31, 1918, Benton Aldrich Collection, series 8.

²⁵ Benton Aldrich, "To Whom It May Concern," manuscript, Dec. 19, 1910, Benton Aldrich Collection, series 8.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ "Some of the Thoughts of Benton Aldrich."

²⁸ "To Whom It May Concern."

²⁹ Benton Aldrich to Mary E. Chickering, Jan 8, 30, 1898 [all correspondence to and from Benton Aldrich is located in series 1 of the Benton Aldrich Collection]; Benton Aldrich, untitled manuscript, Jan.15, 1915. Hugh Stoddard remembered his grandmother Martha Aldrich received \$500 from her family that could have built a new house, but "he [Benton Aldrich] thought it best to use where needed in the farm business." Stoddard to Irwin, Oct. 13, 1971.

³⁰ Patrick Kennedy, "Nemaha County's African American Community," *Nebraska History* 82 (2001): 11-21. For an analysis of an archaeological excavation of the Aldrich homestead see "The Greene Family" and "Archaeology and the Search For African American Pioneer Sites in Southeastern Nebraska," *Nebraska History* 82 (2001): 22-25.

³¹ Benton Aldrich to unidentified correspondent, Benton Aldrich Collection, series 1.

³² "Some of the Thoughts of Benton Aldrich."

³³ Stoddard to Irwin, Oct. 31, 1971.

³⁴ Stoddard to Irwin, Oct. 13, 1971.

³⁵ Mary Aldrich Neff to John Irwin, Oct. 26, 1972.

³⁶ Dick, 315-30.

³⁷ Stoddard to Irwin, Oct. 31, 1971.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Curti, 548; Shera, 98.

⁴⁰ Benton Aldrich, untitled manuscript, Benton Aldrich Collection, series 2.

⁴¹ Benton Aldrich to Mary E. Chickering, Dec. 15, 1892.

⁴² Stoddard to Irwin, Oct. 31, 1971.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Stoddard to Irwin, Oct. 18, 1971.

⁴⁵ "To Whom It May Concern."

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Dougherty to John Irwin, Jul. 21, 1972.

⁴⁷ "To Whom It May Concern."

⁴⁸ Benton Aldrich to unidentified correspondent, Dec. 4, 1880.

⁴⁹ Andreas, 1174; "An Outline of Our Organization," manuscript; and "Clifton Library," unidentified newspaper clipping, ca. 1882, Benton Aldrich Collection, series 2 and 4.

⁵⁰ "An Outline of Our Organization," Benton Aldrich Collection, series 2.

⁵¹ The Clifton Library was an example of a "social" or "subscription" library. In the nineteenth century before local tax-supported free public libraries became common, these existed in many forms in institutes, athenaeums, lyceums, young men's associations, mechanics' and mercantile institutes, and many other organizations. They were commonly divided into two groups: ownership of the library property based on joint stock principle, or the payment of a fee for use of books. Aldrich blended both forms in the Clifton Library. No doubt he drew the ideas and plans from the many examples of social libraries from his New Hampshire childhood. See Thelma Eaton, ed. *Contributions*

to *American Library History* (London: Edwards Brothers Publishing Company, 1961).

⁵² Benton Aldrich to unidentified correspondent.

⁵³ "Farmers in Council," *Nemaha County Granger* (Auburn), Feb. 17, 1882.

⁵⁴ Andreas, 1174.

⁵⁵ Benton Aldrich to unidentified correspondent; "Scratch Book No. 4030," Benton Aldrich Collection, series 2.

⁵⁶ "Scratch Book, No. 4030." The villages were Nemaha City, Sheridan (later Auburn, the county seat), Howard (later Brock), and Wrights.

⁵⁷ "An Outline of Our Organization."

⁵⁸ "Clifton Library," undated newspaper clipping.

⁵⁹ "Scratch Book, No. 4030" and "Western Homes" manuscript, undated, Benton Aldrich Collection, series 2.

⁶⁰ "Western Homes."

⁶¹ Benton Aldrich to unidentified correspondent.

⁶² "Clifton Library."

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid; Benton Aldrich to unidentified correspondent, undated.

⁶⁵ "Catalogue of Clifton Library," Benton Aldrich Collection, series 2.

⁶⁶ "Statistics of the northern half of a Mississippi Valley book wholesaler for 1882-1887," compiled for *The Critic* VIII (August 27, 1887): 99, quoted in Arthur Hobson Quinn, ed., *Literature of the American People, An Historical and Critical Survey* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), 591.

⁶⁷ These writers were also among the most popular at the University of Nebraska Library in 1882. *Hesperian Student*, April 5, 1882, quoted in *Prairie Schooner* XLIII (Spring 1969): 27.

⁶⁸ US Office of Education, *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition, and Management, Special Report* (Urbana: University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science, 1967. Orig. pub. Government Printing Office, 1876), 791. Varying federal statistical sources containing information about libraries in the nineteenth century often list wildly contradictory data that are inconsistent and inaccurate. For example, *The Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1872-73* (Government Printing Office, 1893) reports 71 "public libraries" and 219 "private libraries" in Nebraska with a combined total of 147,000 volumes. This number is probably exaggerated. See Hayes McMullen, "Primary Sources in Library Research," in Rolland E. Stevens, ed., *Research Methods In Librarianship: Historical and Bibliographical Methods in Library Research* (Urbana: Graduate School of Library Science, 1971). See also Philip Kalisch, "High Culture on the Frontier: The Omaha Library Association," *Nebraska History* 52 (1971): 410-17, for the creation of the first Omaha Library Association in 1856-57 that existed only three years due to insufficient financing and conflict among members.

⁶⁹ US Department of the Interior. Bureau of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1884-1885* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1886), 739. Many of Nebraska's early libraries were created

by women's and temperance groups. See Kristin Mapel Bloomberg, "How Shall We Make Beatrice Grow, Clara Bewick Colby and the Beatrice Public Library Association in the 1870s" *Nebraska History* 92 (Winter 2011): 170-83, for an analysis of the struggle to create a town library amid class distinction, gender discord, and conflicts of rival library groups at the same period as the Clifton Library. See also the issue devoted to public library history in *Journal of the West* 30:31 (July 1991).

⁷⁰ Dundas, 24.

⁷¹ Stoddard to Irwin, Oct. 13, 1971.

⁷² Ibid; see also Fred Kiechel, "A History of the Johnson Cemetery Association," <http://johnsoncemetery.net/history.php> (accessed Sept. 29, 2016).

⁷³ Benton Aldrich, untitled manuscript, Benton Aldrich Collection, series 2.

⁷⁴ *Compiled Statutes of the State of Nebraska....Published Under the Authority of the Legislature by Guy A. Brown*, Chapter 49: Libraries (Omaha: Gibson, Miller and Richardson, 1881), 331.

⁷⁵ Nebraska Public Library Commission, *First Annual Report* (Lincoln: Nov. 30, 1902), 13-15. By 1902 the total number of all types of libraries had risen to 73, but there were only 27 publically tax-supported public libraries in Nebraska. See also Grace Evelyn Lenfest, "The Development and Present Status of the Library Movement in Nebraska" (Master's thesis, University of Illinois, 1931).

⁷⁶ "Farmers in Council," *Nemaha County Granger* (Auburn), Feb. 17, 1882.

⁷⁷ For an account of farmers' institutes and their transition to the state agricultural extension network see Robert M. Manley, *Centennial History of the University of Nebraska, Vol. I: Frontier University* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 108-109, 206-208.

⁷⁸ Benton Aldrich, "Thoughts on Farmers' Institutes," undated manuscript, Benton Aldrich Collection, series 6.

⁷⁹ Stoddard to Irwin, Oct. 13, 1971.

⁸⁰ Benton Aldrich to Mary E. Chickering, Jan. 15, 1899.

⁸¹ Hugh Stoddard to John Irwin, Oct. 13, 1971.

⁸² Stoddard to Irwin, Oct. 13, 1971.

⁸³ Benton Aldrich, untitled manuscript, 1907, Benton Aldrich Collection, series 2.

⁸⁴ Benton Aldrich, untitled manuscript, undated, Benton Aldrich Collection, series 2.

⁸⁵ "Benton Aldrich Was an Honored Pioneer," *Nemaha County Herald* (Auburn), March 15, 1918.

⁸⁶ Benton Aldrich to Edele C. Emerson, Oct 31, 1907.