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Article Summary: Nebraska's first frontier was both urban and rural. Its cities were shaped by national concerns—the Pacific Railroad, the Panic of 1857, the Pike's Peak gold rush, and the Civil War. That so many of these embryo cities wanted their own colleges was the result of local boosterism as well as national trends that coalesced in the mid-1850s: the popularization of education, Protestant evangelism, and denominational rivalry. Less restrained by past traditions, the Nebraska schools also showed a tendency to embrace the 19th-century trends of coeducation and vocational courses.

Cataloging Information:

Names: [Note: Only selected names appear in this section, due to the large number within the article.]

Orville H Zabel; J Sterling Morton; Mark Izard; Joseph L Sharp; Thomas Hart Benton, Jr; Richard Brown; James Cumley Mitchell; Mrs Ping; William Larimer; Orasmus C Dake; Thomas Morton; Margaret Martin; Mrs Andrew Jessen; Obediah B Hewitt; Augustus F Harvey; William E Harvey; Edward Everett; William Dorsey; Charles G Bisbee; Thomas B Cuming; Isaac Heaton; James O'Gorman; Jeremiah Treacy; William Kelly; Francis Cannon; Vincent Burkley; Michael Murphy; John Reck; John Q Goss; Stephen D Bangs; William Cleburne; Cortlandt Van Rensselaer; William S Plumer; Nathan Lewis Rice; Joseph S Grimes; Benjamin B Barkalow; John M Kuhn; John H Kellom; William Hamilton; James S Allan; William Young Brown; Reuben Gaylord; Henry M Giltner; Thomas M Chesnut; John Hancock; Charles D Martin; Samuel Gamble; William H Goode; Matthew Simpson; John Evans; John Dempster; O B Hewitt; Henry K Raymond; Henry Raymond; Henry E Brown; John M McKenzie; John M Ellis; Stephen Massock; Lucien A Jones; Sullivan Searle; Luther J Abbott; O P Clark; Stephen F Nuckolls; J G Miller; Theron Baldwin; Henry Tappan; Isaac Heaton; William Armstrong; Moses F Shinn; William Young Brown; Donald Tewksbury

Place Names: [Also See Appendix of Nebraska private schools begins on page 358 of this article]

Nebraska City, Nebraska; Brownville, Nebraska; Florence, Nebraska; La Platte City, Nebraska; Larimer City, Nebraska; Wyoming, Nebraska; Fort Kearney, Nebraska; Omaha, Nebraska; Nebraska Territory; Kansas Territory; Colorado Territory; Orepolis, Nebraska Territory

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Photographs / Images: Brownville college, 1857; Brownville, 1866; Brownville High School, 1881; Map, Nebraska territorial town sites, 1857; Florence Land Company capital stock, 1856; Drawing of Nebraska City, *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, 1859; Charles G Bisbee; Nebraska University poster, 1868; Nebraska University, Fontanelle, 1865; Brownell Hall, 1868; Bellevue, drawing from *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, 1858; Fremont College, 1869; Isaac Heaton, 1858



Brownville College, incorporated in 1857, was first housed in a building now used as a United Methodist Church.

Cities and Colleges in the Promised Land: Territorial Nebraska, 1854-1867

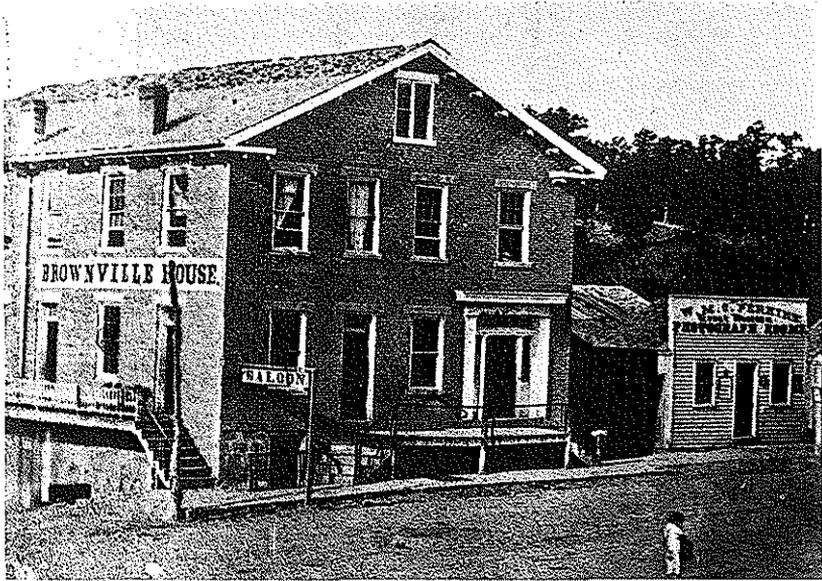
By Ann L. Wilhite

To My Mentor, Dr. Orville H. Zabel (1919-1985)

In 1856 the *Omaha*, a Missouri River steamboat, took its maiden voyage to the country depicted on its frescoed ceilings as the Promised Land. Nebraska Territory, created by congressional act on May 30, 1854, reputedly offered superior advantages: a fertile soil unencumbered with forest or rock, rapidly developed communities, and abundant wealth. Many came in pursuit of that wealth, hoping — as did J. Sterling Morton (1832-1902), one of Nebraska City's pioneer promoters and statesmen — to draw in their nets "lined with little gold dollars."¹

What made territorial Nebraska a land of promise was the transcontinental railroad. Slowed by the recession that followed the Panic of 1857, Nebraska's first railroad did not actually reach Omaha until January 1867. Unaware of the approaching economic crisis, however, western promoters and the eastern press expected the iron horse to leap across the Missouri River by 1858. In his opening message to the second legislative assembly in December 1855, Governor Mark Izard (1799-1866) announced the imminent approach of seven different railroads. A year later *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, a distinguished commercial and statistical monthly, confirmed that six railways were advancing westward and would reach Kansas and Nebraska, "the future garden of the Union," within two years. In its 1856 article on Nebraska, *Emerson's United States Magazine* reported with typical 19th-century rhetoric that "the puff of the iron horse is wafted on every breeze. This is a great country, and a progressive age, and the word is 'onward.'" The New York periodical concluded that Nebraska was "destined soon to become a powerful State, teeming with wealth and swarming with inhabitants."²

Such promotive pronouncements stimulated urban land speculation. Town builders and boosters expected each prospective city to be the territorial center of commerce, education, and politics. Their efforts to lure settlers and to recreate eastern cultural patterns prompted the founding of various private academic institutions. Possession of a "university,"



An 1866 photo of Brownville includes the Brownville House (left), a brick hotel built in 1857-58. The building was destroyed in a 1903 fire . . . (Below) The Brownville High School building, here depicted in 1881, was built in 1866-67. The building is no longer extant.



“college,” “seminary,” or “academy” thus became an important part of community promotion, as well as proof of civilization on the raw frontier.

Among those lured to Nebraska in this golden age of western land speculation³ was Colonel Joseph L. Sharp (1804-69). President of Nebraska’s first territorial Council (upper legislative house), Sharp was a Glenwood, Iowa, attorney who bought land across the river in hopes that a railroad would connect Glenwood with its Nebraska twin, the new city of Plattsmouth. Sharp never lived in Nebraska, but between October 1854 and March 1855 he helped to organize the Plattsmouth Town Company, the Platte Valley Emigration Company, the Platte River Bridge Company, a ferry, and the Missouri River and Platte Valley Railroad Company. The following year – after Plattsmouth possessed some fifty houses, two sawmills, a hotel, Baptist church, and an elementary school – Sharp and other city boosters incorporated the Plattsmouth Preparatory and Collegiate Institute. Sharp also tried to sway legislative votes in favor of Plattsmouth as the territorial capital. In a bitter struggle with other Missouri River towns – Bellevue, Brownville, Florence, Nebraska City, and Omaha – Plattsmouth won in the Council, but lost by one House vote to Omaha.⁴

Another Iowan who speculated on the western side of the Missouri River was Thomas Hart Benton, Jr. (1816-79), nephew of the U.S. senator. In March 1855 the Council Bluffs, Iowa, resident chartered a “wild-cat” bank in Omaha (the Western Fire and Marine Insurance Company) to circumvent Iowa’s prohibition of banks of issue.⁵ He also invested in the land companies of Bellevue, Florence, Omaha, Oreapolis, and Saratoga. In addition, Benton, a devout Methodist and long-time Iowa superintendent of schools, was one of the incorporators of the Methodist universities proposed for Omaha and Oreapolis.⁶

Sharp and Benton promoted Nebraska town sites as absentee landlords. Others, such as Richard Brown (1822-1900), came to the territory to make homes for their families. Son of a southern plantation owner and father of five (seven by 1860), Brown founded Brownville in 1854 near the Nebraska-Missouri border. Eager to advance his town, Brown operated the first sawmill and ferry, served as first postmaster, president of the bridge company, director of the hotel company, and incorporator of a road and a railroad. In addition, he owned the Nemaha Valley Bank and one-half interest in the weekly *Nebraska Advertiser*, operated a drugstore, and promoted a telegraph line. Concerned, too, about the cultural and moral environment of his family’s home town, Brown initiated and actively supported Brownville College, the lyceum and library association, and the Disciples of Christ Church.⁷

Brownville in the mid-1850s was clearly an extension of its founder, Richard Brown. Other towns also reflected the spirit of their promoter-proprietors. Florence, for example, reputedly owed all it “ever was or

now is" to James Cumley Mitchell (1811-60).⁸ Choosing what had been Mormon winter quarters as his city site in 1854, Mitchell used every means to boost it: a ferry, newspaper, mill, hotel, bank, bridge, railroad company, and school. Unlike many promoters, the former sea captain was financially able to support his civic endeavors; in 1857, for instance, he subscribed \$25,000 for a Missouri River bridge between Florence and Crescent City, Iowa. He also spent over \$16,000 on a four-acre estate in the center of town, the furnishings of which included a silver-trimmed English coach, a rosewood grand piano, an imported carpet, and a silver service with three-foot-high urn. The wash house contained a bathroom with a metal tub, and the barn, a floor – curiosities that people came miles to see.⁹

Although Mitchell was the "head and spirit" of Florence, he was also – according to J. Sterling Morton's *History* – "out for all the money there was in anything."¹⁰ His real estate activities suggest the description was valid. Mitchell was prominent in the town companies of Cleveland, Columbus, and Saratoga, as well as a substantial land holder in Cuming City (twenty-two lots), DeSoto (twenty-six lots), and the triangular area between Florence, Omaha, and Fort Calhoun (4,000 acres). These were not random holdings. An 1859 map reveals that Mitchell monopolized land on a projected east-west railroad (routed through Elkhorn and Columbus) and a north-south road connecting Saratoga, Florence, Fort Calhoun, DeSoto, and Cuming City.¹¹

The activities of these four men – Sharp, Benton, Brown, and Mitchell – were characteristic of many early promoters. In the period between the Federal Townsites Act of 1844 and the Panic of 1857, the easiest way to get rich was to buy city lots. Individuals could get twice as much land by pre-empting town sites, and urban real estate usually inflated at a much faster rate. Omaha lots reputedly escalated from \$100 to \$700-\$1,000 in the twelve months between 1855 and 1856; the following year the *Nebraska City News* reported that a Mrs. Ping had disposed of her two-year-old, unimproved 160-acre claim "for the handsome little pile of \$10,000 all in cash."¹²

The prospect of such quick capital gains lured the speculator, businessman, and settler to Nebraska Territory. "What magic there was in that word town-site!" one of those early settlers recalled. "We had always supposed a site for a town, the land of a village, was owned by a great many people . . . and we had never even owned a lot . . . from clerks and paupers we had become land and city proprietors, and were on the high road to health, wealth, and happiness."¹³ Town sites, in fact, became so numerous that in January 1857, a legislator facetiously introduced a bill declaring each alternate land section an incorporated city.¹⁴

Between March 2, 1855, and January 26, 1857, the territorial legislature granted charters to twenty-seven cities; by January 30, 1860, the number of incorporations had increased to eighty-four, most of which



Town sites became so numerous in territorial Nebraska that in January of 1857 a state legislator facetiously introduced a bill declaring each alternate land section an incorporated city.

were in the Missouri and Platte valleys of eastern Nebraska.¹⁵ Such figures are but a fraction of platted towns; one study lists 414 town sites in territorial Nebraska.¹⁶ Most of the towns, however, did not get beyond the paper or hamlet stage.

Frauds were frequent. After selecting a real or imaginary town site, clever con men engraved splendid maps depicting wide streets, elegant residences, and fleets of merchant ships sailing up the Platte. Carrying their lithographic lures eastward, the speculators induced unwary buyers to invest in western urban developments. Reputedly the 10,000 lots in the paper town of Curlew in Cedar County brought its proprietor \$150,000, while lots in the mythical Missouri City sold in New York at \$4,000 each.¹⁷ The enterprising W. E. Walker doubled his prospects by platting the twin cities of Hudson, Nebraska, and Melrose, Iowa, and connecting them (via lithograph) with steamboats and a railroad.¹⁸

Probably more common than paper towns, though, were ghost towns—speculative enterprises that failed. William Larimer intended to build another Philadelphia in La Platte City, “the place of all places in Nebraska.”¹⁹ Certainly the town, located on the Missouri between the Platte and Papillion Creek, was grandly conceived. Lots were 66 by 132 feet and streets eighty feet wide, with names such as Washington, Stuart, Tudor, Metternich, Talleyrand, Liberty, and Larimer. Soon La Platte boasted a tavern and post office, a free Missouri River ferry, and a sawmill that had been erected at a cost of \$7,000. Readers of the New York *Independent*, a Congregational periodical, learned almost immediately of the potential of “this elevated site, above the freshets,” both as terminus of the Burlington and Missouri and of the newly-chartered Missouri River and Platte Valley Railroad.²⁰ Apparently, however, La Platte was not elevated enough to escape high waters. In the spring of 1856 the town site was abandoned in favor of a new enterprise, Larimer City, two miles westward.²¹

Larimer City also became a ghost town, as did even more promising sites, such as Wyoming in Otoe County. That Missouri River town thrived in the late 1850s, primarily as an outfitting center for Utah-bound Mormons. A ferry was chartered in February 1855 and a steam mill in January 1856; the following year, a mass meeting organized the Wyoming, St. Peter’s, and Fort Kearney Railroad Company with a capital stock of four million. By 1858 Wyoming boasted eighty houses and 450-500 inhabitants, two newspapers, two sawmills, a hotel, coach and wagon factory, log school house, and lyceum.²² But at some point the vision of Wyoming as Nebraska’s “great commercial depot” faded; seventy-five years later, a local historian could find no visible remains of the Wyoming town site.²³

The Curlews and Hudsons were mere paper cities, platted in fraud or reckless vision. But others served legitimate functions as steamboat landings, ferry crossings, mill or mineral sites, residential communities, and

centers of government, education, and local services. As they moved restlessly forward or ghostward, these embryo towns shared common characteristics: an upstart, competitive nature and a desire for continuity. Living more in the future than in the present, the West adopted beforehand its future speech.²⁴ Thus, a hamlet was called a city, a rude boarding house a first-class hotel, an academy a college or university. Such puffing was more the rule than the exception in the West and, indeed, in all of Victorian America.

Confident of future progress, residents of Florence ("our prosperous and Heaven-favored City") expected their river town to be "the great emporium of the Missouri slope." Nearby Omaha also intended to be "the emporium of the West—the depot of the immense trade between the Atlantic and the Pacific"—even though Bellevue, "the Belle of the West" and "center of the Union," had "the natural and at present the only feasible route" for a Pacific railroad. Wyoming, "as large and promising today as Rome once was," thought itself destined to be "the great commercial depot in the Territory." Brownville's town site, "surpassed by none and equalled by few," expected to become "the most populous and wealthy of her sisters," apparently unaware that Nebraska City (the prospective "commercial metropolis of the continent") had, according to the local newspaper, almost equalled Chicago's population of 145,000.²⁵

In reality, Nebraska City had only 1,922 inhabitants in 1860,²⁶ but newspapers such as the *Nebraska City News* and the Brownville *Nebraska Advertiser* were not just writing promotional copy for eastern readers; they were also reflecting exuberant local optimism. Omaha, a Missouri River town linked directly by wagon road to Fort Kearny, was by 1856 a recognized outfitting site for westward travelers. Steamboats almost daily unloaded pioneers and freight. "Every house is filled," one missionary reported in May. "The hotels and boarding houses are full to overflowing, and every day there are new arrivals. Buildings are going up as fast as materials can be obtained; and this is but the commencement of what we shall see."²⁷

Such grand hopes were not just confined to the river towns. Lancaster, Saltville, and Salt Spring were founded in southern Nebraska by promoters who believed they had found "salt enough to salt the whole world!"—a prophecy echoed by *Hunt's Merchant's Magazine*.²⁸ And the German colonists who settled Grand Island were convinced that their location, in the center of the expanding United States, would replace Washington D.C. as capital.²⁹

Whether desiring the Pacific railroad terminal, the salt center of the world, or the nation's capital, territorial Nebraska's town builders had great expectations. They could found a one-house town called Enterprise³⁰ because they believed what the *Nebraska City News* expressed in 1860: "We are not what we shall be." Inevitably, such ambitions provoked rivalry. County seat or capital battles were frequent, as were verbal

ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS.

[PRINTED AT THE SEMI-WEEKLY BUGLE OFFICE, COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA.]

TREASURER.

\$100.

No. 7

Florence Land Company.

This is to Certify, that *Ames C. Mitchell*

is the owner of one Share of One Hundred Dollars, in the capital stock of said Company, entitling him to share in all dividends, and rendering him liable for all assessments.

No transfer will be recognized by the Company until recorded by the Secretary thereof.

J. B. Stulman PRESIDENT.

ATTEST,

Ames C. Mitchell Secretary.

FLORENCE,

Nov 9 1856.

ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS.

assaults in the local press. Responding to Rock Bluff's intense hatred for Plattsmouth, the editor of the *Platte Valley Herald* in 1861 noted that the rival town "would rejoice to see Plattsmouth sunk to the bottom of the Missouri River." Omaha, accused of obtaining the territorial capital "by the most shameless and bare-faced bribery and corruption," was particularly hated by its competitors, which included Ashland, Bellevue, Brownville, Chester, Columbus, Douglas, Florence, Fontanelle, Nebraska City, Plattsmouth, and Salina. Capital-location bids in tense legislative sessions frequently erupted into knock-down fights. Bloody noses and black eyes, according to one eyewitness, became too numerous to mention. "I want you to come," the Episcopal priest, Orasmus C. Dake (1832-75), wrote to his father-in-law. "I want you to see how Omaha, with long reaching arms, has killed every other town within a wide scope of country, and how it is destined to be the mammoth city of the Missouri valley."³¹

Violence and bribery were not the only ways to eliminate competitors. Salem took the Richardson County seat from Archer when a resurvey of the half-breed tract placed Archer within the Indian reservation.³² Similarly, Fremont became Dodge County's seat by moving Fontanelle, via a boundary line change, into Washington County. Nebraska City proprietors, fearing their town would be eclipsed by Wyoming, bought the competitor;³³ Columbus did likewise with its potential rivals, Pawnee City and Cleveland.³⁴

The towns of territorial Nebraska's urban frontier were expectant, upstart cities that often competed ruthlessly for such top prizes as the territorial capital, county seat, or railroad terminal. But the residents of these "young Chicagos, increscent New Yorks, precocious Philadelphias and infant Londons"³⁵ also wanted stability and continuity with their former lives. Therefore, they tried to reproduce patterns and institutions characteristic of older, more established communities.

The businessmen-boosters who dominated the urban frontier of Nebraska Territory came west to make money. But many also came to make homes and to attract home-makers. Families sought the familiar: church spires, schools and colleges, houses of wood and brick, tree-lined streets. Above all, these first settlers sought continuity amidst the change and disruption of their emigrant lives. They settled along the rivers and wooded areas of eastern Nebraska. They imported prefabricated houses from Chicago, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh.³⁶ They adopted, with few modifications, municipal systems and legal codes from eastern states. Politically, they allied themselves with eastern parties as Democrats, Douglas Democrats, Whigs, or Free Soilers. Though they broadened the base of egalitarianism and individualism, the first Nebraskans retained a sense of class structure and genteel culture. Even "in the midst of a general scramble for wealth," a Nebraska City booster insisted, "The intelligence of her citizens has not allowed the youth of Nebraska City to



Outfitting buildings for transportation of government supplies at Nebraska City. Drawing from Leslie's Illustrated Weekly, January 8, 1859.

grow up uncouth in manners and unpolished by the refinements and elegancies of a judicious mental training."³⁷

These words by Thomas Morton (1829-87), proprietor of the *Nebraska City News*, cannot be dismissed as merely promotional hype. As early as the spring of 1855, Margaret Martin (later Mrs. Andrew Jessen) operated a private elementary school; nineteen other women and men taught private schools in Nebraska City before the opening of the public system on January 2, 1860. In September 1857, Obediah B. Hewitt (1828-98), a lawyer from Chicago, opened a private high school in which he offered courses in languages and "higher English branches." That same fall, a Mathematical School and Drawing Academy was conducted by two brothers: Augustus F. Harvey (1830-1900), a former mathematics instructor at Rugby Academy in Washington, D.C., and William E. Harvey (1831-79), a surveyor and topographer.³⁸

Apparently genuine support for education existed in Nebraska City, a Missouri River town and supply center for western forts. Reading other issues of the *Nebraska City News* reveals that by the winter of 1859-60 the cultural opportunities of Nebraska's largest town (pop. 1,922)³⁹ included a sizeable library, a lyceum named after Harvard President Edward Everett, an orchestra, saxhorn band, and two theatres. Pianists could find all the latest sheet music at N.S. Harding and Company, while theatre-goers chose among such splendid attractions as *Alonzo the Brave*, *Don Juan*, *Othello*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *Yankee Door Keeper Out-Witted*.

To the individual such refinements and elegancies provided a psychic link that made transition from East to West possible. These links were particularly sought by women, the persons most affected by disruption and change. The William Dorsey family, who came to Nebraska City in the spring of 1857, had for years enjoyed "the benefits of schools, churches, and the best of society" in Indianapolis when financial reverses forced them westward. The crudity of wilderness life was often painful to the Dorsey women, and rituals of refinement were preserved. As daughter Mollie recorded in her diary, every Sunday morning the family – alone on their homestead – dressed up as if they were "in civilization." Hoop skirts must have been inconvenient, but "to be out of the world and out of fashion too is a little too hard," wrote Mollie, "so we persist in the style, and when the boughten ones give out, we substitute small grapevines." With a similar concern for "keeping up appearances," the Dorseys could entertain unexpected dinner guests with simple pioneer food enhanced by a snowy linen cloth, fine glassware, and handsome dishes.⁴⁰

Hoop skirts and snowy linen, prefabricated houses, churches and schools – all were threads of continuity binding East and West. In their effort to recreate a familiar landscape, these early Nebraska towns repeated the patterns of older towns and reproduced similar institutions,

particularly those of church and college. "A settler could hardly encamp on the prairies," noted one observer, "but a college would spring up beside his wagon."⁴¹

The first territorial legislature chartered three institutions of higher education: the Nebraska University of Fontanelle, Simpson University at Omaha, and the Nebraska City Collegiate and Preparatory Institute. Between 1854 and 1867 representatives from twenty-five towns introduced thirty-one bills of incorporation for a total of ten universities, seven colleges, five collegiate institutes, seven seminaries, one academy, and one biblical institute.⁴²

Only twenty-three of these thirty-one institutions received charters; the remaining applications were lost in the cogs of legislative machinery. The bill to incorporate the Omaha Medical University and Marine Hospital, for example, passed the House but failed to reach the Council. The Wyoming College bill, on the other hand, passed the House and received two readings in the Council. But the following day, a brawl between those who wanted Omaha to remain the territorial capital and those who favored nearby Florence resulted in an exodus of legislators to Florence. The session adjourned soon afterwards. Table Rock Seminary's charter also got lost amidst political controversy; Governor Samuel Black (1818-62) vetoed the bill to incorporate the seminary as part of a general crackdown on corporations and land monopolies.⁴³

The charters granted by the territorial legislature followed a basic form. In most cases, corporate powers (such as self-perpetuation, making contracts, and raising capital stock) rested with a group of three to twenty men who also constituted the first board of trustees. All personalty and real estate (which in the earliest charters was limited to 1,000 acres) were tax exempt. Johnson Seminary in Tecumseh, incorporated by the county commissioners, was the only institution empowered to tax other property to raise \$1,000 annually for five successive years.⁴⁴

The institutions were to be open to all Christians; all idle, vicious, or immoral persons, however, were subject to suspension and expulsion. St. Mary's Female Academy in the Catholic colony at St. John's in Dakota County added the provision that "for decorum sake all students shall be required to comply externally with the exterior forms of divine worship in said institution."⁴⁵

Typically, the object of each corporation was to promote "the general interests of education" and "to qualify students to engage in the several pursuits and employments of society and to discharge honorably and usefully the various duties of life."⁴⁶ Salem Collegiate Institute, however, more specifically indicated its intent "to build up and maintain, in the town of Salem, an institution of learning of the highest class for males and females, to teach and inculcate the Christian faith, and morality of the sacred scriptures, and for the promotion of the arts and sciences."⁴⁷

Of the twenty-three acts of incorporation and the eight aborted

attempts to obtain legal charters, only five produced more than paper institutions: Brownville College, Nebraska University at Fontanelle, the Nemaha Valley Seminary and Normal Institute in Pawnee City (Pawnee County), Oreapolis Seminary, and Peru (Mount Vernon) Seminary. Yet, even the paper colleges are important as indicators of city and church boosterism. The booster pattern, as well as the communal and individual desire for continuity, becomes even clearer when one goes beyond the session laws and legislative journals. Territorial newspapers, local histories, church records, and biographical analyses of school founders and incorporators reveal not only more extensive educational activity than previous studies have indicated, but also more church involvement.⁴⁸

The appendix to this article lists fifty-three private and corporate educational institutions founded in territorial Nebraska. An attempt has been made to include all legally incorporated schools, all church-related schools, all community proposals for institutions of higher education, and all schools using the titles of university, college, seminary and academy. Precision in terminology has been difficult. Sodom College in Cass County, for instance, was taught by sixteen-year-old Mary Rhea and was probably never more than an elementary school. Talbot Hall near Nebraska City, on the other hand, was technically an Episcopalian boys' academy (elementary school), but it offered instruction from the primary through junior college level. In 1868 Talbot Hall was re-organized as the Nebraska College and Divinity School.⁴⁹

The 19th-century seminary (not a school of theology unless so designated) usually offered either secondary or higher education. The Nemaha Valley Seminary in Pawnee City proposed to teach "all branches taught in the best colleges" and had the legal right, as did Florence Seminary, "to confer degrees in the liberal arts and sciences, and to do all other things for the encouragement of religion and learning which are lawfully done by the most approved seminaries and colleges in the United States." Oreapolis Seminary, on the other hand, offered college preparatory or high school courses and was apparently intended to feed into Oreapolis University. The Omaha City Female High School, operated by Laura and Helen Mar LeSeur, was also known as "the Omaha Seminary" and the "Misses LeSeurs School." Its curriculum ranged from arithmetic and penmanship to algebra, geometry, English composition, ancient and modern history, chemistry, botany, natural philosophy, German, and French.⁵⁰ It was probably intended, as most mid-19th-century female seminaries were, to provide terminal education for women. Thus one cannot automatically exclude high schools from a study of 19th-century higher education. As one observer noted at mid-century, many high schools "rank with the best colleges, and for practical purposes, surpass them."⁵¹

The use of the word "college" in this study, therefore, is more generic than precise. Probably no territorial Nebraska school offered instruction



The Reverend Charles G. Bisbee, principal and teacher at Nebraska University, Fontanelle.

comparable to present-day colleges and universities. Of the fifty-three educational institutions listed in the appendix, eleven were by title universities, thirteen were colleges or collegiate institutes, twelve were seminaries, and one a Biblical institute; the rest used the more modest designations of academy, hall, school, or high school. Twenty-six are known to have opened, and nearly half of these operated for more than one year. When some of the schools closed is not known; not all towns had newspapers and those that did tended to under-record failures. School openings were announced; closings seldom were.

Taken as a group, Nebraska's territorial colleges can be characterized in two ways. First, they reflected national movements: the popularization of education, Protestant evangelism, sectarian rivalry, and the trend toward coeducation and vocational courses. Second, most of the schools were local, independent efforts that were not part of long-range territorial or denominational planning. The inability of small towns and churches to support neighborhood colleges resulted in a high mortality rate.

The first national movement that affected Nebraska college founding in the 1850s and 1860s was that of popular education. The rapid spread of academic institutions in the 19th century was part of the popularization that early became the most distinctive characteristic of American education.⁵² Education was necessary, as Nebraska's acting governor, Thomas B. Cuming (1828-58), stated in 1855, "to guarantee the perpetuity of free institutions";⁵³ it was the indispensable weapon of popular sovereignty against tyranny and aristocratic machinations. Schools were also guardians of public morality, institutions designed to inculcate the values sacred to God, home, and country. And, finally, education was believed to be economically important, both as a social elevator to individual success and as a basis for community prosperity.

The Jacksonian era, with its atmosphere of expanding egalitarianism and belief in inevitable progress, founded some 133 permanent colleges between 1830 and 1861. Hundreds of others flourished for a time and died.⁵⁴ Territorial Nebraska was part of this boom period of college founding, an activity closely linked with a second national trend, Protestant evangelism.

With an exuberance unleashed by the Second Great Awakening of religious revivalism in the 1790s and early 1800s, Protestant missionaries followed the great migrations westward. These agents of the American Home Missionary Society, the American Tract Society, the American Bible Society, the American Sunday School Union, and the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West hurried to the outposts of Zion to reclaim the wilderness from barbarism and infidelity. They came, as the Reverend Isaac Heaton (1808-93) noted, to lay foundations anew, each denomination anxious to secure its own interest and to get in town ahead of the saloon.⁵⁵

In the Protestant crusade against what were viewed as Satan's legions

— atheism, infidelity, popery, and Mormonism — education was the chief weapon. Clergymen saw the college as the citadel of Christianity, “its magazine, the depot of troops, its arsenal and its fortress, combined in one.”⁵⁶ One of the battle grounds was Nebraska Territory: a territory organized in the decade in which the forces of popular education and aggressive Christianity reached their apex. The third national movement, therefore, that influenced Nebraska college founding in the 1850s and 1860s was sectarian rivalry. Nowhere was the aggressive competitiveness within American Protestantism and between Protestants and Catholics more obvious than in education. Each denomination aspired to outdo the others in the number of its schools, particularly in the West.

Thirty-three, or sixty-two percent, of the fifty-three educational institutions listed in the appendix are known to have been church-related. Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church opened six schools and chartered or proposed nine others; Catholics opened four and chartered three additional schools; Episcopalians opened four and chartered another; Congregationalists opened three; Presbyterians opened one and chartered one other; and the Methodist Protestant Church opened one. The Baptists and Disciples of Christ each proposed a school, but when the institutions opened, they were supported by other denominations. Of the fifteen church-related institutions that were legally incorporated, sectarian control was indicated explicitly in only five charters. The 1858 amendment to Nebraska University’s charter empowered the Congregational Association of Nebraska to elect trustees; the charters of Cass County University, Oreapolis Seminary, Peru Seminary, and Simpson University gave similar power to the Methodist annual conference within whose bounds each institution was located.⁵⁷

Biographical analysis of the incorporators and promoters of Nebraska’s territorial colleges reveals the full extent of church-relatedness. The University of Columbus, for instance, was chartered in 1860 by the Right Reverend James O’Gorman (1809-74), the Vicar Apostolic of Nebraska, and the three other Nebraska priests: Fr. Jeremiah Treacy (1821-89), Fr. William Kelly (c. 1820-1907), and Fr. Francis Cannon, O.S.B. The other incorporators were Catholic laymen: Vincent Burkley (1818-98) and Michael Murphy (1835-1905) of Omaha and John Reck (c. 1816-63), a Columbus farmer.⁵⁸ Although a Catholic affiliation was not mentioned in the legal charter, the Columbus university was clearly a Catholic educational venture.

Similarly, All-Souls College in Bellevue, chartered in 1864, was intended to be an Episcopal school. Four of its five incorporators are known to have been prominent Episcopalians in the Bellevue-Omaha area. Fr. Orasmus C. Dake, rector of Trinity Church, Omaha, preached once a month at Bellevue from 1862 to 1864; John Q. Goss (1827-1918) and Stephen D. Bangs (1829-1919) were the lay leaders of St. James’ (Holy Trinity) Episcopal Church in Bellevue; and William Cleburne (b. 1826),

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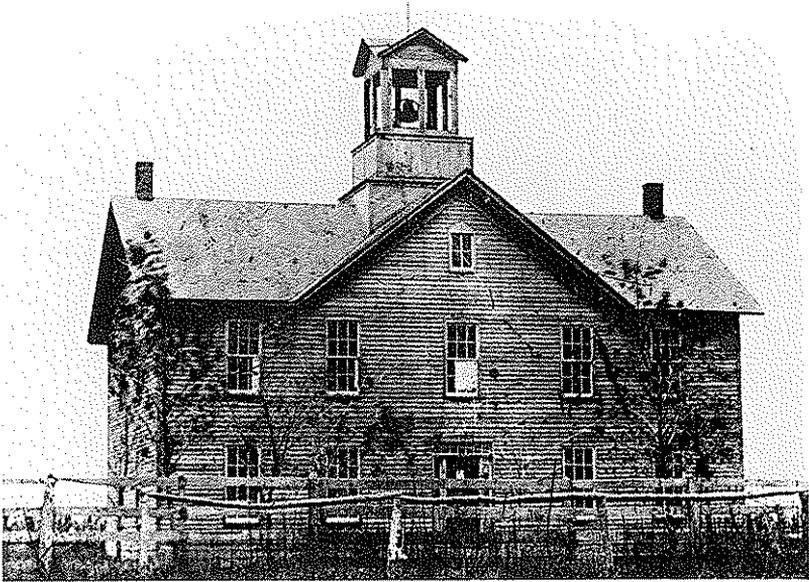
a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, was junior warden of St. Mark's in Omaha and later on the Brownell Hall faculty.⁵⁹

The University of Columbus and All-Souls College were local efforts to found denominational colleges. Biographical analysis of the incorporators who formed the first board of trustees of the University of Nebraska at Saratoga, however, reveals that a formidable group of leaders in the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. (Old School) were involved. Heading the list of 1857 incorporators was Dr. Cortlandt Van Rensselaer (1808-60), secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Education. A man of independent means, this scion of the old Hudson River patron family supported Christian education, including two Presbyterian schools in Kansas Territory.⁶⁰

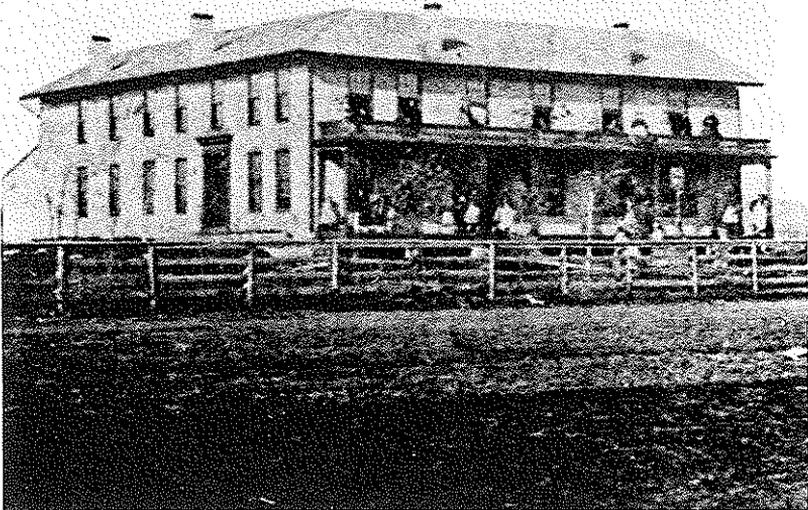
Other national church leaders on Saratoga's board were two theology professors — the Reverend Dr. William S. Plumer (1802-80) of Allegheny, Pennsylvania, and the Reverend Dr. Nathan Lewis Rice (1807-77) of Chicago — and a prominent Ohio minister, the Reverend Joseph S. Grimes (b. 1827), who was expected to found a church in Omaha.⁶¹ The remaining incorporator-trustees were Nebraska and Iowa clergy and laymen. Banker Benjamin B. Barkalow (1819-1904), Dr. John M. Kuhn, and John H. Kellom (1818-91) were lay leaders of Omaha Presbyterian churches; the Reverend William Hamilton (1811-91) and James S. Allan (b. 1805) represented the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions in Bellevue; the Reverend William Young Brown (b. 1827) was a Princeton-trained minister who left the New Lisbon (Ohio) Presbytery to speculate in Nebraska Territory; and the Reverend Reuben Gaylord (1812-80) was the Congregational agent for the American Home Missionary Society.⁶²

In addition to these area churchmen, the Saratoga university board consisted of the Reverend Henry M. Giltner (1827-1903) of Nebraska City, missionary of the Board of Home Missions; the Reverend Thomas M. Chesnut (c. 1803-72), founder of First Presbyterian, Sioux City, Iowa; the Reverend John Hancock (c. 1819-92) and Thomas Officer, founders of the Council Bluffs Presbyterian Church; and the Reverend Charles D. Martin and Samuel Gamble, Dakota County Presbyterians.⁶³ Clearly, therefore, the Saratoga university was intended to be an important — and more than local — Presbyterian educational endeavor.

Religious affiliation was not always as obvious as it was with All-Souls College and the Columbus and Saratoga universities; sometimes, as with the Nemaha Valley Seminary and Normal Institute, the church connection was determined by one person. Most of the incorporators of the Pawnee City school in 1864 were members of the Disciples of Christ. Yet the Nemaha Valley Seminary and Normal Institute was actually the brain child of its first principal, John M. McKenzie (1830-1918), a Methodist and brother-in-law of the local Methodist minister. In the spring of 1865 the Nebraska Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church officially



This single building housing Nebraska University at Fontanelle was destroyed by fire December 6, 1865. . . Female students of Brownell Hall stand on the porch of the school building, the former Saratoga Hotel, which burned in 1868. Courtesy of Brownell-Talbot School.



recommended the institution to its constituency and, according to one conference minister, the school was "largely patronized by Methodists."⁶⁴ In the public mind, therefore, the Nemaha Valley Seminary was a Methodist institution.

Methodists, in fact, were the most active college founders in Nebraska Territory, as they had been on earlier frontiers. Although originally the church had shown little interest in book-learning, by the 1840s Methodists had realized the importance of education.⁶⁵ To compete with the traditionally learned churchmen – Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians – Methodism channeled the aggressive dynamism of its evangelical spirit into the founding of educational institutions, particularly on the frontier. Not surprisingly, therefore, the missionary superintendent of Nebraska Territory, the Reverend William H. Goode (1807-79), in March 1855 helped found Nebraska's first Methodist college, Simpson University.

A former president of New Albany (Indiana) Seminary, Goode named this Omaha university after his Indiana colleague, Bishop Matthew Simpson. Assisting in the enterprise were other Nebraska Methodist missionaries, leading Omahans, and Dr. Charles Elliott (1792-1869), editor of the *Western Christian Advocate* in Cincinnati. Considered the country's most learned Methodist, Dr. Elliott might have headed the Simpson faculty if the university had opened in 1855. Instead, he went to Iowa Wesleyan University at Mount Pleasant as president and professor of theology.⁶⁶

The cause of Methodist education attracted other churchmen to Nebraska Territory – notably Dr. John Evans (1814-97), a prominent Chicago physician and financier, and Dr. John Dempster (1794-1863), the pioneer of Methodist theological education. Lured by the promise of Nebraska's urban frontier, Evans and sixteen others (from Chicago, New York City, and Iowa) incorporated the Oreapolis Company in September 1858 "for the construction of a Town, and the founding of a University, Biblical Institute, and Seminary." Oreapolis at the mouth of the Platte River in Cass County was to be both a railroad center and a center of Methodist education. The town plat reserved thirty acres for a university and ten acres each for a seminary and Biblical institute; one-tenth of the sale of each lot was to be set aside for the university's support.⁶⁷ In thus providing for endowment, Evans – who in 1851 had founded Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois – showed a foresight unique among Nebraska college founders and attracted verbal support from national church leaders.⁶⁸

Although a speculator in western lands, Evans's commitment to education was apparently sincere. "There is no other cause to which you can more profitably lend your influence, your labor and your means," he once said, "than that of Christian education by aiding in founding a university."⁶⁹ Thus, at Oreapolis Evans founded what he considered to be

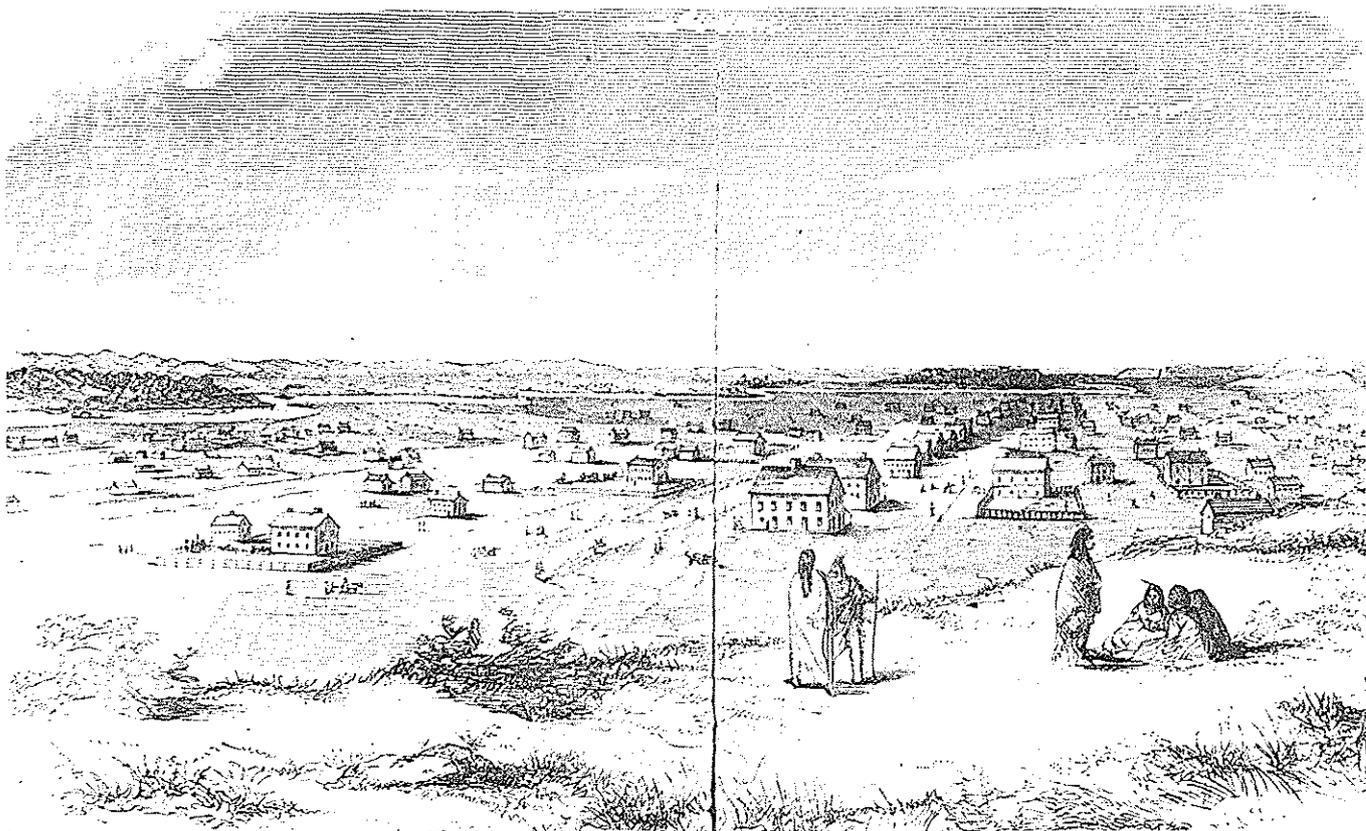
“three grand institutions for the good of the church and mankind.”⁷⁰

Also interested in the Oreapolis venture was Dr. John Dempster, who in 1847 had founded in Concord, New Hampshire, the first Methodist theological seminary. Determined to spread a system of ministerial education across the country, Dempster next founded Garrett Biblical Institute in Evanston in 1855. To complete his innovative plan, additional schools were needed in the West: specifically, in Nebraska and California.⁷¹ Therefore, Dempster Biblical Institute was coupled to Oreapolis University, as Garrett had been to Northwestern.

The Kansas-Nebraska Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1859 was foresighted enough to endorse Dr. Dempster's efforts and to invite him to join the conference. The 1859 session also officially adopted the three Oreapolis institutions – an action contested by another fledgling school, Olin University at Greggspport, a Nebraska City suburb. “Nebraska City contended for the University with great energy but we came off triumphant,” John Evans wrote to his wife. “The Conference adopted all of our Institutions by an almost unanimous vote – Oreapolis is now well established and well advertised as the contest has given us a very general notoriety.”⁷²

Competition thus existed within as well as between denominations. Sectarian rivalry fueled the race to found frontier colleges, but it was coupled with a sincere belief that education would combat the loss of social inhibitions and moral restraints in western cities. Missionaries hastened to found colleges in territorial Nebraska because they believed what the Reverend Isaac Heaton articulated: “Moral and religious impressions made early in the settlement of a place have the most permanent influence.”⁷³ At the July 27, 1858, cornerstone ceremonies for the Congregational university at Fontanelle, the Reverend Reuben Gaylord reminded his hearers of the importance of their undertaking. “We are gathered here, many of us of New England birth and ancestry, to transplant from the Puritan nursery a young and healthful tree, expecting it to receive that care and culture which will insure its future growth. Our work may seem small; yet, it is foundation work. Some may say we are premature,” Gaylord continued, but “we are only acting in concert with the wisest and best minds in all different periods of our country's history. . . We have not begun a day too soon. With a deep sense of the importance of our work, we now lay the foundations of an institution for the promotion of Christian education, and for the good of the church and the world.”⁷⁴

Territorial college founding, therefore, was part of the national movements of Protestant evangelism, denominational rivalry, and popular education; it was also part of the trend toward vocational and co-education. What we know of the curricula in Nebraska's territorial colleges seems, at first glance, to have been fundamentally conservative. The Reverend Orasmus Duke, principal of Brownell Hall in 1863 and of



Bellevue, the seat of Sarpy County, on the west side of the Missouri River, Nebraska Territory. Drawing from Leslie's Illustrated Weekly, June 5, 1858.

St. James' Hall after 1866, saw no educational advantages in either commercial courses or modern languages; he taught only classical studies by "long-trying and well-established methods."⁷⁵ Other teachers apparently followed similar patterns. O.B. Hewitt's Nebraska City High School gave instruction "in all the branches of English and Classical Education, usually taught in High Schools and Academies." Oreapolis Seminary offered Latin and Greek and the traditional higher English branches, as did the Nebraska University at Fontanelle and J.S. Burt's Winter High School in Omaha.⁷⁶

Yet upon closer analysis, Nebraska's territorial colleges were often in tune with mid-19th century currents of change, particularly coeducation and vocational courses. Oberlin (Ohio) Collegiate Institute, which admitted women in 1833, was the nation's first coeducational college; twenty years passed before another institution followed Oberlin's example. Thereafter, coeducation spread westward. The University of Iowa was opened to both sexes in 1856.⁷⁷ In January of that year, Omaha's Simpson University amended its charter to prevent sexual segregation. Salem Collegiate Institute (1857), Nebraska University at Fontanelle (1858), Florence Seminary (1860), and the Nebraska City Male and Female College (1861) stated their intent to be coeducational. In practice, other schools taught both sexes – including Oreapolis Seminary, St. Benedict's School, and Henry K. Raymond's (c. 1814-88) school in Nebraska City, and St. Philip Neri's Academy in Omaha.⁷⁸

Vocational and professional training were other trends apparent in Nebraska's schools. Oreapolis Seminary and Nebraska City's Mathematical School and Drawing Academy offered surveying and civil engineering.⁷⁹ William Cleburne, a competent geologist and former engineer, lectured in geology at Brownell Hall in 1864; possibly he did the same while teaching at Nebraska University in Fontanelle during the winter of 1860-61.⁸⁰ Henry Raymond's Nebraska City School professed to educate its students "for practical life." Henry E. Brown at Nebraska University and John M. McKenzie, first at the Nemaha Valley Seminary and Normal Institute and then at Peru Seminary, set teacher training as one of their goals.⁸¹ Brownville College operated its medical department between 1858 and 1859, and other professional school proposals included the Nebraska University of the Homeopathic Healing Art and Law Institution at Wyoming and the Omaha Medical University. Simpson University's 1856 charter also provided for colleges of law, medicine, theology and agriculture.⁸²

Feeble as these attempts may seem, the rationale for Nebraska's pioneer educational ventures needs to be put into a national context of educational trends, Protestant evangelism, sectarian rivalry, and the popularization of education. Yet, at the same time, Nebraska's territorial colleges were local institutions. Although some of the founders were national figures, no national agency founded or aided any of these early

schools. The Reverend John M. Ellis (1793-1855) — a Congregational minister and agent of the American Education Society, who had previously founded Illinois College — did come to Nebraska in 1854 to found a college, but he died before fulfilling his dream.⁸³

The American Education Society, originally a compact between Congregationalists and Presbyterians, gave help only to students, not institutions. The Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West (Western College Society) was established in 1843 to aid schools; but it did not include any Nebraska colleges in its philanthropies until 1871. The American Home Missionary Society, essentially a Congregationalist organization, also did not sponsor any schools, although it sustained several of the clergymen who promoted and directed Nebraska University at Fontanelle. The Methodist General Conference, the church's national body, neither controlled nor founded colleges; its supervisory Board of Education was not formed until 1869. American Baptists had no educational society until 1888. Presbyterians (O.S.) had a Board of Education and its secretary, Dr. Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, showed interest in the University of Nebraska at Saratoga. The agency, however, had no funds to sustain that interest.⁸⁴

The private schools of territorial Nebraska were thus founded by men who acted either individually or collectively through local churches and communities. The Arago School, which serviced both the community of Arago and the local Episcopal church, was the conception of the Reverend Stephen Massock (c. 1796-1870), as St. James Hall was of the Reverend Orasmus Dake. Brownville College was incorporated by local businessmen, and its medical department was staffed in part by local physicians. Johnson Seminary in Tecumseh was incorporated in 1865 by the Johnson County commissioners, and Omadi College (1857) by city fathers and merchants.⁸⁵

Like the Tecumseh and Omadi schools, many of the territorial institutions were promotive — an attempt, at least on paper, to boost the local community. The Quincy, Illinois, colonists who settled Fontanelle in 1854 were explicit in their hopes that “a college of high literary character” would increase the value of local real estate.⁸⁶ Eleven years later the same rationale was used to solicit funds from absentee landowners. If we can put Nebraska University on “something like a permanent basis,” the Reverend Lucien A. Jones wrote to Sullivan Searle in Quincy, “your property will be worth many hundreds of dollars more . . . and sell quicker The church and in fact all things look rather promising here in Fontanelle. But the school seems to be the mainspring of the whole.”⁸⁷

Other city fathers veiled their motives in more eloquent rhetoric. What city, state, or nation has ever risen “to honor, intelligence, distinction, or happiness in the absence of the benign influence of education and Christianity?” asked the Brownville *Nebraska Advertiser* in April 1857. “To these inseparably we owe our greatness, and without such aid we must

sink into imbecility, ignorance, and darkness. Such being a fact, it behooves us to give a small share of our time to the erection of seminaries and churches. . . . May the time speedily come when the solemn but sweet chiming of church bells will be heard in our midst, and edifices of science and literature be seen in our city!" The editor further insisted that only when Brownville's citizens extended their civic spirit into the erection of schools, churches, hotels, and other public buildings would Brownville rightfully take its place as the Queen City of Nebraska and the West. Brownville citizens responded by erecting a public school building, opening the medical department of Brownville College, and offering a college preparatory high school.⁸⁸

The importance of a school in boosting both a city's population and economy were, nevertheless, undeniable. Fontanelle — after failing in its bid for territorial capital and losing the county seat — had little else to offer but Nebraska University; yet it was enough to prompt family men such as Dr. Luther J. Abbott (1831-1900) and O.P. Clark to move there.⁸⁹ Similarly, Omahans felt their schools spoke "more eloquently to the stranger seeking a home in the far West to induce him to locate in Omaha than any other of the public institutions of the city."⁹⁰

Aware that colleges were conclusive proofs of community stability and refinement, town boosters included educational institutions in their promotional propaganda. Stephen F. Nuckolls (1825-79) of Nebraska City, for instance, in 1855 advertised "the future Emporium of Nebraska Territory" as possessing two mercantile establishments, one hotel, forty buildings, a newspaper, two brick churches, and a college that would be erected the following summer.⁹¹ The pamphlet John Evans printed to advertise his town—entitled *Oreapolis, Nebraska Territory; Its Institutions, Advantages in Site, Etc. Etc. Plan of the Co. for Building up the Town, Inducements offered to Emigrants to Settle There. Bonus for Manufacturers, Tradesmen, Etc.*—made ample mention of the three proposed educational institutions. And the lithographed plat of Brownville, intended no doubt for eastern distribution, included all the assurances of Brownville's cityhood: steam mills, first-class hotels, a bank, newspaper, land office, military company, church, college, and a twice-weekly stage between Kansas, Nebraska City and Omaha.⁹² Though colleges were but one of many accouterments of cityhood, they were nevertheless important in local promotion.

The local impetus to found colleges meant that Nebraska's territorial educational enterprises were independent, simultaneous and haphazard. Refusal or inability of national church groups and of the territorial government to found schools led to local fragmentation and conflict of interests. Nebraska Presbyterians united in their one effort to found a territorial university, and the Congregational Association of Nebraska gave its sole support to the university in Fontanelle. But generally founders did not coordinate their activities with those of others within their

religious denomination or geographical area. In Cass County, for example, six institutions between 1856 and 1859 were proposed under the general auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church: Dempster Biblical Institute, Oreapolis Seminary and University, Plattsmouth Preparatory and Collegiate Institute, Rock Bluff Seminary, and Western University at Cassville (Mount Pleasant). Third largest of Nebraska counties, Cass in 1860 had a total population of 3,369. Thirty-five percent (1,163) of its inhabitants were between the ages of five and nineteen; nearly half of that number were enrolled in public schools.⁹³ Since the median enrollment in 1859 for Methodist colleges and theological seminaries throughout the U.S. was only 161,⁹⁴ Cass County conceivably could have supplied students for at least one college – but not six.

Financial assistance was even less promising. Although a majority of the fifty-six incorporators of the five legally chartered schools lived in the immediate geographical area, they were middle-aged men of modest means. Of the thirty-seven for whom financial data is available, fifty-nine percent listed their total personalty in the 1860 census as under \$1,000. Most had large families; the average size was 6.5 persons. Subsidizing one educational institution during its struggling first years would have been difficult; financing six would have been impossible in a territory whose economy was based more on speculation and outfitting western emigrants than it was on industry and marketable products.

Of the six proposed Cass County institutions, only Oreapolis Seminary opened. "When business enterprises are so hazardous and merchants are discouraged and mechanics are out of employ and the silence of inactivity is scarcely broken, it is refreshing to hear of a new enterprise of so great vitality that a failure is very improbable," commented the Plattsmouth *Platte Valley Herald* on August 8, 1861. "Since the people cannot, in these troublesome times, make fortunes for their children, they should give them an education which is a patrimony far more valuable, and which neither the fluctuations of trade nor the pressure of hard times can ever take from them."

Although carefully planned, endorsed by the Nebraska Methodist conference, locally supported, and boosted by a successful entrepreneur like John Evans, the Oreapolis Seminary was short-lived. Why? Evans's previous vision had materialized; an unoccupied farmsite in Illinois had become within three years a thriving suburban educational center with three successfully operating institutions: Northwestern University, Garrett Biblical Institute, and Northwestern Female College. Not unreasonably, John Evans had expected Oreapolis to repeat Evanston's pattern of progress.

But Oreapolis had no Mrs. Garrett to provide a cash endowment, no nearby Chicago to provide students and suburban residents, no railroad to stimulate the economy, and ultimately no Evans to direct the enterprise. In its crucial first years Oreapolis also lacked the community of

interests provided by resident landowners. Though local boosters later backed Oreapolis Seminary, these men were land poor. Nebraska's recovery from the Panic of 1857 had been slow, despite the stimulus of the Pike's Peak gold rush in 1859 and 1860. Cash remained scarce. Adding to Nebraska's financial burden was the severe winter of 1861. Unable to reach the St. Louis market, "corn went begging on the streets at 8 and 10, and wheat at 25¢ per bushel." Cattle and hogs sold as low as one and one-half cents per pound.⁹⁵ "The people of this Territory are now passing through severe pecuniary trials," Reuben Gaylord wrote in April 1861. "Many who had become involved, are having their property sold by the sheriff under foreclosure. There is but little emigration to the Territory."⁹⁶ Before Nebraska could recover, the nation plunged into civil war. With its landbased economy, inflated through speculation, and the difficulties of converting land into cash, Oreapolis could only suffer. To survive, the seminary needed more than the support of local landowners.

The Nebraska Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, though substantial in numbers, could offer little financial assistance; typically, the Methodist itinerant minister appealed to lower economic brackets. Locally, fund raising was often difficult, as the Reverend J.G. Miller, principal of Oreapolis Seminary, discovered when he attempted to solicit from a Plattsmouth saloon. "Te Metodist, te Metodist church, eh?" responded the saloonkeeper. "Te Metodist dey drink no beer; dey drink no whisky; dey play no billiards. T_____m de Metodist church, Me give tem no cent."⁹⁷

For a new school to waver financially was not uncommon. Northwestern University in Evanston, despite its ample endowment, found itself in constant financial difficulties. But because of John Evans's leadership and repeated generosity, it recovered.⁹⁸ In contrast, Oreapolis after 1861 no longer had Evans's support. Thwarted in his efforts to secure the governorship of Nebraska Territory,⁹⁹ Evans went instead as governor to Colorado Territory in January 1861. Into the new town of Denver he poured his energies, boosting railroads, churches, and the Colorado Seminary (Denver University). Like many other boosters, Evans needed the reinforcement of quick success. He transferred his loyalties from Oreapolis to Denver because the promise of Nebraska Territory had faded: "They were so long building," he later explained.¹⁰⁰

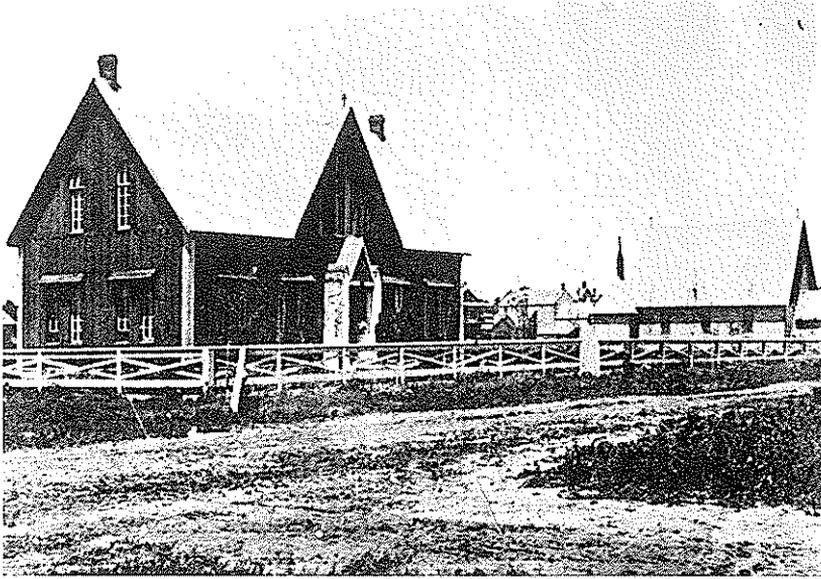
Promoters like John Evans did not, as individuals, have a lasting impact upon Nebraska. Yet as a group these transients were important. They speculated in lands and corporations, enacted legislation, platted town sites, operated ferries and sawmills, built hotels, encouraged settlement, multiplied churches and colleges, and perhaps left their name behind on a town or creek. But they also left a succession of failures: ghost towns, deserted enterprises, paper promises. Had they remained in Nebraska, they would have become useful citizens and community leaders—faces in the county "mug-book" histories. Whether transient or resident,

these pioneer promoters shared a common optimism, an optimism as unbounded as the land they settled. "I am working hard here and deserve success," wrote William Larimer from La Platte City in 1855. If success should never come, "I will live in hopes if I should die in despair."¹⁰¹

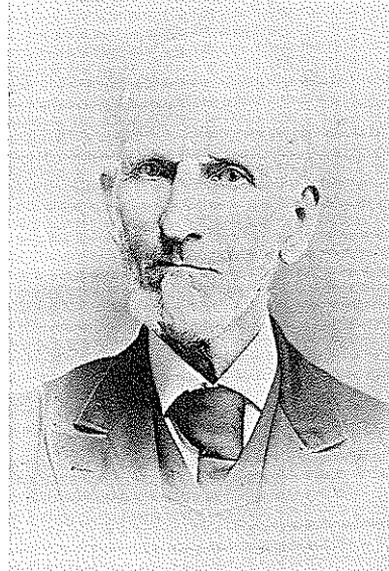
Transient boosters and transferred loyalties were certainly a factor in the demise of such grand enterprises as Oreapolis and its three Methodist schools. But, ultimately, the high mortality rate of Nebraska's territorial colleges must be attributed to localism and the excessive number of attempted schools. Throughout Victorian America, educational institutions far exceeded local demand. Some contemporary observers decried "the multiplicity of titled shams,"¹⁰² but others found virtue in numbers. "It is one of the glories of American colleges," insisted Theron Baldwin (1801-70), a Congregational missionary and secretary of the Western College Society, "that they are not concentrated into one vast University, but scattered far and wide among the people; each one filling its sphere, availing itself of local associations and local sympathies, and standing up there as the visible and ever present representative of liberal and Christian learning."¹⁰³

By 1850 the U.S. had become not just a land of colleges but of neighborhood colleges. "We have multiplied colleges so as to place them at every man's door," boasted Henry Tappan (1805-81), a Congregational clergyman and prominent educator.¹⁰⁴ The problem was that every man did not, or could not, support higher education. Many Americans seemed to think that colleges, once planted, would take care of themselves. Perhaps the reluctance to support education with more than rhetoric was rooted in American materialism. People hastened west to acquire land, wealth, and prominence. Towns were laid out, roads chartered, bridges projected, and colleges founded, as the Reverend Isaac Heaton admitted, "for personal advantage — almost literally supposing that gain is godliness."¹⁰⁵

Not even clergymen were immune to worldly temptations. William Armstrong (b. 1818), a Methodist minister who speculated in Iowa and Nebraska, was on the board of directors of the Loudon (Iowa) Town Company, boosted the Council Bluffs and St. Joseph Railroad, and in 1860 went to the Colorado gold mines. Far from the image of the impoverished circuit rider, Armstrong in the 1860 census valued his real estate at \$12,500 and personal estate at \$7,500. Another Methodist, the Reverend Moses F. Shinn (1809-85), was frequently tempted by western abundance: land claims, ferry crossings, and liquor. The Reverend William Young Brown, a Presbyterian clergyman, gave up his ministry during his Nebraska sojourn so he could speculate in lands and banks. Yet these three men were all college incorporators.¹⁰⁶ However sincere their intentions to serve God



Fremont College (left), chartered in 1869, was housed in a structure built in 1866 as an Episcopal boys' academy. The other building in the photograph is a church erected in 1867. Courtesy of St. James Episcopal Church, Fremont.



Isaac Heaton, one of the incorporators of Nebraska University at Fontanelle in 1858. Courtesy of First Congregational Church, U.C.C., Fremont.

and community, they – and others like them – sought first to serve themselves.

To assume that Armstrong, Brown, and Shinn were typical of territorial Nebraska clergymen, however, would be erroneous. Most of the missionaries who so zealously promoted frontier colleges were unable to financially support their institutions. The Reverend Lucien Jones, pastor of Fontanelle's Congregational Church, in the winter of 1865-66 had but one pair of trousers, boots with a rat-sized hole, no overcoat or outer garment except an old cloak without a lining, and neither mittens nor gloves. "My circumstances are not much below the average of my church," Jones explained to the American Home Missionary Society.¹⁰⁷ Faced with rebuilding the burned Nebraska University building, the Fontanelle Congregationalists would have to endure great privations. Yet, the executive committee of Nebraska University's board felt "fully assured by the manifestations constantly visible that with this community educational advantages, civilization and general intelligence are of more importance than all the luxuries of life without these higher employments."¹⁰⁸

Fontanelle's commitment to education was strong enough to keep Nebraska University's doors open until 1872 – in spite of hard times, Indian scares, fire, wind, and factionalism within the church and school. But even though residents, in their own words, "sacrificed temporal comforts for educational benefits – in a permanent college,"¹⁰⁹ both the city and the university eventually were victims of localism. Nearby Fremont took the county seat and secured the railroad; in June 1869 the Congregational Association of Nebraska withdrew its support from Nebraska University, giving it instead to Doane College in Crete.¹¹⁰

The men who founded Fontanelle, and the many other towns of territorial Nebraska had been lured by the promise of abundant land, transcontinental railroads, and a quick return on urban investments. They created upstart, competitive cities patterned after eastern settlements and populated by businessmen-boosters, missionaries, and families – all of whom had a vested interest in founding schools. Businessmen viewed colleges in promotive terms, as a means of advertising a city's permanency, stability, and refinement – and thereby attracting settlers and raising property values. Missionaries and other churchmen founded colleges in order to halt the barbarizing process of the frontier, to secure their own denominational interests, and to guide young people along a Christian path. And married settlers wanted colleges in their community because they sought continuity, stability, and a better life for their children.

The result was an excessive number of local educational institutions and a high mortality rate. Town promoters and churchmen, caught up in the exuberant optimism and restless ambition of the age in which they lived, seldom paused to reflect upon the past or to plan realistically for the

future. Obtaining articles of incorporation, reserving lots in a city plat, or releasing promotive press notices was not enough to insure a college's success.

The excessive multiplication of colleges and low survival rate were not just characteristic of Nebraska Territory; they were national phenomena. According to Theron Baldwin, if a headstone had been erected for each dead college, a traveler in mid-19th century America would have found himself within an apparently limitless burial ground.¹¹¹ After studying session laws in sixteen states, historian Donald Tewksbury found 516 institutions incorporated before the Civil War, 412 of which were mere skeletons by 1927 (the date of his study).¹¹² Based on the session laws alone, territorial Nebraska incorporated twenty-three colleges, only one of which still functioned in 1986. When one goes beyond the session laws, the number of church and community colleges, seminaries and academies in territorial Nebraska more than doubles. The example of Nebraska therefore suggests that Tewksbury's statistics are low. Adding the thirty unincorporated schools to the list of twenty-three charters does not alter the conclusion that the death rate for antebellum colleges was high; only Brownell-Talbot in Omaha (founded 1863) and Peru State College (chartered 1860) can today trace their origins to Nebraska's territorial period.

Nebraska's first frontier was both urban and rural. Its cities were shaped by national concerns—the Pacific Railroad, the Panic of 1857, the Pike's Peak gold rush, and the Civil War. That so many of these embryo cities wanted their own colleges was the result of local boosterism as well as national trends that coalesced in the mid-1850s: the popularization of education, Protestant evangelism, and denominational rivalry. Less restrained by past traditions, the Nebraska schools also showed a tendency to embrace the 19th-century trends of coeducation and vocational courses.

Although part of the West, territorial Nebraska did not sever its eastern ties. It was not the frontier of trapper and fur trader; nor was it the "Wild West" of cattle drives, miners, and desperadoes. Nebraska was first settled by the speculator, the town builder, the missionary, and the family man. The story of each individual and community is unique. Yet patterns were established that would shape the years of statehood: boosterism, competitiveness, the preeminence of certain eastern Nebraska towns, local interest in higher education, and faded promises.

APPENDIX

The following list of territorial Nebraska private schools is more indicative than inclusive. The intent has been three-fold: to show the extent of church involvement in educational proposals, the eagerness of communities to possess academic institutions of "higher learning," and the lack of precision in using terms such as "college." Therefore, the list has attempted to include all church-related schools wherever a denominational connection seemed plausible, all community proposals for institutions of higher education, and all schools using the title of university, college, seminary or academy. Sources have been the session laws, legislative journals, newspapers, county and church histories, and biographies of founders and incorporators. Operational dates have been given whenever possible.

ACADEMY OF THE ANNUNCIATION, Nebraska City, Otoe County

Opened 1856

Type: Parochial

Founders: Benedictine sisters

Rationale: Catholic education for girls

ALL-SOULS COLLEGE, Bellevue, Sarpy County

Incorporated 1864

Type: Church-related

Founders: Pastor, wardens, members of local Episcopal churches

Rationale: General education under Episcopalian auspices

ARAGO SCHOOL, Arago, Richardson County

Opened 1860

Type: Parochial

Founders: The Reverend Dr. Stephen Massock, local Episcopalian priest

Rationale: 1) Episcopalian education; 2) adult education, particularly for German immigrants

BROWNELL HALL, Saratoga, Douglas County

Opened 1863; moved to Omaha 1868; continues as Brownell-Talbot

Type: Parochial

Founders: Episcopalian bishop and clergy

Rationale: Classical academy education for girls under Episcopalian auspices

BROWNVILLE COLLEGE, Brownville, Nemaha County

Incorporated 1857; medical lectures given, 1858-59

Type: Liberal arts college with medical department

Founders: Brownville businessmen, church leaders, physicians

Rationale: 1) general education; 2) medical training; 3) community service through public lectures; 4) community promotion

BROWNVILLE HIGH SCHOOL, Brownville, Nemaha County

Opened 1859

Type: Community secondary school

Founders: The Reverend T.W. Tipton, Congregational minister and president of Brownville College

Rationale: 1) to prepare students for entrance in Brownville College; 2) to provide free secondary education for residents of Brownville school district; 3) to provide secondary education and boarding accommodations for non-residents at a "moderate fee"

DAKOTA CITY COLLEGIATE AND PREPARATORY INSTITUTE,
Dakota City, Dakota County

Incorporated 1857

Type: Community secondary school

Founders: Dakota City speculators, Omaha businessmen, and local Catholic priest

Rationale: 1) general Christian education; 2) community promotion

DEMPSTER BIBLICAL INSTITUTE, Oreapolis, Cass County

Bill to incorporate introduced, Council, 1858; adopted by Kansas-Nebraska Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, 1859

Type: Theological seminary

Founders: Dr. John Dempster of Garrett Biblical Institute and Dr. John Evans, founder of Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois

Rationale: Education of Methodist ministers for the Missouri valley

DEWITT COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE, DeWitt, Cuming County

Bill to incorporate introduced, House, 1857

Type: Community secondary school; possibly church-related

Founders: The Reverend J.W. Taggart, Baptist minister

Rationale: Promotion of community and possibly Baptist church

FACTORYVILLE FEMALE SEMINARY, Factoryville, Cass County

Opened 1866

Type: Church-related

Founders: Mrs. Nichols

Rationale: Female education under general auspices of Methodist Episcopal Church

FALLS CITY COLLEGE, Falls City, Richardson County

Bill to incorporate passed House, 1858

Type: Community college

Rationale: Community promotion

FLORENCE SEMINARY, Florence, Douglas County

Incorporated 1860

Type: Liberal arts college

Founders: Florence businessmen

Rationale: 1) general Christian education for both sexes; 2) community promotion

JOHNSON SEMINARY, Tecumseh, Johnson County

Incorporated 1865

Type: Tax-supported secondary school*Founders:* Johnson County commissioners*Rationale:* General education

LANCASTER SEMINARY, Lancaster, Lancaster County

Proposed 1863; open 1866-67

Type: Church-related elementary and possibly secondary school*Founders:* The Reverend J.M. Young and Methodist Protestant colony*Rationale:* Religious education for both sexes under auspices of Methodist Protestant Church

LEWIS AND CLARK COLLEGE, Washington County

Joint resolution passed House, 1858

Type: Speculative*Founders:* P.G. Cooper, Cuming City speculator*Rationale:* To obtain federal land grantMATHEMATICAL SCHOOL AND DRAWING ACADEMY, Nebraska
City, Otoe County

Opened 1857

Type: Vocational school*Founders:* Augustus F. and William E. Harvey*Rationale:* To train civil engineersNEBRASKA CITY COLLEGIATE AND PREPARATORY INSTITUTE,
Nebraska City, Otoe County

Incorporated 1855

Type: Community secondary school*Founders:* Three local men, two of whom were directors of Nebraska City and Pacific Railroad Company*Rationale:* 1) General non-denominational education; 2) community promotion

NEBRASKA CITY FEMALE SEMINARY, Nebraska City, Otoe County

Open 1861-63

Type: Elementary School*Founders:* B.W. Vineyard*Rationale:* Academy education for girls

NEBRASKA CITY HIGH SCHOOL, Nebraska City, Otoe County

Opened 1857

Type: Classical academy and seminary*Founders:* O.B. Hewitt*Rationale:* Classical education on upper elementary and secondary level

NEBRASKA CITY HIGH SCHOOL, Nebraska City, Otoe County

Opened 1862

Type: Church-related secondary school

Founders: The Reverend Douthett and daughter, Sallie

Rationale: Secondary education under Presbyterian auspices

NEBRASKA CITY SELECT HIGH SCHOOL, Nebraska City, Otoe County

Opened 1865

Type: Church-related secondary school

Founders: The Reverend D.A. Cline

Rationale: Secondary and musical education under general auspices of Methodist Protestant Church

NEBRASKA UNIVERSITY, Fontanelle, Washington County

Incorporated 1855; charter revised 1858; operated 1856-72

Type: Church-related elementary and secondary school (college courses projected)

Founders: Nebraska Colonization Company, territorial officials, Baptists

Rationale: 1) To promote personal and political ideas of Nebraska Colonization Company; 2) to found the territorial (and future state) university of Nebraska; 3) to promote denominational interests of Baptist Church; *after 1858:* to provide Christian education under auspices of the Congregational Association of Nebraska

NEBRASKA UNIVERSITY OF THE HOMEOPATHIC HEALING ART AND LAW INSTITUTION, Wyoming, Otoe County

Bill to incorporate introduced, Council, 1857

Type: Professional

Rationale: 1) Professional legal training; 2) medical training according to system of Samuel Hahnemann, founder of homeopathy

NEMAHA UNIVERSITY, Archer, Richardson County

Incorporated 1856

Type: Church-related

Founders: Area businessmen and farmers, a local Methodist minister, and prominent Methodist laymen

Rationale: 1) Education under general auspices of Methodist Episcopal Church; 2) community promotion

NEMAHA VALLEY SEMINARY AND NORMAL INSTITUTE, Pawnee City, Pawnee County

Incorporated 1864; Operated 1863-66

Type: Church-related liberal arts college with education department

Founders: Pawnee City businessmen and local Methodists

Rationale: 1) Moral and intellectual training under Methodist Episcopal Church auspices; 2) teacher training

OLIN UNIVERSITY, Greggspport, Otoe County

Proposed 1859

Type: Church-related

Founders: Local Methodists

Rationale: General education under auspices of Methodist Episcopal Church

OMADI COLLEGE, Omadi, Dakota County

Incorporated 1857

Type: Community college

Founders: City fathers and merchants

Rationale: 1) General education; 2) community promotion

OMAHA MEDICAL UNIVERSITY AND MARINE HOSPITAL, Omaha,
Douglas County

Bill to incorporate introduced, House, 1857

Type: Professional

Rationale: Medical training

OMAHA SEMINARY, Omaha, Douglas County

Opened 1856

Type: Secondary school

Founders: Laura and Helen Mar LeSeur, Methodist laywomen

Rationale: Comprehensive Christian education

OMAHA SELECT SCHOOL, Omaha, Douglas County

Opened 1857

Type: Elementary and secondary school

Founders: Mrs. A.M. Smith, Congregational laywoman

Rationale: General education

OMAHA WINTER HIGH SCHOOL, Omaha, Douglas County

Open 1857-59

Type: Church-related elementary and secondary school

Founders: J.S. Burt, licentiate of Illinois Congregational Association

Rationale: Classical elementary and secondary education under general auspices of Congregational and Presbyterian churches

OREAPOLIS SEMINARY, Oreapolis, Cass County

Incorporated 1858; adopted by Kansas-Nebraska Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, 1859; operated 1861-c. 1864

Type: Church-related elementary and secondary school

Founders: Area businessmen and Methodist clergy; Dr. John Evans of Chicago

Rationale: 1) General elementary and secondary education under auspices of Methodist Episcopal Church; 2) vocational training (teaching, surveying, civil engineering); 3) to prepare students for Oreapolis University

OREAPOLIS UNIVERSITY (CASS COUNTY UNIVERSITY), Oreapolis,
Cass County

Incorporated 1858; adopted by Kansas-Nebraska Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, 1859; Charter amended 1861

Type: Church-related

Founders: Area businessmen and speculators; Methodist clergy; Dr. John Evans of Chicago

Rationale: 1) To provide general education under auspices of Methodist Episcopal Church; 2) to become a center of Methodism in the West

PERU SEMINARY (MOUNT VERNON SEMINARY), Peru, Nemaha County

Incorporated 1860; opened 1866; 1867 given to state as Peru Normal School; continues as Peru State College

Type: Church-related; *after 1867:* state supported teachers' college

Founders: Methodist clergy and laymen; area businessmen

Rationale: 1) General coeducation under general auspices of Methodist Episcopal Church; 2) teacher training

PLATTSMOUTH PREPARATORY AND COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE, Plattsburgh, Cass County

Incorporated 1856; charter amended 1857

Type: Church-related community school

Founders: City fathers; local farmers, merchants, and Methodist leaders

Rationale: 1) Secondary education under general auspices of Methodist Episcopal Church; 2) community promotion

ROCK BLUFF SEMINARY, Rock Bluff, Cass County

Incorporated 1857

Type: Church-related community school

Founders: City fathers and commissioners of Missouri River and Pacific Railroad Company; Methodist clergy

Rationale: 1) Secondary education under general auspices of Methodist Episcopal Church; 2) community promotion

ST. BENEDICT'S SCHOOL FOR MALES AND FEMALES, Nebraska City, Otoe County

Opened 1862

Type: Parochial

Founders: The Reverend Emanuel Hartig, local Catholic priest

Rationale: Catholic education with training in "manners, arts and sciences"

ST. JAMES HALL (FREMONT COLLEGE), Fremont, Dodge County

Operated 1866-70; incorporated 1869 as Fremont College

Type: Parochial

Founders: The Reverend Orasmus C. Dake, rector of St. James' Episcopal Church, and Bishop Clarkson

Rationale: 1) To provide classical education for boys under auspices of Protestant Episcopal Church; 2) to "meet the wants of the country"; 3) to become a "literary centre of wide repute"

ST. MARY'S ACADEMY (OLD HOLY ANGEL SCHOOL), Omaha, Douglas County

Operated c. 1857-64, 1864-76

Type: Parochial boarding school

Founders: Catholic laywomen; *after 1864:* Sisters of Mercy

Rationale: 1) To provide popular education for Catholic women; 2) to compete with rival female seminaries (Episcopal and Presbyterian); *after 1868:* education extended to males

ST. MARY'S FEMALE ACADEMY, St. John's, Dakota County

Incorporated 1857

Type: Parochial

Founders: Catholic sisters, possibly Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Rationale: Catholic education for girls

ST. PHILIP NERI'S ACADEMY, Omaha, Douglas County

Opened 1863

Type: Parochial

Founders: Catholic laymen

Rationale: Catholic education for both sexes

SALEM COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE, Salem, Richardson County

Incorporated 1857

Type: Community liberal arts college

Founders: City fathers and local merchants; directors of Missouri River and Nemaha Valley Railroad Company

Rationale: 1) To provide coeducation of "highest class"; 2) to instruct in "the Christian faith and morality of the sacred scriptures"; 3) to promote the arts and sciences; 4) to promote the town of Salem

SIMPSON UNIVERSITY, Omaha, Douglas County

Incorporated 1855; charter amended 1856; adopted by Kansas-Nebraska Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church 1856

Type: Church-related

Founders: Methodist clergy from Nebraska Territory and Iowa; prominent Omaha businessmen

Rationale: 1) General secondary and collegiate coeducation under auspices of Methodist Episcopal Church; 2) community promotion; 3) to provide professional training (law, medicine, theology, agriculture)

SODOM COLLEGE, Elmwood, Cass County

Opened 1866

Type: Elementary subscription school

Founders: Mary Rhea

Rationale: General elementary education

TABLE ROCK SEMINARY, Table Rock, Pawnee County

Incorporated 7th legislative session 1860, vetoed by governor

Type: Church-related

Founders: The Reverend Charles W. Giddings and Nebraska Settlement Company

Rationale: 1) General education under auspices of Methodist Episcopal Church;
2) community promotion

TALBOT HALL (NEBRASKA COLLEGE AND DIVINITY SCHOOL),
Nebraska City, Otoe County
Operated 1866-85; incorporated 1868 as Nebraska College and Divinity
School

Type: Parochial school for boys, with divinity department; *after 1868:* college
and theological seminary

Founders: Bishop Robert H. Clarkson and Diocesan clergy of Protestant Epis-
copal Church

Rationale: Classical and theological education under auspices of Protestant
Episcopal Church

UNIVERSITY OF COLUMBUS, Columbus, Platte County

Incorporated 1860

Type: Church-related

Founders: Bishop James O'Gorman and the other Catholic priests in Nebraska
Territory; Catholic laymen

Rationale: Catholic education

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT SARATOGA, Saratoga, Douglas
County

Incorporated 1857

Type: Church-related

Founders: Educational leaders of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. (O.S.); area
Presbyterian clergy and businessmen

Rationale: 1) General education under auspices of Presbyterian Church,
U.S.A.; 2) community promotion

UNIVERSITY OF ST. JOHN, St. John's, Dakota County

Incorporated 1857

Type: Church-related

Founders: Local Catholic clergy and laymen

Rationale: 1) Catholic education; 2) promotion of an Irish Catholic colony

WASHINGTON COLLEGE, Cuming City, Washington County

Incorporated 1856

Type: Community college

Founders: Territorial officials and speculators

Rationale: Community promotion

WESTERN UNIVERSITY, Cassville (Mt. Pleasant), Cass County

Incorporated 1856

Type: Church-related

Founders: Local farmers and Methodist laymen; Methodist minister, William D.
Gage

Rationale: Education under general auspices of Methodist Episcopal Church

WYOMING COLLEGE, Wyoming, Otoe County
 Bill to incorporate introduced, 4th legislative session, 1857-58
Type: Community college
Rationale: Community promotion

YOUNG LADIES' ACADEMY, Omaha, Douglas County
 Opened 1857
Type: Elementary and secondary school
Founders: Miss Werde
Rationale: General education for girls, including modern languages and music

NOTES

¹*Omaha Nebraskian*, March 26, 1856; "Westward Ho!" *Christian Advocate and Journal* (New York), 32 (June 11, 1857): 95; Caroline Morton to Emma Morton, November 18, 1854, J. Sterling Morton Collection, Nebraska State Historical Society. Hereafter the State Historical Society will be cited as NSHS.

²Nebraska, Territorial Legislature, *House Journal*, 2d sess., 1856, 18; "The Pacific Railway," *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review* (New York), 35 (December 1856): 659; "Nebraska," [*Emerson's*] *United States Magazine* (New York), 3 (September 1856): 309-11.

³*Omaha Nebraskian*, June 10, 1857.

⁴Nebraska, *Laws, Resolutions and Memorials Passed at the Sessions of the Territorial and State Legislatures, 1855-56, 155-56, 159, 201, 208-09, 316-17*; A.T. Andreas, *History of the State of Nebraska* . . . (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1882), 481-88; J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *Illustrated History of Nebraska*, 3 vols. (Lincoln, Nebr.: Jacob North & Company, 1905-13), 1:195, 216-19.

⁵*Laws, 1855, 152-53*. See also, Erling A. Erickson, *Banking in Frontier Iowa, 1836-1865* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1971).

⁶*Laws, 1855-58, 159-60, 165-66, 201-02, 414-16, 604-05*; Florence Land Company, Minutes and Misc. Stock Certificates, NSHS; *Pacific City (Iowa) Herald*, March 24, 1859; *Nebraska City News*, January 17, 1857; T.S. Parvin, "Thomas Hart Benton, Jr.," *Iowa Historical Record*, 16 (January 1900): 1-14.

⁷Morton and Watkins, *History*, 1:217; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Population*, Nebraska; *Laws, 1855-57, 155-56, 207, 305, 404-07, 420*; Andreas, *History*, 1138, 1141, 1144-46; *Brownville Nebraska Advertiser*, August 16, and December 25, 1856; *ibid.*, June 25, 1857, and February 25, 1858.

⁸*Council Bluffs (Iowa) Bugle*, August 8, 1860.

⁹*Laws, 1855-60, 154-55, 158-59, 205-08, 288, 669-70*; Florence Bridge Company, Stock Book, and James C. Mitchell, undated property list, Florence Collection, NSHS; Hannah Beals, "The Mitchell House of Florence," in *Founders and Patriots of Nebraska*, edited by Mrs. Charles H. Mullin, et al. (Omaha, Nebr., 1935), 77.

¹⁰*Omaha Nebraskian*, July 23, 1856; Morton and Watkins, *History*, 1:280.

¹¹*Laws, 1855-57, 206-07, 308-10, 453-54*; Mitchell, Property list; Columbus Town Company, Minutes, 1856, Columbus Town Records, Vol. 1, NSHS; *Nebraska City News*, January 12, 1857. For map, see C. Chaucer Goss, *Bellevue, Larimer and Saint Mary* (Bellevue, Nebr., 1859).

¹²*Omaha Nebraskian*, March 19, 1856; *Nebraska City News*, February 26, 1857.

¹³John A. MacMurphy, "Part of the Making of a Great State," NSHS, *Proceedings and Collections*, 2nd ser., 1 (July 1894): 4-5.

¹⁴*House Journal*, 3rd sess., 1857, 50.

¹⁵For a list of charters see Addison E. Sheldon and William E. Hannan, *Nebraska*

Municipalities (Lincoln, Nebr.: Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau, 1914), 7-8.

¹⁶Josephine M. Jelen, "Towns and Townsites in Territorial Nebr., 1854-1867" (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, 1934), 116-25.

¹⁷William Huse, *History of Dixon County* (Norfolk, Nebr.: Press of Daily News, 1896), 26-27; *Brownville Nebraska Advertiser*, April 23, 1857.

¹⁸John T. Bell, *History of Washington County* (Omaha, Nebr.: Herald Steam Book and Job Printing House, 1876), 46.

¹⁹William Larimer to Thomas Mellon, La Platte City [Nebr. Territory], May 31, 1855, in *Reminiscences of General William Larimer and His Son William H.H. Larimer*, edited by Herman S. Davis (Lancaster, Pa., 1918), 20.

²⁰A.S.M. Morgan, *La Platte*, 1847, NSHS Map Collection; *Omaha Nebraskian*, April 30, 1856; "Letter from Iowa," May 24, 1855, in *Independent* (New York), 7 (July 5, 1855):210.

²¹See C.W. Shreve, *Larimer City*, 1857, NSHS Map Collection, and Goss, *Bellevue, Larimer*. The present town of La Platte in Sarpy County dates from 1870 and includes a portion of the original Larimer town site, according to Stephen D. Bangs, *Centennial History of Sarpy County* (Papillion, Nebr.: Times Print, 1876).

²²*Laws*, 1855-56, 209-10, 289; *Wyoming (Nebr.) Post*, April 3 and 10, 1858; *ibid.*, May 1, 1858; *Wyoming (Nebr.) Telescope*, September 3 and 10, 1857.

²³*Wyoming (Nebr.) Telescope*, April 9, 1859; Helen R. Williams, "Old Wyoming," *Nebraska History*, 17 (April-June, 1936): 79-90.

²⁴*Christian Advocate and Journal* (New York), 41 (May 31, 1866):172.

²⁵*Florence (Nebr.) Courier*, March 12, 1857; *Omaha Nebraskian*, March 19, 1856; *Bellevue Nebraska Palladium*, July 15, 1854; S.W.Y. Schimonsky, *A Plat of the City of Bellevue, N.T.* (C. Curriers, Lithographer, 1859), NSHS Map Collection; *Wyoming (Nebr.) Post*, April 10, 1858; *Wyoming (Nebr.) Telescope*, April 9, 1859; *Brownville Nebraska Advertiser*, June 7, 1856; *Nebraska City News*, November 28, 1857; March 17, 1860.

²⁶*Eighth Census, 1860*.

²⁷Reuben Gaylord to Milton Badger, Omaha, May 6, 1856, American Home Missionary Society, Nebraska Letters #5, NSHS, microfilm copies. Hereafter the American Home Missionary Society will be cited as AHMS.

²⁸*Brownville Nebraska Advertiser*, November 1, 1856; "Salt and Salt Springs in Nebraska," *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* (New York), 41 (July, 1859):126.

²⁹Wilhelm Stolley, *Geschichte der Ersten Ansiedlung von Hall County in Nebraska von 1857 mit Anhang bis zum Jahre 1907* (Grand Island, Nebr., 1907). The present city of Grand Island was laid out in 1866 by the Union Pacific Railroad and covered only a small part of the spacious 1440-acre tract of the original town. See Esther Bienhoff, "The Original German Settlement at Grand Island Nebraska (1857-1866)" (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, 1929).

³⁰E[meline] R[ichardson] Kline to Amanda Dake Fontanelle, [Nebr.], August 16, 1872, Orasmus C. Dake Papers, NSHS.

³¹Alfred Sorenson, *History of Omaha . . .*, 3rd ed. (Omaha: National Printing Company, 1923), 105; Orasmus Dake to [H.K. Eaton], Omaha, December 26, 1864, Dake Papers.

³²*Brownville Nebraska Advertiser*, March 19, 1857. See also, Addison E. Sheldon, "Solitary Ghosts," *Nebraska History*, 18 (July/September, 1937):190, and Berlin B. Chapman, "The Nemaha Half-Breed Reservation," *Nebraska History*, 38 (March, 1957):1-24. Archer in Richardson County soon became a ghost town; the present town of Archer is in Merrick County.

³³"Letter from S.F. Nuckolls, Salt Lake City, Utah, June 10, 1874. To Maj. J.W. Pearson, President Old Settlers' Association," NSHS, *Transactions and Reports*, 1 (1885):34. The accuracy of Nuckolls's reminiscence seems indicated by a property list in the *Wyoming (Nebr.) Telescope*, March 5, 1859. S.F. Nuckolls, Nebraska City's principal

investor-booster, had the third largest property valuation (\$10,415); his brothers Heath, Houston and Lafayette also owned Wyoming property.

³⁴Francis Dischner, "Historical Sketches of Mid-Nebraska," in Eugene Hagedorn, *The Franciscans in Nebraska* (Norfolk, Nebr.: Norfolk Daily News, 1931), 28-29, 53-54. Pawnee City in Platte County, whose only claim to cityhood seems to have been the Elkhorn and Loup Fork Bridge and Ferry Company (formed by the Florence entrepreneur, James C. Mitchell), adjoined Columbus. The present-day Pawnee City is in Pawnee County.

³⁵J. Sterling Morton, "Speech Delivered at First Territorial Fair," September 21, 1859, in Nebraska, State Board of Agriculture, *Report*, 1860, 40.

³⁶William Larimer, for instance, brought a prefabricated house from Pittsburgh. For illustrations of ready-made houses available from a Chicago firm, see Keith Wheeler, *The Old West: The Townsmen* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1975), 28-29.

³⁷Thomas Morton, *Sketch of Nebraska City*, . . . (Nebraska City: Thos. Morton & Co., 1858).

³⁸Andreas, *History*, 1204-05; *Nebraska City News*, April 15, December 5, 12, 1857; Raymond E. Dale, "Otoe County Pioneers, A Biographical Dictionary," NSHS, Type-script, 1961.

³⁹*Eighth Census, 1860*. The next largest towns were Omaha (1,883), Bellevue (929), Salem (694), Plattsmouth (474), Falls City (473), and Brownville (425). Returns, however, were incomplete and some towns are not listed in the 1860 census.

⁴⁰Mollie Dorsey Sanford, *Mollie: The Journal of Mollie Dorsey Sanford in Nebraska and Colorado Territories, 1857-1866*, edited by Donald Danker (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), 2, 12-17, 36-37, 76.

⁴¹Quoted in Louis B. Wright, *Culture on the Moving Frontier* (New York: Harper & Row, 1955; Harper Torchbooks, 1961), 178.

⁴²*Laws, 1855-65, 165-69, 303-04, 308-10, 314-17, 403-10, 416-18, 604-05, 668-70, 942-44, 955-56; Nebraska, Territorial Legislature, Council Journal, 3rd sess., 1857, 86, 92; idem., 4th sess., 1857-58, 117-18; idem., 5th sess., 1858, 213, 221, 233, 247; idem., 6th sess., 1859-60, 49; idem., 7th sess., 1860-61, 189-91; House Journal, 3rd sess., 1857, 165; idem., 4th sess., 1857-58, 96; idem., 5th sess., 1858, 187, 213, 233.*

⁴³*House Journal, 3rd sess., 1857, 165, 188; idem., 4th sess., 1857-58, 124; Council Journal, 4th sess., 1857-58, 117-18; idem., 7th sess., 1860-61, 189-91.*

⁴⁴*Laws, 1865, 995-96.*

⁴⁵*Laws, 1857, 418.*

⁴⁶See, for example, *Laws, 1855, 165.*

⁴⁷*Laws, 1857, 408.*

⁴⁸See Howard M. Caldwell, *Education in Nebraska* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), and Walter K. Beggs, "Frontier Education in Nebraska" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, 1939).

⁴⁹Edward F. Bornemeier, "History of Sodom and Community," *Elmwood (Nebr.) Leader-Echo*, September 25, 1941; Beggs, "Frontier Education," 158; Andreas, *History*, 1206.

⁵⁰Brownville *Nebraska Advertiser*, October 31, 1861, and April 2, 1863; *Laws, 1859-64, 669-70, 943-44; Omaha Nebraskian*, October 1, 1856, and April 22, 1857.

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⁵²Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 561.

⁵³Thomas B. Cuming, "Opening Message to the First Session of the Legislative Assembly," January 16, 1855, *Council Journal*, 1st sess., 1855, 11.

⁵⁴Donald G. Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities before the Civil War* (New York: Columbia University, Teachers College, Bureau of Publications, 1932), 16-17, 28.

⁵⁵Isaac E. Heaton to Milton Badger, Fremont, N.T., April 8, 1861, AHMS, Nebraska Letters #96.

⁵⁶Richard S. Storrs, Jr., *Colleges, a Power of Civilization to be Used for Christ*, Discourse before the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West, Providence, R.I., October 30, 1855 (New York: N.A. Calkins, 1856), 20.

⁵⁷*Laws*, 1855-60, 286-87, 604-05, 668.

⁵⁸*Laws*, 1859-60, 669; Hagedorn, *Franciscans*, 196-97, 202-03; Morton and Watkins, *History*, 1:322-23, 607-08, and 2:458-59; Sr. M. Aquinata Martin, *The Catholic Church on the Nebraska Frontier (1854-1885)* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1937), 56-57; Andreas, *History*, 731; *Eighth Census, 1860*.

⁵⁹*Laws*, 1864. 942-43; Andreas, *History*, 724, 1367; *Biographical Sketches of Leading Citizens of Saunders and Sarpy Counties, Nebraska* (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Co., 1900), 151-52; James W. Savage and John T. Bell, *History of the City of Omaha Nebraska* (New York: Munsell & Company, 1894), 318; James Robbins, "Foundations of the Episcopal Church in Omaha, 1856-1964 (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1965), 28.

⁶⁰*Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "Van Rensselaer, Cortlandt"; Guy S. Klett, ed. "Minutes of Nebraska Presbytery, 1849-51, and of Presbytery of Highland, 1857-58," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society*, 35 (June, December, 1957): 128-30, 251.

⁶¹*Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "Plumer, William Swan," and "Rice, Nathan Lewis"; *Encyclopedia of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, edited by Alfred Nevin (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Encyclopedia Publishing Company, 1884), 284; *Omaha Nebraskian*, October 1, 1856.

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⁶³Morton and Watkins, *History*, 2:555-56; William J. Harsha, *The Story of Iowa* (Omaha: Central West Co., 1890), 302-03; D.C. Bloomer, "Notes on the History of Potawatamie County. No. 4," *Annals of Iowa*, 10 (July, 1872): 180-81; M.M. Warner, *History of Dakota County, Nebraska*, . . . (Lyons, Nebr.: Lyons Mirror Job Office, 1893), 201-03; *Eighth Census, 1860*; Huse, *History of Dixon County*, 171-72.

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⁶⁶D.W. Lounberry, "Letter from the Far West," *Christian Advocate and Journal* (New York) 32 (June 18, 1857): 98; Methodist Episcopal Church, Iowa Conference, *Minutes*, 1857, 26.

⁶⁷*Pacific City (Iowa) Herald*, March 24, 1859; *Oreapolis, Nebraska Territory; Its Institutions, Advantages in Site, Etc. Etc.* . . . (Chicago: Press and Tribune, 1859).

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⁷²Methodist Episcopal Church, Kansas and Nebraska Conference, *Minutes*, 1859; John Evans to wife Margaret, Plattsmouth near Oreapolis, N.T., April 2, 1859, John Evans Collections, State Historical Society of Colorado.

⁷³Isaac Heaton to Milton Badger, Fremont [Nebr. Ter.], October 7, 1858, AHMS, Nebraska Letters #21.

⁷⁴Reuben Gaylord, "Address on Laying the Cornerstone, . . ." in Mary Welles Gaylord, *Life and Labors of Rev. Reuben Gaylord*, . . . (Omaha: Rees Printing Company, 1889), 425-28.

⁷⁵Orasmus C. Dake, quoted in unidentified newspaper clipping, 1866, Orasmus C. Dake Papers.

⁷⁶*Nebraska City News*, August 15, 1857; *Brownville Nebraska Advertiser*, October 31, 1861; Nebraska University, Board of Trustees, Executive Committee, *Minutes*, March 7, 1859, NSHS; Nebraska University, Circular, 1864, J.S. Gaylord Papers, NSHS; *Omaha Nebraskian*, November 4, 1857.

⁷⁷Edwin G. Dexter, *A History of Education in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 445-56.

⁷⁸*Laws*, 1856-60, 287, 408-09, 605, 669-70; Andreas, *History*, 1206; *Platte Valley Herald* (Plattsmouth, Nebr.), August 8, 1861; *People's Press* (Nebraska City), November 27, 1862; *Nebraska City News*, February 26, 1859; Martin, *Catholic Church*, 79.

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⁸⁰Savage and Bell, *History of Omaha*, 318. See also Verne C. Fuhlrodt, "The Pioneer History of Fontenelle, Nebraska" (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska at Lincoln, 1930).

⁸¹*People's Press* (Nebraska City), August 15, 1860; Henry E. Brown to AHMS, Columbus [Nebr. Ter.], October 1, 1867, AHMS, Nebraska Letters #313; Andreas, *History*, 1157-58, 1161.

⁸²*Brownville Nebraska Advertiser*, February 25, 1858, and February 17, 1859; *Council Journal*, 3rd sess., 1857, 86; *House Journal*, 3rd sess., 1857, 165; *Laws*, 1856, 286-87.

⁸³*Independent* (New York), 7 (August 30, 1855):277. See also Arley B. Show Papers, NSHS.

⁸⁴Paul M. Lambert, *Denominational Policies in the Support and Supervision of Higher Education* (New York: Columbia University, Teachers College, Bureau of Publications, 1929), 8-15, 41-42; Harvey R. Bostrom, "Contributions to Higher Education by the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West, 1843-1874" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1960); Duvall, *Methodist Education*, 123; Lewis J. Sherrill, *Presbyterian Parochial Schools, 1846-1870* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1932; reprinted, New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 3.

⁸⁵*Laws*, 1857-65, 406-08, 995-96; *Brownville Nebraska Advertiser*, February 18, 1858; Andreas, *History*, 1151-52. Town founders among the ten Omadi College incorporators were Robert G. Alexander, John S. Bay, Jacob H. Hallock, William C. McBeath (1833-86), Alfred W. Puett, and Henry Ream (b. 1822). Bay, McBeath, and Stephen Ulery were merchants; Ream, the first hotel-keeper and first postmaster; Charles Blevin (1811-84), a carpenter; Puett, a lawyer and land agent. Andreas, *History*, 61, 612; *Brownville Nebraska Advertiser*, April 1, 1858; Warner, *History of Dakota County*, 166-67, 177, 179-80, 200, 215; A.P. DeMilt, *Story of an Old Town* (Omaha: Douglas Printing Company, 1902), 91ff.

⁸⁶[Jonathan] H. Smith, "Nebraska Colonization Company," *Quincy (Ill.) Herald*, July 31, 1854

⁸⁷[Lucien] H. Jones, Fontanelle [Nebr. Terr.], to "Brother" [Sullivan] Searle, October 13, 1865, Leroy Bisbee Papers, NSHS.

⁸⁸Andreas, *History*, 1142-43; *Brownville Nebraska Advertiser*, February 18, 1858, and July 14, 1859.

⁸⁹Ned C. Abbott, "Then and Now," speech delivered to Rotary Club, Fremont, May 21, 1920, and Eoline Clark to Ned C. Abbott, Fremont, April 16, 1916, Ned C. Abbott Papers, NSHS.

- ⁹⁰Andreas, *History*, 732.
- ⁹¹Council Bluffs (Iowa) *Chronotype*, March 7, 1855.
- ⁹²Allen L. Coate, *Plat of Brownville* (St. Louis, 1855), NSHS Map Collection.
- ⁹³*Eighth Census, 1860*; Nebraska, Territorial Commissioner of Common Schools, *2nd Annual Report*, 1860-61.
- ⁹⁴Sylvanus M. Duvall, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and Education up to 1869* (New York: Columbia University, Bureau of Publications, 1928), 95ff.
- ⁹⁵Brownville *Nebraska Advertiser*, January 24, 1864; William Fulton, "Freighting and Staging in Early Days," NSHS, *Proceedings and Collections*, 5 (2nd ser., 1902):261-62.
- ⁹⁶Reuben Gaylord to Milton Badger, Omaha, April 20, 1861, AHMS, Nebraska Letters #88.
- ⁹⁷Davis, *Solitary Places*, 260-61.
- ⁹⁸McMechen, *Governor Evans*, 69.
- ⁹⁹See Harry E. Kelsey, Jr., *Frontier Capitalist: The Life of John Evans* (Denver: State Historical Society of Colorado and Pruett Publishing Company, 1969).
- ¹⁰⁰John Evans, quoted in Kelsey, *Frontier Capitalist*, 108.
- ¹⁰¹William Larimer, Jr., to Thomas Mellon, Council Bluff, May 31, 1855, quoted in *Reminiscences*, 20.
- ¹⁰²B. F. Crary, "Universities in the Northwest," *Christian Advocate and Journal* (New York), 33 (April 15, 1858):60.
- ¹⁰³Theron Baldwin, *Eleventh Report of the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West*, 1854, 43, quoted in Tewksbury, *Founding of American Colleges*, 4.
- ¹⁰⁴Henry Tappan, *University Education* (1850), 64, quoted in Tewksbury, *Founding of American Colleges*, 3.
- ¹⁰⁵Isaac Heaton to Milton Badger, Fremont, October 15, 1859, AHMS, Nebraska Letters #40.
- ¹⁰⁶*Eighth Census, 1860*; *Pacific City (Iowa) Enterprise*, August 27, 1857; *Pacific City (Iowa) Herald*, August 5, 1858, and March 8, 1860; *Nebraska City News*, January 17, 1857; *Laws, 1857-62*, 380, 436-37, 541.
- ¹⁰⁷Lucien Jones to AHMS, Fontanelle [Nebr. Ter.], January 5, 1865, AHMS, Nebraska Letters #278.
- ¹⁰⁸Quoted in *ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁹Mrs. E[mily] R[ichardson] Kline to Prof. A. B. Show, St. Louis, Mo., September 14, 1889, Arley B. Show Papers, NSHS.
- ¹¹⁰Nebraska, General Association of Congregational Churches, *Minutes*, 1869 and 1872.
- ¹¹¹Theron Baldwin, *Twenty-first Report of the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West*, 1864, 21, quoted in Tewksbury, *Founding of American Colleges*, 24.
- ¹¹²Tewksbury, *Founding of American Colleges*, 28.