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Article Summary: This article is a firsthand report from a stone-cutter who came west to build the first state capitol. Hired by the contractor Joseph Ward, it tells the story of the trip from Chicago, as well as stories of early Lincoln and of the stone found for the entrances to the University.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Thomas Malloy, Joseph Ward, Mr Wallen, Mr Luff, Mr Scoggins, Felix Carr, Governor Butler, Mr Lane, Thomas Hyde, Mr Johnston [barber], Robert Silvers

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HISTORY OF THE FIRST STATE CAPITOL.

Prepared for the Society by Thomas Malloy, 1899.

In the month of November, 1867, I was hired in Chicago by contractor Joseph Ward, who had the contract of building the first state capitol. There were also twelve other stone-cutters who came west to Lincoln, Neb., along with me. We were to receive \$4.50 per day as soon as we began work. He paid our way as far as Omaha, and then transferred us back to Council Bluffs, from which place we arrived in Nebraska City. Here we rested for a day and night. There were two teams hired to bring our tool-chests and trunks from the depot on the Iowa side across by ferry to Nebraska City. We had guns and revolvers to protect ourselves from the Indians. Before we left Nebraska City we were advised to get blankets and moccasins, as it looked as if there was a storm coming. Sure enough the storm did come, after we left Nebraska City for Lincoln. We had to walk and run all the way behind the wagons to keep ourselves from freezing the first day. I believe the moccasins we bought saved our lives on the road. The first day we came as far as a place where there was one shanty on each side of a creek. One was occupied by a man by the name of Wallen and the other by a man by the name of Luff, old pioneers on the Nemaha near Unadilla. The owners of the houses were scared at us until we told them where we were going to; that we were going to Lincoln to build the state capitol. Then they divided us between the two houses. One house kept seven men and the other five. Lucky enough they had some bread, coffee, and bacon. They did the very best they possibly could for us. But such sleeping apartments! A loft in the peak of each shanty, with loose boards for a floor, on which we slept. And such a night! We lay on the floor with our lucky blankets rolled around us and kept ourselves as warm as we could.

Next morning we got a breakfast of the same kind of food, paid our bill, and thanked the pioneer gentlemen for their kind treatment. Then we started for Lincoln and arrived at the Pioneer Hotel at 9:00 P.M. that night. This hotel was owned by Mr. Scroggins, and was north of where the State Journal building is at present, on Ninth street. The number at the hotel that night after we signed our names on the register was sixty-five. The hotel was well filled with lodgers, consisting of laborers, mechanics, doctors, and a few lawyers. The next morning we went to see where our job was to be. A few men went with us and showed us the place. To our great surprise there was nothing for us to see but the trenches dug for the foundation. There was no material in the way of stone for us to go to work at. So we were badly discouraged. What could we do, out in the wilderness of Nebraska, and our families in Chicago? At this time the contractor was on his way from Chicago to Lincoln, three days behind us. We patiently waited for him to come, and when he did come we met him determined to do something desperate. In fact we were going to hang him. When he saw the material was not on hand for us to go to work at, he there and then told us not to be uneasy; that he would see that we would get our wages, work or play, according to agreement, as the State was good for it. So that pacified us. We were idle two weeks before the rock came in. He paid us full time. We then built a sod boarding house on the capitol grounds and boarded all the men working on the building. A man and team were hired to haul all the things required for the table from Nebraska City. That was good board at \$5, so we were all well satisfied up to the 1st of April, 1868. At that time a man by the name of Felix Carr came from Omaha with a letter from Governor Butler to the contractor, Mr. Ward. This man made a deal with Mr. Ward, who rented the boarding house to Mr. Carr. Then Mr. Carr went back to Omaha and brought out his wife and family to run the boarding house. He also brought out two big barrels of

whisky. Then we saw what was up. We held a meeting and resolved to boycott the whisky, as the boys were all saving their money at this time. A few days after he invited some of the men to have a drink, but they refused, and he was greatly surprised to see such a large number of men in a big building like a state capitol all sober. But one wet day came, and some of the masons broke the boycott about a month after the whisky came. This continued for a week. I watched an opportunity at night when they were all asleep, and crept to where the barrel was and turned the faucet in the barrel. I then crept back to bed again. The whisky kept running all night on the floor and down the cracks, until the barrel was empty. In the morning the smell of whisky was all over the boarding house. The man Carr became tearing mad. He carried a brace of revolvers at the breakfast table and threatened the man or men who committed the crime of emptying the barrel of its contents. But he did not shoot. A few days after all the stone-cutters left the boarding-house and went to Mr. Lane's new boarding house on O street. He was foreman carpenter.

Mr. Felix Carr left in a few weeks and never paid Mr. Ward, the contractor, a cent of rent, and took his blankets, dishes, even the stove, spoons, and knives, and never was seen in Lincoln since.

In the spring of 1868 the prairie was covered with camp wagons, consisting of bull teams, mule teams, and horse teams, all seeking out section stones and taking up homesteads and preemptions in Lancaster county. The land office was in Nebraska City at this time. All available teams were employed hauling lumber from Nebraska City and stone from Beatrice for the state capitol. Frame houses were springing up in all directions. Carpenters, masons, and plasterers were in demand. Auction sales were conducted by Thomas Hyde, auctioneer, selling city lots at that time to pay the expenses of building the capitol. The kind of money in circulation at that time was called greenbacks, and it was easy carried in a man's pocket, not being so heavy as gold.

In the fall of the same year, 1868, politics were getting lively. There were two liberty poles planted on top of a hill called market square at that time, north of where the post-office is now built, between O and P streets. One was a Democrat pole and the other was a Republican pole, both with the stars and stripes flying from the top. The Republican pole was taller than the other, being spliced. But some wicked villain came around one night, threw a rope across the top of it, and kept pulling at it until it fell across the top of the hill and cracked in two pieces. In the morning when the men were going to work, they only saw one pole with the stars and stripes flying, and that was the Democrat pole. When the report went around the town the people gathered in swarms to see the broken liberty pole. There was nothing but weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth among the old veterans of the late war. Finally there was a colored barber of the name of Johnston who lived west of the hill on Ninth street where Humphrey's hardware store is now. He reported that he heard the crack of the pole when it fell, and that he saw a man running toward the livery barn of Dunbar and Jones, on west O street. Suspicion fell on young Jones because he was a southern Democrat, and he was taken and a guard placed over him. The Moore brothers and other veterans of the recent war went to George Ballentine's lumber yard and got lumber and built a scaffold on top of the hill where the pole lay. The scaffold was built to hang Jones on, and his trial was to be held that evening before Judge Cadman. The Democrats got very uneasy, and sent word out toward Salt creek and other places around Lincoln to be in at the hanging. There did a lot of them come in and waited until the trial commenced. Judge Cadman called the case, and the witness appeared. He said he heard a loud noise of something cracking, and he looked out and saw a man running toward the barn after the crack.

"Did you know the man?"

Answer—"No, sir."

"Any more witnesses?"

There were none.

"I discharge the prisoner for want of further prosecution."

So there was no hanging on that scaffold in 1868.

In 1868 Mr. Robert Silvers got the contract of building the State University. The first thing he did was to start a brick yard. He bought all the wood he could find in the country and had to haul it with teams, as there was no railroad in the country at that time. He hauled the foundation stone from Yankee Hill, which was sand rock. This was of little account. As there was no other stone around Lincoln at that time to build any kind of foundation with, even the first bank at the corner of Tenth and O was built out of it. At that time Mr. Silvers did not know how he could find stone for the steps at the three principal entrances, south, east, and west, to the University. He asked me if there was any show to get them at any price. He told me to search the country to see if I could find any, as he hated to put wooden steps in a State University. I started out on a pony, and the first day I could find no stone that would suit. The second I went east and found stone located south of Bennet in a ravine. I was overjoyed to find a lot of fine sound stone that had been exposed to the sun for years. I knew that on that account they were sound. I then returned and told Mr. Silvers that I had found the stones that would make the steps. He asked me would they split with the frost. I said to him that if even one of them split with the frost never to pay me one cent for my material or labor. "Well," he said, "name your price." "Oh," I said, "about \$1.50 a superficial foot." He then said to me, "The job is yours." The contract was then made out.

I got all the stones that had been long exposed to the frost and sun, dressed them, and they are there to-day, after all the wear and tear they have received since they were laid in 1868. The steps and landings at the three entrances cost \$1,000, and Mr. Silvers made me a present of \$50 and thanks.

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