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Article Summary: Hicks served as a history professor and administrator at the University of Nebraska in the 1920s and 1930s. In this brief memoir he describes his campus colleagues and his relationships with students.

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MY NINE YEARS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

JOHN D. HICKS

IT WAS not without deep foreboding that in 1922 I joined the faculty of the North Carolina College for Women, now the Women's College of the University of North Carolina. My grandfather, Eli Hicks, was probably of North Carolinian ancestry, for he was born just across the western boundary of North Carolina near Greenville, Tennessee; but he had gone north as a boy, had accepted without reservation the northern point of view on slavery, and in due time had cast his lot with the Republican Party. He had little use for Democrats, and according to my father saw nothing wrong with the saying, long common along the Middle Border, that maybe all Democrats were not horsethieves, but all horsethieves were Democrats. It grieved him sorely when his older daughters, who came of age during the Civil War, married stay-at-home Democrats. "The Lord had a grudge against me," he used to say, "and paid me off in Democratic sons-in-law." Well, the fact that I was going into Democratic territory didn't bother me

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much, but I did wonder if I could ever feel at home in a region so different from my native Middle West. Naturally I kept the thought to myself, but I also cherished the hope that I would not have to stay in the South very long.

Nevertheless, the year I spent in Greensboro was an interesting and, in many ways, a rewarding experience. The southern girls I taught were dears, of course, professionally so. From about eight years on the flower of southern womanhood pursue the study of how to achieve mastery over the minds of men; they soon know exactly how to make any male animal think that really he is the only worthwhile person in all the world. Fortunately I had a wife who wasn't so slow in that department herself, and our interest centered closely on the five months old baby daughter we had brought with us. Teaching girls only, especially southern girls, was no great intellectual challenge. They were docile, studied hard, got good grades, and longed for matrimony. Their prejudices ran deep, but luckily I had little occasion to challenge them. The year before my arrival Professor Frederic Logan Paxson of the University of Wisconsin had fared less well. During a series of lectures he gave on the Greensboro campus one of the girls who had heard him speak was found weeping in her room, because, she said, she was afraid that Dr. Paxson was "neither a Christian nor a Democrat." On the latter score she might have been right. One reason why I was immune from such criticism was the fact that all of my teaching lay outside American History, but I was not long in beginning to feel the necessity of concentrating on my own field, an opportunity not open to me at NCCW. One thing that strengthened even more my resolve to leave the South was the sight of a gang of Negroes, convicts, I suppose, working the road in front of my house under guard of white men armed with guns. This wasn't the kind of environment in which I wanted to bring up my children.

Quite on the positive side were two close friendships my wife, Lucile, and I developed during the year. One of

them was with Charles B. Shaw, the college librarian, and his wife, Dorothy, our next door neighbors. Charles, or one of his predecessors, had succeeded in getting a new library building, but its bookshelves were startlingly bare. We conspired together on how to fill them and found, to our considerable dismay, that getting the money was the least part of the problem. I learned then that you don't just go out and buy a library, a fact that is painfully apparent nowadays as we struggle to establish new campuses, new colleges, and new universities. Libraries have to be built from the ground up, and the process takes a long time, partly because other libraries have already cornered so many of the books you need. The Shaws stayed in Greensboro longer than we did, then went to Swarthmore, where Charles was librarian until the time of his death. Somehow over the years we managed to see each other repeatedly. The other choice friend from Greensboro days was Harriet Elliot, who headed the Political Science Department. Harriet really opened my eyes to the world of politics; I had long had liberal tendencies, but Harriet was militant in her liberalism, and knew why. Later when she was prominent in the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, I had the pleasure of introducing her to Governor Phil LaFollette in his office at the state capitol in Madison. The two hit it off together perfectly; the conversational sparks flew in every direction. Phil was then advocating New Deal expenditures in billions rather than hundreds of millions to defeat the depression, and no doubt Harriet carried the word back to Washington.

Lady luck plays a prominent part in anyone's career. We had hardly got settled in Greensboro when I received an invitation to read a paper at the December meeting of the American Historical Association. This was the break I needed, and I accepted with alacrity, but how was I to write such a paper? My findings on "The Origin and Early History of the Farmers' Alliance in Minnesota," which exploited about all I had found out about that subject, were

already on the way to publication.¹ Had I been in Minnesota, I could easily have gone on with that theme, but what did I know about the Farmers' Alliance in North Carolina? The subject suggested itself, and I had to find out. The college library yielded exactly nothing, so I tried the Greensboro Public Library, which by good fortune had a file of the *Greensboro Daily Record* during exactly the years I needed it. I learned also of another newspaper prominent during the period, the *Greensboro Patriot*, located the back files, and used them. The trail pointed next to the *Progressive Farmer*, a paper that had been closely identified with the southern Alliance movement and Populism. So I went to Raleigh, where the paper was still published, and pored over its old volumes in the newspaper office. I also visited the headquarters of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, and picked up such additional data as its collection yielded. By the time the Convention met in late December, 1922, at New Haven, I had put together a paper that I was not ashamed to present.²

My luck continued. In my audience, I learned afterward, was Frederick Jackson Turner, and the word I got was that he approved of my paper. Far more important, however, was the presence of Guernsey Jones, Chairman of the Department of History at the University of Nebraska, who was scouting the field for a new man in American History. Jones had already got favorable reports on me before he came to the meeting, probably from Paxson, my major professor at Wisconsin, and from Dean Guy Stanton Ford of Minnesota, who knew of my work at Hamline University, St. Paul, where I had taught for six years before going to NCCW. I met Jones, and later at his invitation went to Nebraska to be inspected by Chancellor Samuel Avery and other interested individuals. Apparently I passed the test, for in due time I received an offer of a

¹ *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, IX (December, 1922), 203-226.

² "The Farmers' Alliance in North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review*, II (April 1925), 162-187.

professorship at \$4,000 a year, \$500 more than I was making at NCCW. I could have been had for less.

Going from North Carolina to Nebraska was like going back home. My parents, and theirs before them, had lived in the extreme northwestern tip of Missouri, and Lincoln was less than a hundred miles distant from my birthplace in Nodaway County. To our eyes the Nebraska capital city of about 50,000 inhabitants, with its wide streets flanked by stately elms, seemed an ideal place in which to live, and we were pleased at the prospect of spending the rest of our lives there. We found a suitable house to rent (somewhat more expensive than we could afford), but most important of all we found new friends, young people our own ages, with their children on the way and their futures to make. Among those we came to know best were Cliff and Frances Hamilton, Joyce and Flo Hertzler, Townsend and Elizabeth Smith, John and Nell Rice, Paul and Marjorie Sears, Fred and Georgia Upson. Guernsey Jones was unmarried, but he took quite a shine to Lucile, and was a constant caller at our house. He was a connoisseur of fine china, and brought with him each time he came a gift to treasure. He found bargains for us that we bought for a fraction of their value, and that still decorate our table. We knew other bachelors, too, among them Sherlock Gass, Kenneth Forward, and Orin Stepanek, all of whom later married. Delightful older people took us in, such as the Max Westermanns and the Paul Grummans. We joined a Faculty Dancing Club, and Lucile grimly undertook to make my dancing less intolerable. But with my one Methodist foot and my one Quaker foot, what chance did she have? Nevertheless we soon had a sense of belonging in Lincoln that we could never have acquired in a southern city. We even bought a lot and built ourselves a house out on "N" Street, starting the project with \$1,500 pressed on me by my mother, who thought her money would be safer with me than with a bank. She was so right; the bank failed disastrously a few weeks after she took her money out. As students of economic history will

recall, that happening was altogether too common among western small town banks of the period.

In our day Lincoln was a very "clubby" sort of place, and some of the organizations that then existed probably still endure. One such group, consisting of our most intimate friends, made it a practice to get together frequently at one another's houses for pot-luck dinners, each couple bringing a "dish." Strange as it may seem now, those of us who had children could then afford domestic help, usually a college girl who "lived in," and for a few dollars a week plus board and room was available for day-time chores and for baby-sitting when we went out of an evening. In this particular "dinner club," John Rice more or less led the works, with Menckenesque diatribes against every sort of sham and pretense. A Rhodes scholar, Rice had taken a first in Classics at Oxford, although I always believed less because of his knowledge of Greek than because of his native brilliance. He and others among us made constant use of the word "humanism," the definition of which seemed to vary with each user, but we wrestled earnestly with whatever ideas anyone thought he had. The one common denominator that ran through our talk was that there was a hell of a lot wrong with the world, whether in education, in religion, in literature, or in business, and that something ought to be done about it. Rice left Nebraska before I did, and the place was the poorer for his going. He could stir up more argument in a few minutes than any other man I ever knew. He later wrote a book, *I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century*, a delightful book in some ways, but unbecomingly unkind to Nebraska and some Nebraskans, particularly members of the University community. Nebraska certainly was not Oxford, and it had many faults, but it carried the brightest torch for learning to be found anywhere between the Missouri River and the Pacific Coast.

There were several somewhat formal men's dinner clubs in Lincoln, and I belonged to three of them. Most pretentious was "The Club," or as some called it derisively

"The *The* Club," which consisted of a dozen or fifteen of Lincoln's well-established business, professional, and University leaders. After a sumptuous home dinner (provided in turn by the various wives) one member read a paper, on which afterward every other member commented in turn. As I recall, the papers were quite uniformly good, and the comments worth listening to, if only one could keep awake after eating so much. Another club, "The Twelve," with somewhat similar membership, followed the same practice, but permitted the wives (known as "The Taggers") to be present at dinner, although afterward the women made themselves scarce. The third such organization to which I belonged, "The Crucible Club," had a somewhat larger membership, drawn in the main from young business and professional men. They met at a hotel or the University Club, and went through the customary after dinner ritual. Once in a while we struck pay dirt, as for example in a heated argument between a physician and a scientist on whether the future of medicine lay with the bacteriologists or the chemists. They both won. In general, members of this club regarded me and my ideas with some disdain. I stood up for the farmers, voted for such impossible characters as Norris, LaFollette, and Al Smith, and showed too little respect for what I would probably have called then the rotarian way of life. But I found a few choice friends in this group, among them Paul F. Good, now an Omaha lawyer, and Walter Locke, a journalist of real distinction, now deceased.

In addition to these clubs, membership in the University faculty meant involvement in a very active, almost mandatory, social life. Arthur M. Schlesinger, who had encountered much the same thing at Iowa City, once asked me: "How in the world did you manage to get any work done?" I don't know; but he did, and I did.

Adjustments to the University of Nebraska came easily. The main campus was unfortunately located near the business district of the city, campus buildings showed the remarkable unconcern for architectural consistency then

(and still) so characteristic of American universities, and all serious thought of landscaping lay well in the future. But my new University home looked good to me. I can remember thinking to myself as I settled into my Social Science Building office, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." The Department of History was then filled with dissension; despite its small size (six members, as I recall) it had only recently ceased to be three departments, English History, European History, and American History, each headed by an unyielding chief. But now it was united in name, if not in fact, under one head. I got along well with the chairman, and departmental problems did not at first trouble me. I had been warned about Fred Morrow Fling, well-known for his work on the French Revolution and for his personal inflexibility. "So you're going out to Nebraska to have your Fling!" quipped one of my friends, in commenting on my new appointment. But when the learned professor and his wife called on us, our baby daughter occupied the entire time untying his shoe-strings, a circumstance that kept the conversation on a pleasantly low level. When we returned the call, however, it was different. The master took me into his library, showed me his books (a truly remarkable collection), then sat me down at a table opposite him, and began to quiz me. He was past-master at the art—my oral Ph.D. examination at Wisconsin was as nothing in comparison. After an hour or more he seemed satisfied, and we rejoined the ladies in the living room. My relations with him from that time on were never unfriendly, if often difficult.

I early conceived a very genuine admiration for Chancellor Avery. He was a diamond in the rough who looked more like a farmer, uncomfortable in store clothes, than like the head of a great University. He was deeply intent on building up his faculty, a task too long neglected, and admitted overpaying some recent acquisitions (including me) in order to beat out prospective competitors. He was a shrewd judge of men, who could strike a keen balance between the virtues and defects of any given individual,

and use him for what he was worth. In analyzing character he sometimes thought out loud, and maybe said too much. "You can't make a parlor cat out of an alley cat," I've heard him observe, in explanation of a certain professor's deficiencies. He could squeeze a penny hard, especially on minor items—always expected and delivered a tight budget. In his regime salary increases were difficult to come by; if an increase in rank in lieu of salary would satisfy, he would keep the cash and let the credit go. One dean who made overgenerous promises to his faculty, Avery likened to a small boy, who in advance of their appearance promised out more kittens to his friends than his expectant mother cat delivered. I can recall being invited to his office and greeted with the comment: "I don't like it for members of the faculty to conspire *against* the Chancellor, but I've no objection to their conspiring *with him*. Let's do a little conspiring." Out of that particular conspiracy came the selection of Herman G. James to be Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Dean of the Graduate School, both at the same time, a sound as well as frugal idea, I thought. The fewer deans, the better.

Off as well as on the campus Avery was an astute politician. He got along well with his Board of Regents most of the time, but was content with only a bare majority on his side when he couldn't do better. The Board he had to deal with was elected, one from each Congressional district, a situation that sometimes brought out the cynic in him. Commenting on the relative merits of appointive and elective boards, I've heard him say: "Which ever you've got you'll wish it was the other." His frugality and conservatism appealed to the state legislature, which during the years I was in Nebraska showed similar traits. In dealing with politicians, he asserted feelingly that conservative Republicans were the easiest to handle, conservative Democrats next, liberal Democrats considerably more difficult, and liberal Republicans quite the worst of all. I think probably he had something there, even if in these years I did class myself with the last-named group. I had good company. George W. Norris was a United

States Senator from Nebraska all the time I lived in the state, and C. A. Sorensen was his able campaign manager. On several occasions I met Norris at Sorensen's house.

Most of my classes at Nebraska were large, particularly in the survey course which filled the Social Science auditorium, but they were all in American History, the students were responsive, and the library facilities were adequate. There was then no pampering of teachers as to the work load. In addition to the survey course, which was designed primarily for sophomores, I taught two lecture courses for upperclassmen, one on the History of the West, and the other on recent American History; also a seminar for graduates. The survey course I had given before at Hamline, but I now included in it for the first time the colonial period, and revised every lecture, again and again. The other courses I had never given before, and for several years they absorbed a large part of my time. The day of dependence on graduate students for use as section leaders, or teaching assistants, had not yet dawned in Nebraska, although in large courses we did have paid readers. For this assignment we sometimes chose able undergraduates, a last resort which I deeply deplored and rarely used.

In the History of the West I followed the pattern that Paxson had laid out at Wisconsin, beginning with the colonial frontier of 1763, and following the frontier across the continent, step by step, until 1893, the date Turner delivered his famous paper on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." An easy, but not always accurate (Nebraska, for example) definition of when a given frontier grew up and could be abandoned to make way for a discussion of its successor was when the territories concerned became states. Sometimes I threw in a few extra lectures at the end in order to bring in the four states admitted later—Utah, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona. I can recall also lectures comparing the Canadian frontier with the frontier of the United States, and raising questions about a world frontier. I had to put this course together without benefit of Paxson's *A History of the*

American Frontier (1924), but as soon as this book appeared it became our text, and sent me scrounging for new lecture material. From the first year, however, we had Turner's collected essays, and made much use of them in the discussion periods I held at regular intervals. For this purpose I divided the class into several small groups, over each of which I presided in person. In my advanced courses I read all the bluebooks myself, and also the term papers I required of each student. This seemed normal to me; my teachers both at Northwestern and at Wisconsin has assumed the same responsibility. Mari Sandoz, whom I had known as an undergraduate, told me later that I had commented favorably on a term paper she wrote for me, noting her admirable understanding of frontier conditions. I'm sure she merited whatever compliments I paid her; her *Old Jules* is one of the most moving narratives of the frontier that I have ever read.

My course in recent American History was not technically so named, for one of my colleagues, Roy Cochran, had pre-empted that title for a course he gave in current events. So I called the first semester "The Cleveland Era," and the second, "The Roosevelt Era." There was then no occasion to ask which Roosevelt. Partly because of the competition from Cochran's course, and partly because of rigorous prerequisites laid down to satisfy Dean James, my classes in these courses were very small and very select. Under these conditions I could make use of an informal lecture system that worked very well. I prepared a careful outline from which I could have lectured, if necessary, but instead of trying to do all the talking myself I encouraged the students to contribute whenever their information was adequate. What they didn't say that needed to be said, I tried to provide. Student participation was enthusiastic, and about one hundred per cent for each period. When I succeeded Dean James in 1929 I gave up this course, however, out of deference to my administrative duties. Furthermore, as long as I remained in Nebraska my principal interest lay in the History of the West. It was only after

I joined the faculty of the University of Wisconsin that I began to turn definitely toward the twentieth century.

My first efforts to direct graduate work occurred at Nebraska, and it was my great good fortune to welcome a steady stream of really superior graduate students into my seminar. I quickly discovered that an abundance of excellent sources existed for the pioneer period of Nebraska history, and, dedicated Turnerian that I was, I steered my flock in that direction. In Nebraska, and in every other western state in which I have lived, some of the old-timers invariably did a tremendous service to the cause of history by collecting and preserving the records. Impressed as they were with the process of transforming a wilderness into a civilized society, and incidentally with the importance of their own contributions to that end, they made every effort to promote the "remembrance of things past." In general their contribution was strictly antiquarian; they were not in search of hidden meanings or new interpretations. But they kept the sources, and in due time nearly always founded a state historical society to help take care of them. The old-timers got a minor assist from the genealogists, although in the new western areas ancestors beyond a generation or two back always lived somewhere else. Unwilling to ignore anyone with any interest in any kind of history, I not only joined the State Historical Society, but also the local chapter of the Society of Mayflower Descendants. At an annual dinner of the latter organization, one lady genealogist, following an animated recital of her "line" to a bored male guest, inquired brightly: "And what is your line?" To which he replied cogently: "The Union Pacific." Historically speaking, his answer was not irrelevant, for railroad records were among the most important of Nebraska's historical sources.

The Nebraska State Historical Society, when I arrived on the scene, still had its principal collection in the basement of the old University Library. Plans for a new building adjacent to the state Capitol had gone awry after the foundations were laid, but the pressure for space was so

great that the Society roofed over the basement walls, and installed therein well-filled book-shelves. On occasion I braved an inch or two of water on the floor of this cellar to explore such reserves as were stored there, but for the most part my students and I found what we needed in the Society's campus headquarters. Old newspaper files, territorial and early state documents, pamphlets of every sort and kind, and some manuscript collections provided the all-essential material for historical investigation. As yet, not nearly enough had been done by way of organizing and classifying the Society's treasures, but we had the advantage of two knowledgeable individuals to help us find the items we sought. One was the Superintendent, as he was then called, Dr. Addison E. Sheldon, an old-timer himself, who had been around long enough to know a great many of the Nebraska pioneers, and to remember more about them than they had ever known about themselves. The other was the Librarian, Mrs. Clara S. Paine, widow of a former Superintendent, who patiently directed the search part of our research.

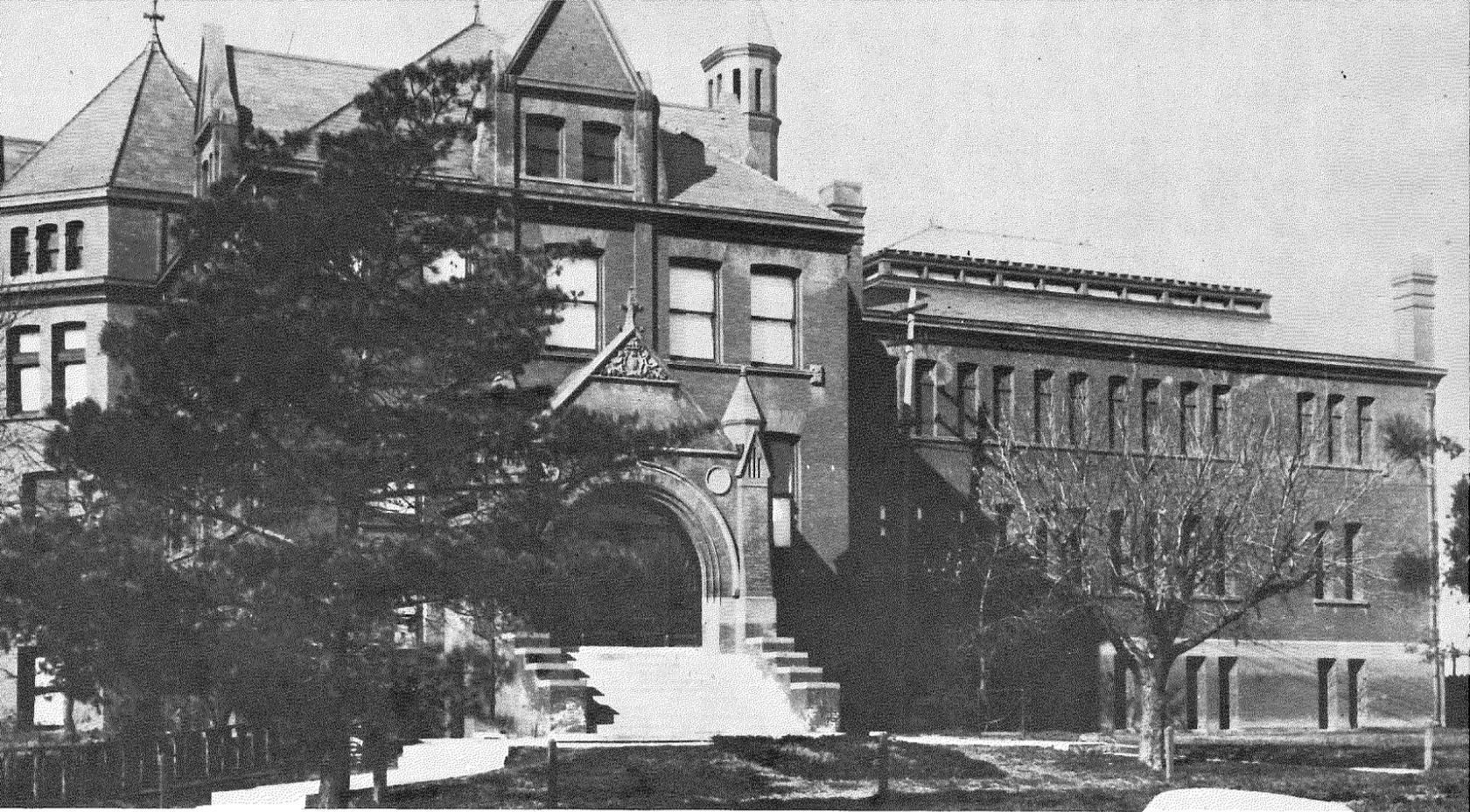
Of great importance to us, also, was a three-volume work by Albert Watkins, *Illustrated History of Nebraska* (1906-13), a production of extraordinary merit. Watkins was a native of England who had come to Nebraska by way of Wisconsin and Iowa. As a former school-teacher and newspaper editor, with one foot in politics (he was postmaster of Lincoln from 1885 to 1890, and a leading opponent of free silver), he knew whereof he wrote, and he wrote it well. Part of his *History* was "mug-book," but that part, too, was of great value to us. While Watkins' volumes were by no means complete enough to obviate the need for further research, they did provide us with a spring-board to almost every conceivable subject. I made good use of them, and of Sheldon's extraordinary memory, when I was writing a score or so of sketches of early Nebraskans for the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

Most of my graduate students were candidates for the M.A. degree who were either planning to teach, or had al-

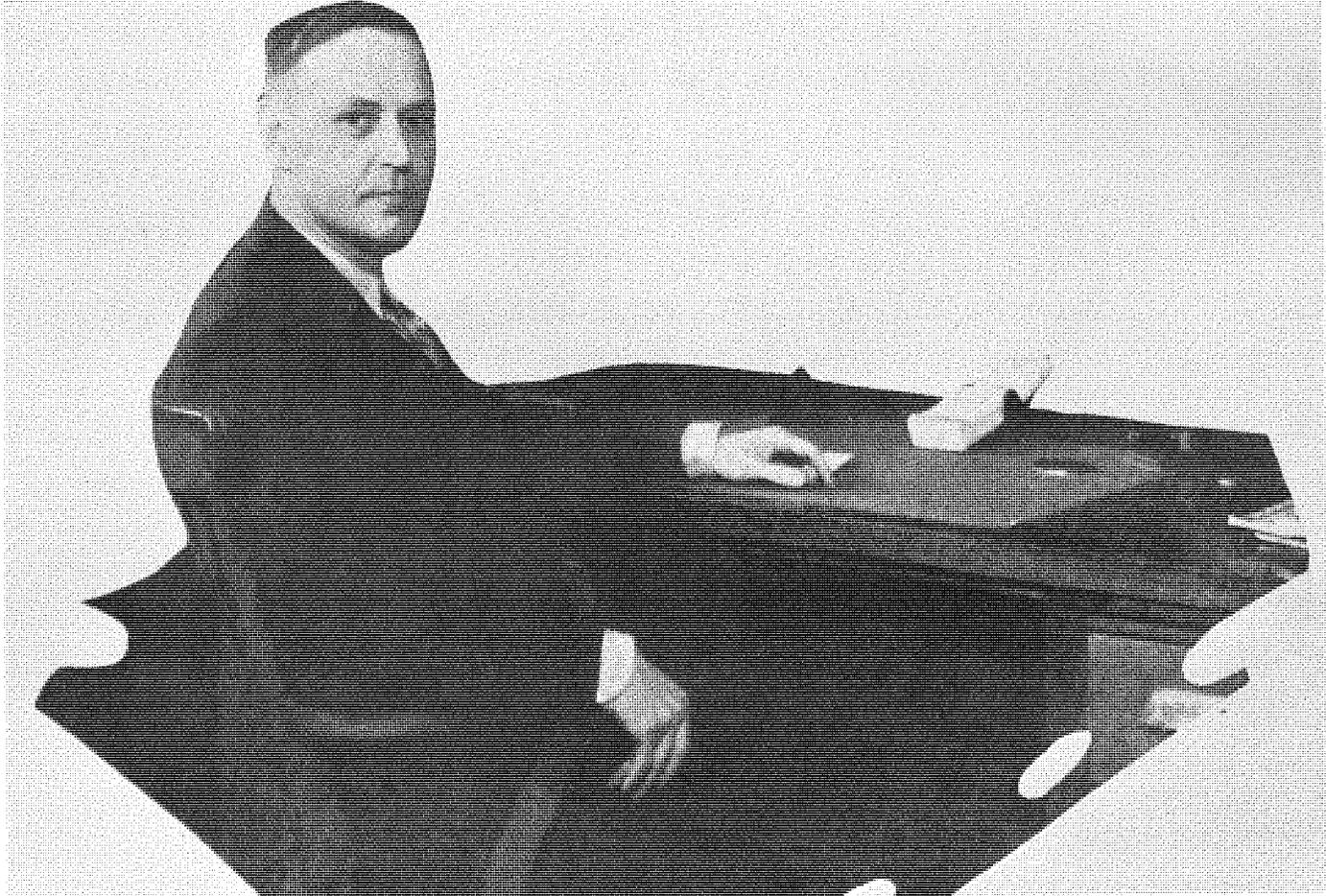
ready taught, in high school. In those days, fortunately, the requirements for an M.A. included a thesis, and student reports on their progress toward this goal provided the chief *piece de resistance* of our seminar. I encouraged each member of the group to find a subject that would have some special meaning for him (or her, as the case might be, for there were always a number of women in the group). The origins of a student's home town, an early Indian outbreak, the opening up of new trails (Nebraska was a highway to the farther West), the building of branch railroads, the careers of prominent citizens, the family trail to Nebraska, all these and many other local subjects furnished grist for our mill. One of the most perspicacious of these theses was Jesse E. Boell's "Bryan before 1896," which demonstrated among other things the author's genius for digging out original sources. Sometimes the subject led beyond the state borders, but if so, we followed where it led; two such theses that were particularly good were Fern McBride's, "Steamboating on the Upper Missouri," and Everett Dick's, "The Long Drive."³ I should have kept a card file indicating by author and title all the master's theses written under my direction, but this was one of my many sins of omission. A few of them that were related in some way to Populism I noted in the bibliography of *The Populist Revolt*.

Only two of my students completed their work for the Ph.D. with me at Nebraska. One of them, Annadora Gregory, wrote about Crete, Nebraska, and Doane College, its particular pride and joy. The other, Charles Lindsay, was from Wyoming, and with my encouragement wrote a thesis, later published, on *The Big Horn Basin* (1932). We lacked most of the material he needed, but he traveled the region over and hunted it out from Army posts, Indian reservations, town libraries, and the like, a laudable example of both search and research. Lindsay died shortly after receiving his degree, while swimming across the Shoshone

³Dick's thesis was published in the Kansas State Historical Society *Collections*, XVII (1926-1928), 27-97.



The University of Nebraska Library, 1895-1945.



John D. Hicks, Dean of the College of Arts and Science,
1929-1932.

River, probably from a heart attack for he was a powerful swimmer. As a matter of policy I encouraged most of my M.A. students who wished to take a Ph.D. degree to finish their work elsewhere. Among such were Everett Dick, now a Professor of History at Union College; J. Martin Klotsche, now Provost at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; and William F. Zimmerman, now Dean of Midland College, Fremont, Nebraska. Dick and Klotsche took their doctor's degrees at Wisconsin; Zimmerman, at Cornell. A. Bower Sageser, now of Kansas State University, Manhattan, started his Ph.D. work with me, but finished it after I had left for Wisconsin. George T. Hunt also began with me at Nebraska, but followed me to Wisconsin, and took his degree there.

In a very literal sense I worked with my graduate students. The old University of Nebraska Library was cramped for space, and we trod on each other's toes as we ransacked its historical resources. In the Historical Society quarters the crowding was even worse. One result of my close proximity to my students was that I was forever at their mercy; when they had a question to ask, it never occurred to them not to interrupt me. Possibly I could have stopped this informality by a slight show of impatience, but I don't recall that the thought ever entered my mind. As a matter of fact I got as much as I gave. My students all knew what my interests were, and the interruptions were often to tell me about some item they had dug up that they thought I would like to have.

Despite its relative youth, the University of Nebraska had even then a good library, partly, no doubt, because of pressure exerted by E. Benjamin Andrews, Chancellor from 1900 to 1908. Andrews was a well-rounded scholar, a distinguished historian, and a former President of Brown University. During the 1890s, while still at Brown, he had openly espoused the free silver cause, and when asked by his Board of Regents to discontinue the airing of his monetary views, had promptly resigned. His action precipitated a terrific row over freedom of speech, and the Regents

backed down. Andrews withdrew his resignation, but remained at Brown for only one more year before accepting, first the Superintendency of the Chicago Public Schools, then after two years the Chancellorship of the University of Nebraska, where his views on free silver were less a liability than an asset. Andrews' activities at Nebraska provide a shining example of the leavening influence of the East on the West. Under his guidance the frontier institution shook off its western provincialism, and became a University in fact as well as in name. Will Owen Jones, brother of Guernsey Jones and the highly intelligent editor of Lincoln's leading daily, no doubt had this thought in mind when he answered the query of a supercilious eastern visitor: "How far east do you have to go to find a really good library?" "To the British Museum," was Jones' instant, if somewhat cryptic, reply.

Whether because of its location in the heart of the Populist country, or because of Andrews' influence, or both, the University Library possessed the finest collection of free silver pamphlets I have ever seen, while the Historical Society was rich in Populist lore. My first instinct was naturally to write on Populism in Nebraska, but I discovered that John D. Barnhart, then teaching at Nebraska Wesleyan, had a Harvard Ph.D. thesis on that subject in the making, while Raymond C. Miller, at the University of Chicago, was engaged in a similar task on Kansas. Since A. M. Arnett's *The Populist Movement in Georgia* (1922) had already appeared, soon to be followed by several other state studies on southern Populism, it seemed evident that the thing for me to do was to aim at an all-over treatment of the subject. Meantime, however, to satisfy the insistent urge for publication, I began to turn out a series of articles on various aspects of the agrarian revolt. During this period I was characterized, not inaptly, by one critic as an "indefatigable monographer," who could write an article, but not a book. *The Populist Revolt* (1931) was a long time in coming, I'll have to admit, but in due time it arrived. I dedicated it, appropriately I thought, to my grad-

uate students, many of whom had worked on subjects related to the general theme.

It is only fair to point out, however, that I had benefitted greatly from research in other libraries than those of my own University. My previous contacts, both in Minnesota and in North Carolina, had been invaluable, but I needed to visit other libraries also. In the 1920s "grants-in-aid" were not so easy to come by as they are now, but I solved this dilemma in part by accepting summer appointments in other institutions. The most rewarding of these positions was one I held at George Washington University, Washington, D. C., which enabled me to work an entire summer in the Library of Congress, an absolute essential. I also taught one summer each at the University of Minnesota and at Northwestern University, both useful experiences. On the way from North Carolina to Nebraska I taught the summer at Syracuse University, and after leaving Nebraska but before arriving at Wisconsin at West Virginia. The first half of my last year as a member of the Nebraska faculty I was on leave as Visiting Lecturer at Harvard University, and had an office in Widener Library, but by that time *The Populist Revolt* had achieved publication.

Contemporary reviews of my book were for the most part flattering, but a generation later it became the frequent target of "revisionists." Except for a few minor points they did not challenge it factually, but they did object to some of my interpretations. By this time I could, in certain instances, agree with them, although seemingly it never occurred to anyone that events of the intervening years might have changed my mind on anything. For example, when I wrote *The Populist Revolt* I was still uncritical, as were most American historians, of Turner's theories, and found greater significance in the passing of the frontier than I would now think reasonable. As I saw matters then, the lack of a new frontier to which to go was an important consideration, alike for the distressed farmers of the West, where the frontier had only lately

disappeared, and for those of the South, where the Civil War and Reconstruction had virtually revived post-frontier conditions. While this line of thought was not altogether without merit, I would now give greater emphasis to the effects of the agricultural revolution, and particularly to the increasingly international aspects of American farm marketing. As a matter of fact, early in 1954, well before the publication of Richard Hofstadter's criticisms in *The Age of Reform* (1955), I wrote a little piece in this vein for Broadcast Music, Inc., which no doubt reached a few listeners over the air, and two years later was published in *The American Story* (1956), edited by Earl Schenk Miers.

My statement that the Populists had begun "the last phase of a long and perhaps a losing struggle . . . to save agricultural America from the devouring jaws of industrial America" has also received criticism. While the farmers are now in a small minority, it can be argued that they are doing all right, and they certainly haven't been devoured. They began to prosper, indeed, even before World War I, and they certainly prospered during it. Such emotion as my statement reveals, however, can be traced readily to the time in which it was written. During World War I the American farmers had responded cordially to the slogan, "Food will win the war," and had achieved a capacity to produce in greater quantities than they could market profitably after normal production began again in Europe. While the war was on, the federal government had fixed agricultural prices at a lower figure than the law of supply and demand would have warranted, but after the war it took off its price supports, and allowed the farmers' income to drop abysmally. Throughout the decade of the 1920s the holders of power in Washington branded nearly every farmer effort to get government help as "economically unsound," while at the same time defending the necessity of a high protective tariff and other benefits for manufacturers. It is possible that my sympathy for the earlier movement of protest was compounded by the conditions I saw about me. A quarter of a century later, when

the farmers had learned after World War II how to obtain substantial governmental aid, the situation had quite a different look, although hardly anyone would now deny the overwhelming superiority of industry over agriculture.

Perhaps a few other items stressed by the revisionists are worthy of note. Some of them have taken my observation that many Populist demands won later acceptance to mean that I regarded nineteenth century Populism as the primary cause of twentieth century Progressivism. I would not so interpret my comments; certainly the Progressive urbanites had many quite separate reasons of their own for embracing so much of the Populist program. I will concede cheerfully that I did not evaluate adequately the importance of middle class participation in the twentieth century reform movement until after the publication of George E. Mowry's *The California Progressives* (1951), but I was writing about the Populists, not the Progressives. My failure to brand the Populists as antisemites and nativists also worried some critics, but I think that the critics were much further off base than I was. Indeed, later investigations seem to show that the Populists were, if anything, more charitable toward the Jews and the foreigners than were the general run of Americans. As for the argument of some so-called "new conservatives" that the Populists introduced into American politics a spirit of demagogic intolerance and authoritarianism that culminated in the activities of such persons as Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin, there could hardly have been a more glaring misrepresentation. The Populists favored the use of governmental power to restrain misconduct on the part of the great corporations only because there was no other power strong enough to protect the agricultural interest. Undoubtedly they put too much faith in the efficacy of legislation, but this was (and is) an all-American, not strictly a Populist, trait.

Sometime during the middle 1920s Guernsey Jones became incapacitated because of illness, and I took over from him the chairmanship of the Department of History.

This task involved much less paper work than is almost universal in departmental offices today, and I held down the job without so much as a part-time secretary or typist. I had only one Department meeting during my four years as chairman, for the clashing personalities within our group made it completely impossible to transact any business that way. So I gathered support for what I thought should be done by consulting individually with each member. Quite obviously we needed new blood, and we achieved some results along this line. To take over Professor Jones's work in English History, we brought in Glenn Gray, a Notestein Ph.D. from Cornell, whose course in English Constitutional History, a pre-law requirement, greatly pleased the Law School faculty. It was a matter of deep concern to me that we had no one in the Department primarily interested in either Ancient or Medieval History, and as a long step in the right direction we succeeded in adding to our staff Charles Henry Oldfather, a Wisconsin Ph.D. who had studied under Westermann and Rostovtzeff and had taught for ten years at Wabash College. While Classics departments, in these days when students of the "dead" languages are not very numerous, readily volunteer to take over courses in Ancient History, it has always seemed important to many of us in the historical profession that the history of the Ancient World should be taught by historians. Too often the Classicists are primarily interested in philology, and as history teachers approach their subject more from the language than from the historical point of view. Oldfather was a great tower of strength to the Department and the University; eventually he succeeded me, first as chairman, then as dean. In Medieval History we first brought in John L. La Monte, a Harvard Ph.D. who left us for Minnesota after two years, then Robert L. Reynolds, who after a similar interval returned to Wisconsin. We then got Edgar N. Johnson, a Chicago Ph.D. who stayed at Nebraska for a long time. The Department of History also collaborated with the State Historical Society to invite James L. Sellers, a Wisconsin Ph.D. then teaching at Wisconsin, to join us, giving part

of his time to the Society and part to courses in American history. Sellers soon came over full-time to the Department, which he served with great distinction for the rest of his teaching career.

I had no faintest desire to become an administrator, beyond such limited duties as I exercised as chairman, and I can honestly say that the deanship I held at Nebraska sought me out, not the reverse. When Dean James left Nebraska in 1929 to become President of the University of South Dakota, his double deanship was divided between my friend Fred Upson as Dean of the Graduate School, and myself as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Since John Senning at the same time became Chairman of the Political Science Department, a post James had also held, James took great delight in pointing out that it took three men to replace him. Perhaps I should have declined a job in which I felt so little interest, but I accepted it in part to keep it out of more ambitious hands. I had come to believe, and this is still my opinion, that our Universities suffer much from over-administration. I knew that I had no desire for power, and would interfere as little as possible with the prerogatives of the teaching staff. Despite my fancy title, I still considered myself primarily a teacher, and proved it both by giving up my chairmanship and by retaining three out of the four courses I taught.

I suppose I was really not a very good dean; certainly my heart wasn't much in the job. I inherited from Dean James an efficient secretary, Florence Beers, who knew the routine of the office and discharged her responsibilities well. It never occurred to me to seek additional clerical help; we had enough. Indeed, my first two decisions as dean nearly put our office out of commission. I directed (1) that we would keep no records available elsewhere in the University, and (2) that there would be no revision of the Arts and Sciences requirements for degrees while I was dean. Like most such faculties, ours had tended to change the requirements so often that the ink was hardly dry on one new plan before another new plan was adopted; it was

a rarity for a senior to graduate under the requirements that existed when he was a freshman. I had lived through enough revisions of the curriculum to realize how like such an ordeal was to a general revision of the tariff by Congress. Every department, like every economic interest, was out to get all it could for its own aggrandizement. This was natural enough, for every instructor who was worth his salt thought of his subject as fundamental to learning. But the log-rolling necessary to get any agreement among the various contenders for spoils would almost put Congress to shame. University professors are terrible in-fighters; they operate with no holds or weapons barred. So while I was dean we avoided this kind of bloodshed.

It was my policy also to interfere as little as possible with the various departments. I had the duty of selecting departmental chairmen, and during my two-and-one-half years as dean I exercised this prerogative once, when after much consultation I brought in Thomas M. Raysor, a Harvard Ph.D., to head the English Department. I remember Raysor best for a great personal service he did for me. Once he called at my office to ask if I had any manuscripts that I would like him to read critically; he was fresh out of such punishment, and missed it. I handed him a typed copy of *The Populist Revolt*, which I had not yet submitted to a publisher. He brought it back a day or two later with some excellent suggestions, and the flattering comment: "This is a good book. It will make your reputation." As dean I also had annual budget recommendations to make, the most serious and time-consuming of my duties. The budget sheets we used displayed three columns, one for the chairmen, one for the appropriate dean, and one for the Chancellor—the final answer. I always conferred with the chairmen before they made their recommendations, and tried to hold them down to figures that would be acceptable on high. As a result, the chairmen's figures and the dean's figures were usually identical, and were usually accepted, for I knew in advance about how much the Chancellor would assign to Arts and Sciences. I had no separate dean's budget, except barely enough to carry my office, and hap-

pily no largesse of any kind to distribute. Nor did I have any responsibility for student discipline; I would never have taken the job had it called for such duties. We had a separate Dean of Students on whom that responsibility fell, poor chap.

Despite the limited interpretation I placed on my duties, I did, however, attempt to assert some leadership. Unfortunately I had not yet learned the first rule of effective University administration. Under no circumstances should a President, or a Chancellor, or a Provost, or a Dean appear to have any ideas. If he wants something done, he should carefully and unobtrusively plant the thought in some unexpected place, wait patiently for it to take root and grow, act as surprised and suspicious of the idea as possible when it is brought to his attention, then yield reluctantly to overwhelming pressure. One thing I thought a dean should do was to read the catalogue. This is by no means a simple undertaking, and if persisted in too long at a time is guaranteed to produce migraine. But I tried. One thing I discovered was that many courses seemed to overlap with many others, and I thought something ought to be done about it. I found, for example, that there were at least five separate courses in statistics, given in as many different departments. Why, I innocently suggested, should there not be one course in the fundamentals of the subject, then if necessary others building on this foundation? I soon discovered that I had stirred up a veritable hornet's nest—there were at least fifty good reasons why this could never be done. Before the statistical confusion that resulted, I retired in some disorder.

I had another idea, by no means original, but it seemed good to me. One problem of the College of Arts and Sciences was that every other undergraduate college—Teachers, Engineering, Business Administration, and the like—made use of Arts and Sciences courses to fill out its curriculum; in some of them, indeed, our courses provided from three-fourths to four-fifths of their programs. Not only that, the professional schools, Law and Medicine,

designated certain courses we gave as pre-Law and pre-Medic requirements, and kept a sharp eye on their content. Because of outside insistence, we felt obliged to offer certain special courses, Business English, for example, that of our own free will we would hardly have thought necessary. For our own freshmen we required a three hour course in English, but some of the other colleges were unwilling to spend so much time on so unimportant a subject, so for their benefit we offered a two-hour watered-down substitute. Our beginning Mathematics course, I always thought, represented less what our Mathematicians thought desirable than what the Engineering faculty wanted us to teach their students. Arts and Sciences was thus to a very great extent a mere service college for other schools and colleges, and had no real soul of its own. For this situation, which still exists to some extent in nearly every American university, I think now that there is probably no remedy, but I wondered then out loud why all parties concerned shouldn't agree on a common program for the first two years, and begin their divergences thereafter. I would even have given up my cherished dream of avoiding curriculum revisions if by so doing we could all have adopted the same requirements for the freshman and sophomore years. Well, this trial balloon was shot down so fast that I couldn't even find the fragments. So I gave up reform.

I also found out that I couldn't trust reporters. For what reason, I don't quite know, but in general it seems true that the newspaper world is determined to make university professors look as ridiculous as possible. Once, in talking with an affable reporter from an Omaha newspaper, I dwelt on some of the problems described above, and facetiously (I thought) quoted Hartley Burr Alexander, a distinguished Professor of Philosophy who had recently left Nebraska for Scripps College. Disgusted with the way in which students worked more for degrees than for an education, Alexander suggested that society could save itself much trouble by awarding degrees at birth. All babies weighing nine pounds or more should receive a Ph.D. degree; all eight pound babies an M.A.; all seven

pound babies a B.A.; all six pounders and under, a teacher's certificate. The reporter panned me roundly for making light of serious things, and his story went all over the country. I received numerous letters of protest, most of them from teachers-college professors who were angry that I had placed their product so low on the totem pole. I never again tried to be funny with a reporter.

Three episodes made me regret deeply that I had ever become a dean. After Avery retired, the Regents made Dean Edgar A. Burnett of the College of Agriculture Acting Chancellor, partly because he was the oldest of the deans and was not regarded seriously as a candidate for Chancellor. As Acting Chancellor Burnett leaned over backward to seek faculty advice and conciliate faculty opinion. Because of this characteristic, many of us urged that he be made Chancellor, even though his term of office might be short; and this was done. But as Chancellor he no longer felt the need of faculty advice, and took many actions that I, at least, could not approve. One was the very harsh treatment he meted out to two faculty members who made the mistake of drinking some yeast beer (this was during the prohibition era) at a student party in a campus building. I defended these men before the Board of Regents, while the Dean of the Law School (a somewhat better lawyer) acted as prosecutor. The punishment assessed was out of all proportion to the crime; but it would have been even worse had not a lawyer on the Board detected from the evidence (as I did not) that the whole thing was almost, if not quite, a frame-up. On another occasion a member of the Sociology Department was offered his salary for the rest of the year to resign and get out of town. His crime was that, while he and his wife were out at a party, a baby-sitter at his house had misbehaved with a boy friend, whose influential father insisted that the wicked Sociologist was somehow to blame. Knowing full well that I would protest, the Chancellor directed that the story be kept from me until the victim had left the state.

The third episode had to do with the depression. Nebraska salaries were then pitifully low, but at least we had salaries. Nevertheless, the Chancellor decided that, to conciliate public opinion, all salaries should be lowered by a flat ten per cent. This action was ordered in the middle of a biennium, with the money to run the University for the coming year already appropriated. Nor was the sum thus saved returned to the state treasury; it was spent, most of us thought, for far less important things than teachers' salaries. I reminded the Chancellor that President Hoover, as a means of holding the depression in check, had urged businessmen not to reduce wages or salaries, and I remember well the reply I got. "That's one point," the Chancellor asserted firmly, "on which Hoover was wrong." When in the spring of 1932 I received an invitation to join the Department of History of the University of Wisconsin at the same salary I was receiving at Nebraska, I accepted without first referring the matter to the Chancellor. It is only fair to admit, however, that I would have accepted this offer under any circumstances. Professionally it was a long step forward, and I didn't want to be a dean anyway.

Glad as I was to escape from my administrative perplexities, it was not easy for me, or for my wife, to leave Nebraska. It was almost like leaving home again; many of our happiest memories are associated with the years we spent in Lincoln. We came with one small daughter; we left with three, only one of whom was still very small. We came with a few acquaintances; we left with many close friends, the kind one doesn't lose by separation, but for that reason misses all the more. We can never forget the generous welcome we received as we arrived, nor the continuing evidence of good will that accompanied us as we went on our way. My students, whom I had not forsaken when I became a dean, were a constant joy, perhaps the most appreciative students I have ever taught. They flocked to my office, and I received them gladly; they sent me flowers when I was ill; they gave me some carefully-chosen books when I met them last; in the days of a well-known "gloomy dean," they called me the "jolly dean." The fac-

ulty I had sought to serve were equally gracious; I think that I retained the confidence of an overwhelming majority of them to the end. They had a "going-away" dinner for us, and gave us presents, a part of the "middlewestern way of life" that we understood and liked. It was hard to leave, and maybe we should have stayed. But one can't have it both ways; we did what we thought we had to do.