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Article Summary: The sculptor Lee Lawrie and his contemporaries showed a growing interest in regionalism. Lawrie's 1920 drawings for the new capitol building in Lincoln included a varied collection of Nebraska images: buffalo, pioneer families, Conestoga wagons, cavalry soldiers, Indians, the Sower.

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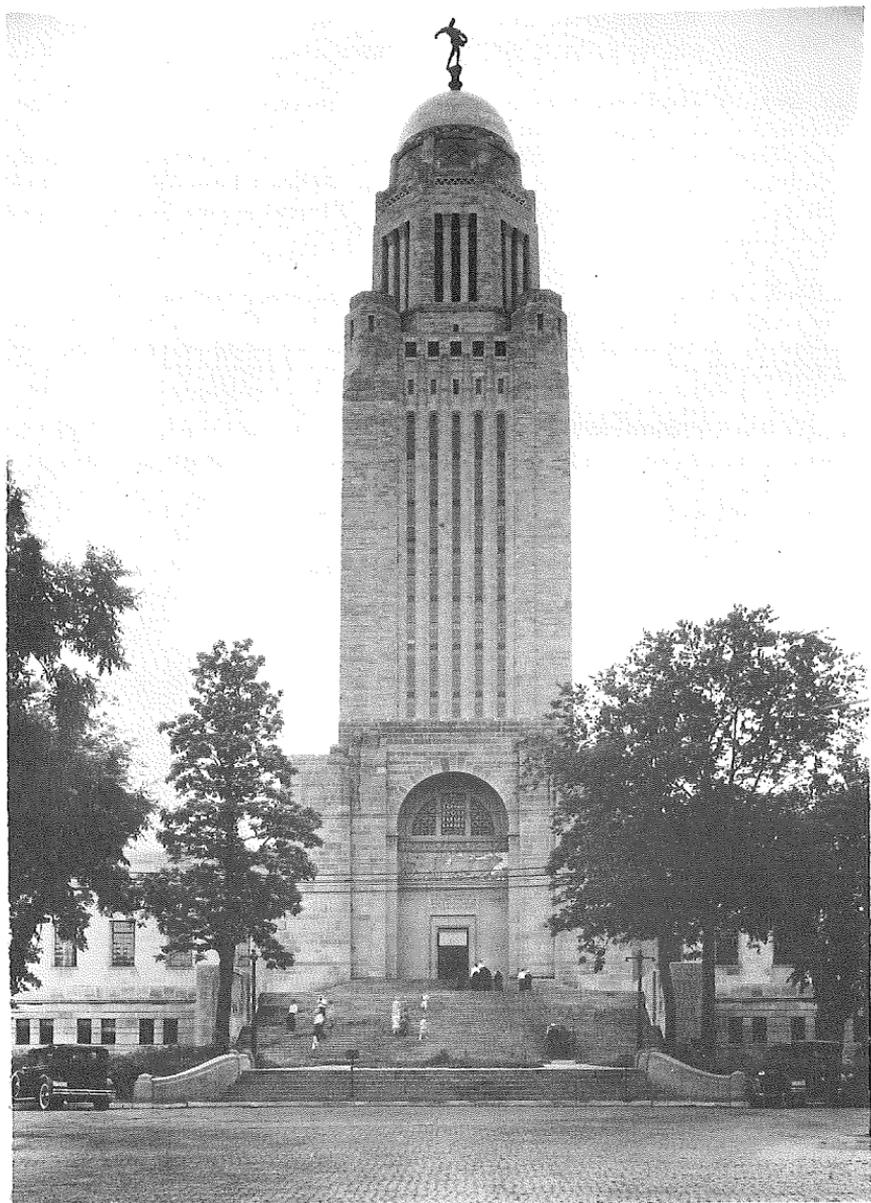
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Nebraska State Capitol, June 14, 1931. Nathaniel Dewell collection, Nebraska State Historical Society.

Strength and Stability on the Middle Border: Lee Lawrie's Sculpture for the Nebraska State Capitol

By Timothy J. Garvey

In my earliest recollection of [Nebraska] there were miles and miles of rolling prairie, grass-grown and treeless. Such had been the land for countless centuries before my father and the men of his generation had come into it, to change its face once for all. I could remember, too, how beautiful in those early days the prairies looked on autumn nights, banded in every direction by moving ribbons of fire; for the homesteaders were adventurous rather than provident men, and they cleared their land for tillage with the easy extravagance of pioneers. The country was still very beautiful, but in a new fashion: the virgin prairie was all gone; in its place were tilled fields and secluded pastures, and the rolling hills were varied in every direction by upstanding groves and orchards planted by the hand of man. And what the country had become one realized that it must remain for centuries, aye, for millenia, to come: a generation of men, armed with hammer and plough, had swept over its surface, and converted the hunting grounds of the countless past into the farmsteads of the not less countless future. They were great adventurers, these men; and they left their mark upon Time.¹

With a simple paragraph, University of Nebraska philosophy Professor Hartley Burr Alexander captured a sense of the abrupt change which occurred in the plains region during the later 19th century. An "adventurous" group had descended upon the land, prairie for "countless centuries," bringing a transformation that would last "for millenia." The image Alexander created in this brief recollection is one of sudden, meaningful change; it is little wonder that he spoke of such change as leaving a perceptible "mark upon Time." In effecting this transformation, the pioneers Alexander described had disturbed the calm flow of the prairie's history, wrenching it about to a new direction. Four years later that same "mark upon Time" was chosen as the theme of an elaborate sculptural program being devised for the new Nebraska State Capitol. New York sculptor Lee Lawrie, collaborating with

architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, conceived a complex arrangement of relief panels and figures for the exterior of the new structure.² Yet despite the greater complexity of Lawrie's sculptural program, the actions of the pioneers—standing between the countless centuries of the past and those centuries yet to come—remain the primary issue. And just as Alexander suggested that his father's generation had transformed past beauty into present and future beauty, so too did Lawrie's sculpture illustrate a continuity; Lawrie's pioneers carry the strength of traditions, extending those traditions to serve as a stable foundation for future Nebraskans.

It was inevitable that Lawrie's program feature regional imagery; the Nebraska Capitol, like other American capitols, represented more than the headquarters of state government. In 1699 the House of Burgesses borrowed the name of the ancient Roman Temple of Jupiter for the new government building to be erected at Williamsburg, declaring that it should "for ever hereafter be caled and knowne by the name of Capitoll."³ Since that time virtually every state capitol has been designed with the understanding that it was not only a government building, but the symbolic center of the state. The Nebraska State Capitol Commission was clearly aware of the symbolic importance of such buildings. One of the earliest public documents issued by that body included an outline of the "concept" they intended to follow in procuring a new capitol for Nebraska:

The Capitol of a State is the outward sign of the character of its people. Their respect for [the state's] traditions and history, their belief in its importance and worth, and their love of its fair name—all find expression in its Capitol.⁴

Later in the same document symbolism was discussed in even greater detail. Among the major objectives identified by the commission was that the new capitol be an "inspiring monument worthy of the State for which it stands; a thing of beauty, so conceived and fashioned as to properly record and exploit our civilization, aspirations, and patriotism, past, present, and future."⁵

Given that mandate, Lawrie assembled an impressive collection of regional images. Buffalo, pioneer families, Conestoga wagons, cavalry soldiers, Indians, and a finial figure in the form of a colossal Nebraska sower graced the drawings Lawrie helped Goodhue prepare for the original competition

in 1920. As plans matured after their design was chosen, it became evident that Lawrie's sculpture would constitute a veritable inventory of Nebraska's resources and people. Throughout the building, decorative friezes, grilles and capitals sported images of buffalo skulls, ears of corn, clusters of wheat, sunflowers, meadowlarks and an assortment of wild animals native to the state; 24 figures originally intended to encircle the tower at the junction of shaft and lantern ranged from cowpunchers and threshers to millers and farriers; other plans called for portraits of specific state heroes like former Nebraska Congressman William Jennings Bryan and regional explorer John C. Fremont in the main foyer. While many of these plans changed as construction continued over the following decade, Lawrie's sculpture was seen as an important vehicle for recording what Nebraskans deemed significant in their region.⁶

But Lawrie's sculptural program was not merely an inventory of regional imagery—nor was his choice of subject matter prompted entirely by the objectives of the Capitol Commission. At least as influential was the growing interest in regionalism displayed by many of Lawrie's contemporaries. Robert Sklar points out that a number of American writers prior to World War I had voiced concern over maintaining the strength of American society by fostering "a cultural atmosphere in which social, ethnic, regional, and political differences could express themselves and flourish."⁷ Some, like Herbert Croly, Randolph Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks and Henry L. Mencken, did so through various "little magazines" in a struggle against the genteel norms adopted by the rising middle class.⁸ On the other hand, Josiah Royce was interested in promoting "the vigorous development of a highly organized provincial life" in order to combat what he perceived as a growing tendency toward collectivism in mass-cultural America.⁹ What Royce meant by "province" was clearly spelled out in his 1908 treatise, *Race Questions, Provincialism and Other American Problems*:

For me, . . . a province shall mean any one part of a national domain, which is, geographically and socially, sufficiently unified to have a true consciousness of its own unity, to feel a pride in its own ideals and customs, and to possess a sense of its distinction from other parts of the country. And by the term "provincialism" I shall mean, first, the tendency of such a province to

possess its own customs and ideals; secondly, the totality of these customs and ideals themselves; and thirdly, the love and pride which leads the inhabitants of a province to cherish as their own these traditions, beliefs and aspirations.¹⁰

Similar issues were also raised by Professor Alexander, a figure who became very important to Lawrie as both colleague and friend. A native of Nebraska, Alexander had formed a strong affection for the area before leaving for graduate work in the East in 1898. When he returned to his home state a decade later to accept a position at the university in Lincoln, he had already established himself as an authority on the history and lore of the American Plains Indian. Once resettled in Nebraska, Alexander's interest in the region caused him to supplement work on Plains Indian culture with the writing of local history pageants and articles on regional issues.¹¹ As a philosophy professor, Alexander was aware of Royce, and the Nebraskan's sense of regionalism echoed the older philosopher's basic conservatism. However, as Alexander proposed the slow, careful advancement of a "rejuvenated provincialism, building upon the old traditions of the soil," he drew more heavily upon the work of Maurice Barres, leader of the movement for French nationalism at the turn of the century.¹² While Alexander avoided the extremes of Barres, stopping short of the latter's racism and fascist leanings, he did acknowledge the Frenchman's influence.¹³ Moreover, just as Barres proposed what one writer calls his "doctrine of rootedness" in response to "the problems of nihilism and decadence which plagued so many intellectuals at the fin de siecle," Alexander's claims for the merits of regional culture surfaced as "the one promising guide out of the present chaos of European and world ideals."¹⁴ Both held fast to a belief in locale in reaction to external difficulties they hoped to surmount by the cultivation of regional culture.

The problem of cultural chaos became especially acute for Alexander during World War I; by 1918 he had written 15 "essays in wartime," including "Liberty and Democracy," "The Limits of Tolerance," "The War and Men's Ideals," and "The War and the Problems of Life."¹⁵ But the Armistice did not signal the end of Alexander's concern. Still troubled by the sad lack of established cultural standards in post-war American culture, he continued to warn of the need for adopt-

ing a regional foundation for future stability. As he explained in a lengthy letter to Goodhue,

I am now and for a number of years have been pleading with the people of the central west and in particular of the Missouri Valley to seek to discover within the roots of their own life the sources of its better inspiration. Chiefly I have worked through pageantry and talks to interested groups and clubs; and I venture to say that the result has been distinctly heartening, although as yet the outward expression is slight. I realize well enough that we have here no such foundation as exists, say, in France. We have little in the way of a past, and much of that is a miscellaneous and ill-adapted importation from the Old World (I am thinking of the tawdry Siegfrieds and tinselled Loreleis that used to parade our streets in pre-war days, with the German flag uber alles!). But we have a future, and a part of what we inherit from the past is singularly beautiful in its possibilities.¹⁶

This introduction was followed by three pages of additional comments, detailing the potential to be discovered in the "roots" of the Missouri Valley culture. While Alexander was not directly responsible for writing the sculptural program for the Nebraska State Capitol, his influence was strongly felt as the result of such communications.¹⁷

Royce, Barres, and Alexander saw their respective "provincialism" theories as ways to build stronger nations (Barres) or worlds (Royce and, presumably, Alexander); yet to do so it was necessary in their minds to build connecting links beyond the regions themselves. Royce's "provincialism," for example, was not a fragmenting, "false sectionalism," but a feeling which he believed capable of uniting the nation:

As our country grows in social organization, there will be, in absolute measure, more and not less provincialism amongst our people. To be sure, as I hope, there will also be, in absolute measure, more and not less patriotism, closer and not looser national ties, more and not less mutual sectional understanding. But the two tendencies, the tendency toward a national unity and that toward local independence of spirit, must henceforth grow together. They cannot prosper apart.¹⁸

Other writers and artists wished to establish connections between the region and even wider cultural units. T. S. Eliot articulated this position especially well in a 1923 essay entitled "The Function of Criticism." He explained that the critic should be aware "of the literature of the world, of the literature of Europe, of the literature of a single country, not as a collection of the writings of individuals, but as 'organic wholes,' as systems in relation to which, and only in relation to which, individual works of literary art, and the works of individual artists, have their significance."¹⁹ Such a spatial or

regional order could provide artists with a new sense of community—even if only unconsciously—which would, in turn, illuminate the individual's unique position and contribution. Then too, the feeling of community could provide the artist with a significant "beyond" to which he might form a strengthening allegiance. But the regions Eliot mentions are clearly more than mere locales. Rather, regions form an interlocking system of spatial and cultural units of increasing size which, far from limiting the artist's horizons to the provincial, extend them forcibly to make him aware of his place in the broader order of things.

While Eliot's discussion was limited to an artistic community, the same principles held true for society as a whole. Lawrie, himself troubled by increasing cultural complexity and the lack of accepted standards, also recognized the value of an expansive regionalism. When assembling the sculptural program for the Nebraska State Capitol, he deployed his inventory of local imagery with great care, establishing links between Nebraska, the Great Plains, the nation, and the world. The basis for the program involved a distinction between the two major architectural segments of the Capitol, the base and the tower. The first comprehensive account of the decorative program written by Alexander in 1926 summarizes this dichotomy:

In relation to its symbolic decoration the exterior of the Capitol falls into two major units, the peripheral *Square* and the central *Tower*. Their architectural forms naturally suggest that related significance in a monumental sense. The circuit of the Square is emblematic of the quarters of the Earth and the historic course of human experience. The Tower, in its upward sweep, serves as gnomon of the Heavens and symbol of the more abstract conceptions of life derived from historic experience.²⁰

Lawrie perceived the base as the foundation for the whole and proceeded to devise his program accordingly. Buffalo, pioneers, and other images of local significance were situated on the base in combination with subjects of national and international consequence. The provincial and the international merge here to invoke a strong sense of regional order, comparable to that which Royce and Alexander desired as a means of fortifying modern society against disintegration.

Introducing the imagery of the base are four large relief panels showing American bison. As explained in Alexander's

synopsis of decorations, these panels were intended to symbolize the concerns of the earliest resident of Nebraska, the Plains Indian:

On the cheeks of the Balustrades panels in bas-relief in two patterns, each one repeated, representing respectively a bison bull with hills of maize and a bison cow and calf with hills of maize. The symbolism is primarily Indian, the bison and the maize having been the fundamental food sources of the Plains Indians as corn and cattle are for their white successors. Further, in Plains Indian legend the bison is commonly represented as the giver of the maize, while this animal and plant are intimately associated in the native ritual. These panels symbolize, therefore, not only the first human life of the Plains, that of the Red Man, in relation to its elemental sources, but also the elemental source of the human life which has followed.²¹

The appearance of these motifs reflected a growing public appreciation of the distinct character of American Indian cultures, but Alexander was Lawrie's immediate mentor in respect to Indian culture. From the beginning of their discussions the Nebraskan expressed an ambivalence regarding the value of established European art forms, convinced that Americans—and especially the people of his own region—would be better served by a new visual and symbolic vocabulary. He proposed turning to American Indian culture to find a solution to this problem; imagery drawn from such a source would enhance the regional significance of the art produced. Indeed, so high were his hopes for art based on "native ideas, aesthetic and natural as well as political and social," that he claimed the new art would "challenge even the Greek" in time.²²

Aside from the specific nature of his proposal that Indian culture be used as the foundation for a new regional art, Alexander's position was not actually a new one. In fact, Robert F. Berkhofer Jr. has noted that European and American assessments of the worth of their respective customs and civilizations have frequently determined current opinion concerning the American Indian at any given moment. Berkhofer explains that Indian culture has traditionally been perceived as "the reverse or negative of White life" in the past, and as such "could be viewed as bad or good depending upon the observer's feelings about his own society."²³ For Alexander, then admittedly searching for a way out of "the present chaos of European and world ideals," the Indian seemed an altogether noble and attractive figure.

While Lawrie had occasionally used Indian imagery in earlier work, it was not until his contact with Alexander that he began to display an awareness of the visual character of American Indian art forms, and thus an awareness of the true richness of their cultures. Nevertheless, the sculptor's use of the Plains Indian imagery on the base of the Capitol suggests a slightly different attitude. Lawrie was a product of the 19th century and his early biases were difficult to shed. In addition to reading American history from textbooks which portrayed the Indian as an inferior prelude to White civilization, he retained vivid memories of Indians from such popular forms of entertainment as Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. As a studio assistant at the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition, for example, when given the task of guiding Indian models from Buffalo Bill's camp to the studio of Alexander Phimister Proctor, he found them to be wild creatures speaking unintelligible languages who had to be led from one place to another just as one led the livestock.²⁴ If, as Berkhofer suggests, whites have commonly understood Indians as antitheses of themselves, this thesis definitely applied to the young studio hand leading "young Chief Red Cloud" to sit for Proctor.²⁵ In those more confident times—with the White City of the white man's empire rising about him—Lawrie's wide-eyed assessment of the Indian differed considerably from that reached later by Alexander.

Evidence of these early impressions surfaced in Lawrie's use of Indian imagery at Nebraska: the "otherness" of Indian culture is very apparent in the Capitol sculptural program. Pioneers, American history and the history of Western civilization in the Old World are freely intermingled in imagery elsewhere on the Capitol, but the Indian is distinctly separate.²⁶ While the buffalo panels are important insofar as they serve as elements introducing the program, they stand below all other regional imagery. These panels refer to a static past well apart from the sense of development suggested by the rest of the sculpture above on the base. The bison themselves reinforce the static character of the culture, posed as if to suggest movement but tightly boxed in by edges of the panels touching them on all sides. Although key images, they remain distinct, subject to an older interpretation.

Despite problems with Indian imagery, however, the main

north entrance to the Capitol was of paramount significance in Lawrie's sculptural program. In fact, the Pioneer Panel immediately over that entrance is the most important single panel on the entire structure. The subject first appeared as a simple scene from the state's past in a three-part relief included in early competition drawings of 1920, but by the time the panel was actually completed in June of 1925, its iconography transcended local color sentimentalism. More than an inventory of Nebraska imagery, the panel had become a carefully composed selection of images, calculated to convey a strong sense of place. Lawrie fixed the geographic location by reference to the historically important position of Nebraska on the famous Oregon Trail. The panel shows a pioneer family trudging across the open prairie with Conestoga wagon, oxen, dog and scout; traveling from left to right above the cornice on the north facade of the Capitol, their westward direction is unmistakable. But this is clearly the beginning of the trail, just beyond the "jump-off" on the Missouri River. The journey is still over flat ground in this panel, and the well-defined horizon on the right shows more of the same ahead.²⁷ While the setting sun toward which these pioneers move represents the West, it is less the West of Oregon sought by Jesse Wingate in Emerson Hough's *Covered Wagon* (1922) than the "sunset regions" of which Hamlin Garland's father sang as he periodically grew restless and moved his family ever farther onto the Middle Border.²⁸

At the same time, some of the remaining imagery and detail also form links to regions beyond Nebraska. Small but significant are the deciduous bush at the east end of the panel behind the rear wheel of the wagon, and the cactus plant at the west end near the forward leg of the dog. These serve as framing elements, helping to define the prairie; they also suggest the existence of different environments on either side. The entire panel, after all, represents movement from one region to another, and these small details contribute to an understanding of that movement. In combination with the long rifle of the man at the rear (a typical attribute of the first pioneer in the American novel) and the dousing stick of the older man in front of him (symbolic of what Walter Prescott Webb would refer to as "plainscraft"), such ancillary detail provides a strong impression of inter-regional movement.²⁹

Of even greater importance are the identities of the individual figures Lawrie included in the Pioneer Panel. When Eliot wrote of the significance of region, he explained that one of the major benefits to be derived from regionalism was a fortifying awareness of one's connection with a broader community. This community involved not only contemporaries immediately at hand, but great individuals from the past and from other regions: great heroes of the world. Heroes from the past carried the virtues of that past with them; those from other regions represented the unique strengths of their regions. Recognizing this, Lawrie made extensive use of heroic figures in his sculptural program—thereby suggesting that the Nebraska public to whom his work was addressed was part of a timeless, universal community.

The most striking hero of the Pioneer Panel is the scout. On July 9, 1924, Lawrie was guest at a dinner at the Lincoln Country Club. Although he had been working on the sculpture for the Capitol for over four years by that time, this was his first visit to Lincoln and several citizens convened at the club to discuss his work. The major topic of conversation was his newly completed model for the Pioneer Panel; of special interest was the identity of the scout. Lawrie later recalled that "when the suggestion of Buffalo Bill as the scout was discussed. . . I saw Dr. Alexander shake his head in disapproval, but most of them liked the idea, and although it isn't a portrait, the suggestion of Buffalo Bill was kept."³⁰ Alexander may have believed Buffalo Bill Cody too disreputable a character for inclusion in an important panel on the new Capitol. Cody's long-standing reputation as an Indian killer would have made him unpalatable to the philosopher; perhaps Alexander was also aware that Cody, newly elected to the Nebraska Legislature in 1872, deserted that office without even taking his seat when Ned Buntline dangled promises of the bright lights and cheering crowds of the Chicago stage before him.³¹ In any case, other citizens at the country club that night did believe Buffalo Bill to be an important Nebraskan, and Lawrie, acquainted with the famous scout from the Columbian Exposition, shared their opinion.

Regardless of Alexander's possible objections, it was fitting that Buffalo Bill be included in the Pioneer Panel, for he was much more than a former Nebraska scout. From the time of

his early promotion by Buntline in 1869, Cody had been a national figure whose reputation soared under the careful direction of his many press agents. The subject of serials, short stories and novels, star of the stage and the famous Wild West Show, major attraction at such prestigious events as the Columbian Exposition and celebrity wherever he went, Buffalo Bill was a national figure by the turn of the century. On the strength of popularity alone, he was an ideal character to fill the role of the Western hero in the panel; but the complex nature of his popular image made him even more appropriate. He was actually a transitional figure, mediating between different facets of American culture on two levels. By his own claim he "stood between savagery and civilization" throughout his career as scout, protecting settlers and travelers, and helping to open the trans-Missouri West.³² By the early 1920s, however, his importance as a transitional figure was due more to his accomplishments in bringing a taste of the early pioneer West to an eager public to whom such adventures were no longer accessible.³³ By either account he was a pivotal figure well suited to the Capitol sculptural program: he served as a bridge between regions and a link between past and present.

Lawrie's positioning and pose of the scout in the Pioneer Panel display the sculptor's awareness of Cody's role. Buffalo Bill is exactly centered in the panel, his hat in direct line with the vertical axis of the building. Instead of heading the procession—as might be expected of a scout—he remains off the lead, apparently distracted by something to the rear. Indeed, leaning back and pulling in on the reins, Buffalo Bill brings his horse up sharply while gazing intently behind him—to the East. Whether looking back at the source of encroaching civilization with apprehension or looking toward the scene of his triumph as an entertainer, Cody's eastward gaze and position midway between deciduous bush and cactus plant underscore his transitional role and relationship to regional order.

The anonymous pioneers who accompany Buffalo Bill in this panel represent a general type of hero long recognized for great achievements. Like the renowned scout, their initial impact is on the regional level for they were to be identified as heroic settlers of the state. That this role was important is clear

from the criticisms which surfaced during the country club meeting when local citizens found fault with the appearance of the pioneers in Lawrie's model. The sculptor later described one exchange with particular vividness:

One of the guests, Mrs. [F. M.] Hall said to me, "What's in the minds of that serious looking young couple?"

I said, "They are preparing to build a state."

"What's the man going to do with the ax," she asked.

"He's going to cut down trees and build a cabin," I replied.

"Mr. Sculptor," she said, "didn't you know when the pioneers arrived here there wasn't a tree in the state of Nebraska? There was nothing here but buffalo grass."

Mrs. Hall also had something to say about the type of young men and young women I had used for the first settlers. She also said my group was too serious; that in reality they were a rollicking lot of care-free young people. She said: "All I tell you is true. I know. I was there. I was the first White baby born in the future state of Nebraska."³⁴

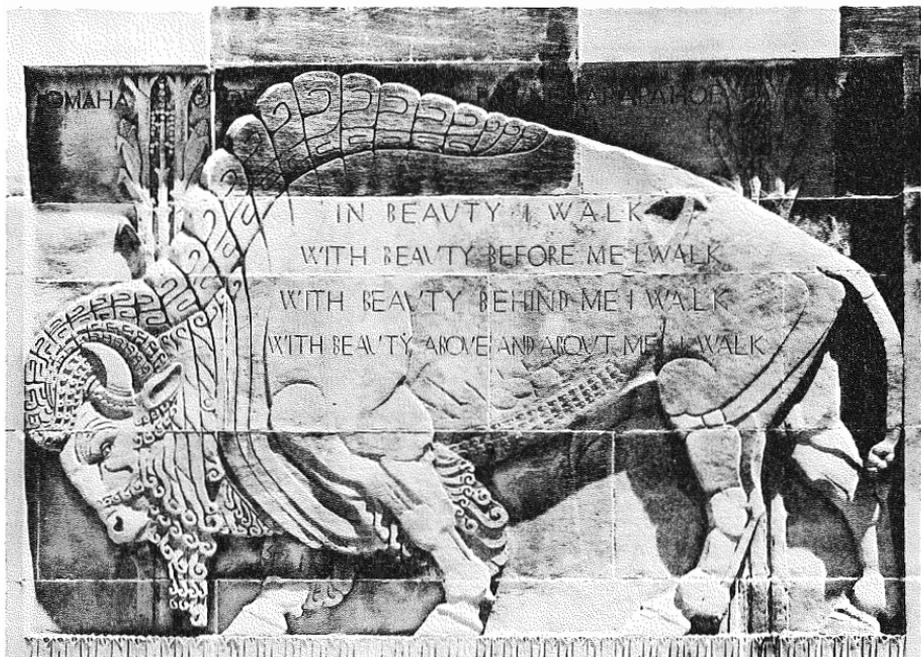
Although Lawrie used some of her lesser suggestions—like that involving the ax—he could not agree with her general opinion concerning the appearance of the pioneers. As he explained in a letter to Alexander, the heroic character of the pioneers was of central importance:

A Pioneer Panel is a great opportunity, and I think I'm going to get something good. I've taken out the heavy drag that you and the others criticized in the smaller models, putting into it some of the buoyancy that Mrs. Hall wanted. Still, I'm keeping it grim enough to convey to the young the courage and determination that went into the making of the state, and remind them that their inheritance came perhaps none too easily.³⁵

When the panel was unveiled the following June, it was apparent Lawrie had remained firm in his position. The pioneers he produced are moving out onto the prairie with long strides, leaning into their task. Their expressions show a grim determination to complete the journey and get on with settlement of the region; the accessories they carry are crude; their manner of traveling looks very difficult. One newspaper commented with some surprise that Lawrie "did not see fit to modernize the wagon or the ox bow, or to remove from the shoulders of the young man the basket which would hardly be carried for any distance in that manner."³⁶ Such qualities heighten the impression that the accomplishments of the state's early settlers were fraught with difficulty, and therefore make those accomplishments seem greater.



“Spirit of the Pioneers” panel above north entrance to the Capitol. . . (Below) Buffalo bull, west parapet, north entrance.



These same characteristics also give the pioneers national significance. What Lawrie presented with these figures was an image of the western yeoman, whose roots Henry Nash Smith has traced back to the early 19th century. The western yeomanry consisted of men and women who were forced by difficult circumstances or other unacceptable conditions in the settled East to strike out on their own, moving into the unsettled West. Once arrived at their new locations, courage and determination allowed them to triumph, transforming the West into a productive region. If, as Smith notes, Hamlin Garland and other "realists" described the pioneer to be somewhat less contented and successful than earlier accounts had claimed, most novelists—especially those writing for the popular market—reinforced the traditional view.³⁷ In his survey of American pioneer novels written between 1900 and 1950, Nicholas J. Karolides concludes that many such works actually "eulogize" the pioneers, dramatizing their strengths and courageous perseverance.³⁸ Writers like Willa Cather and Emerson Hough offer two examples. Compared to Frank Shabata or even her subsequent companion Carl Lindstrum, Cather's Alexandra Bergson exhibited the strengths popularly associated with the yeomanry in *O Pioneers!* (1913); it was Alexandra who survived deprivation and disappointment, prospered, and made a place in which Lindstrum could later join her. Hough has Jesse Wingate explain that it was actually he and his fellow pioneers, not the earlier explorers, trappers or prospectors, who could settle and hold the country for those who would follow:

Did ever you see pick or shovel build a country? Did ever you see steel traps make or hold one? Oregon's ours because we went out five years ago with wagons and plows—we all know that. No, friends, waterways never held a country. No path ever held on a river—that's for exploring, not for farming. To hold a country you need wheels, you need a plow.³⁹

And as he might have gone on to declare, those wheels and plows needed hardy pioneers like himself—or the limestone pioneers of Lawrie's Pioneer Panel—to run them.

Yet important as the Pioneer Panel is, understanding its relationship to other sculpture of the base provides deeper insight into the sculptural program as a whole. Just over the cornice at the west end of the north facade is a relief panel representing "Moses Bringing the Law from Sinai."⁴⁰ This is

the first of 21 "History of Law" panels extending around the base of the Capitol and culminating in "The Admission of Nebraska as a State in the Union" on the east end of the north facade. The presentation of this sequence of reliefs stems from what Henry Steele Commager has identified as a unique American veneration for the law:

Americans alone of western peoples made constitutionalism a religion and the judiciary a religious order and surrounded both with an aura of piety. They made the Constitution supreme law, and placed responsibility for the functioning of the federal system upon courts. The Supreme Court, in time, became the most nearly sacrosanct of American institutions—became to Americans what the Royal Family was to the British, the Army to the Germans, the Church to the Spaniards.⁴¹

This feeling was especially strong in the early 1920s. As yet unshaken by the full implications of the Storrs Lectures delivered by Justice Benjamin Cardozo at Yale in 1920, Americans were at the height of what Grant Gilmore has referred to as "The Age of Faith" in his recent contribution to that same lecture series.⁴² They held firm to a belief in the unchanging and universal character of their legal system, on both intellectual and emotional levels. Lawrie's law panels captured the foundations of that system in stone, commemorating events which had led to the legal definition of the commonwealth of Nebraska. At the same time, his sculpture linked the commonwealth to its region, the nation and other nations in the history of Western culture.

The last law panel, symbolizing the entry of Nebraska into the Union in 1867, defines the region of the commonwealth. At the center is an allegorical figure of Nebraska, applying for admission before a seated figure of Columbia who wears the liberty cap and is positioned before the national Capitol. Wearing sunbonnet and buffalo robe, Nebraska is attended by a Union soldier, a young sower, and an older man with a steel plow. As she approaches Columbia, Nebraska reaches forward to place the 37th star on the American flag with her right hand while holding a bundle of wheat and corn in her left. Reading back from this panel, the relationship between the state and an ever widening context unfolds in reliefs depicting major incidents in the evolution of American civil liberties, English law, legal foundations of democracy in Rome and Greece, and Old Testament law—culminating in the Moses panel.

The "History of Law" sequence helped establish Nebraska as a distinct region within the broader context Eliot and others deemed so critical. Beyond that, by connecting the legal establishment of the state with a long tradition of legal history, Nebraska achieved a place within that immortal tradition. The "Age of Faith" Gilmore described was marked not only by a belief in the universality of legal truth, but also by a belief in the enduring nature of that truth. Leading 19th century jurists like Christopher Columbus Langdell, named dean of the Harvard Law School in 1870, held that in this respect law was actually akin to science; both were based upon a series of immutable truths capable of enduring forever once discovered.⁴³ The Langdellian position was first voiced during the post-Civil War period when a longing for tranquility and peace made tradition appealing. Designed in the wake of another war, Lawrie's relief panels portraying a legal tradition reaching from Moses' tablets to the legal birth of the state of Nebraska were a response to similar longings.

The sequence of law panels is introduced by a group of four allegorical figures representing Wisdom, Justice, Power, Mercy, emerging from the piers of the main north entrance arch.⁴⁴ Labeled the "Constant Guardians of the Law" in a large inscription, these figures are further reminders of the lasting virtues of the legal system. But that they also flank and therefore guard the Pioneer Panel below draws the Nebraska homesteader into the sequence as well. Taken into this context, the Nebraska pioneers stand not by themselves but in relation to the entire history of Western law. As they embark upon their new enterprise—moving out across the flat plains of their state—the pioneers do so with the great tradition of Western civilization behind them. The legal system under which they advance helps them to extend civilization across the continent; but the traditions behind that system also serve to link the homesteaders' region and their nation to the past and to the world community. There is an optimism in the actions of these rude, ill-equipped pioneers, moving out to settle and carry cultural tradition to the harsh prairie; but their optimism is justified by the existence of the Capitol itself. Inscriptions in capital letters on the faces of the east and west balustrades flanking the stairway below offer summary: "Honor to pioneers who broke the sods that men to come

might live;" "Honor to citizens who build an house of state where men live well."

The meaning of the tower, soaring above the base as "symbol of the more abstract conceptions of life," was to have been conveyed by a number of heroic figures at various levels. Although original plans were altered and the number of figures significantly reduced, the role of the hero and general concept of community was retained. A series of eight buttress figures occupied the first level above the base:

These form a circuit around the base of the Tower, as it were, upholding its symbolism of present ideals rooted in a living past. The series of figures, beginning from NNW and reading to the right, represent[s] the genius of human civilizations, as embodied in typical heroes of its great epochs, thus recapitulating the spiritual history of man's past, of which the more strictly political record is embodied in the series of reliefs which follow[s] the Terrace below.⁴⁵

This general description was followed by a list of the types of genius to be included, and recommendations for the specific heroes to represent them:

- (1) "The Dawn of History"—an Egyptian scribe, possibly the poet Pentaour, who celebrated the Battle of Kadesh. . . .
- (2) "Cosmic Tradition"—a Semetic Seer, gifted with Apocalyptic Vision, perhaps the Prophet Ezekiel, . . .
- (3) "The Birth of Reason"—a Greek philosopher, preferably Socrates, . . .
- (4) "The Region of Law"—a Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, emperor-philosopher. . . .
- (5) "The Glorification of Faith"—. . .the Apostle John, emblematic of Christianity. . . .
- (6) "The Age of Chivalry"—a Mediaeval Knight, preferably Louis IX (St. Louis), emblematic of the chivalric virtues, . . .
- (7) "The Discovery of Nature"—a Renaissance Scientist, Isaac Newton, who set the form of modern scientific thought. . . .
- (8) "The Liberation of Peoples"—the Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln[,] in his younger days.⁴⁶

The physical relationship between the buttress figures on the base of the tower leaves no doubt as to the progress of civilization's genius. That they represent a period ranging from ancient Egypt and the Old Testament to 19th century America is obvious from the list of figures in the synopsis; but the important north face of the tower provides striking evidence of the progression by the pairing of Pentaour (on the right) and Lincoln (on the left). Juxtaposed in this fashion, the

earliest and most recent manifestation of the genius are brought together to underscore its continuity.

The buttress figures also describe the regional dimension of Eliot's "community" by including subjects drawn from both the Old World and the New. Lincoln, long a major American hero, was a natural choice to represent the extension of genius to the United States. However, here the presence of "the Emancipator" does more than involve the nation. This Lincoln is coatless; the homespun shirt he wears is open at the collar and both sleeves are rolled above the elbow; his trousers are secured by a broad worker's belt; he is clearly ready for hard labor. His left hand grasps a book, but it is a huge worker's hand which, joined with the other, also steadies an ax. Such an image of Lincoln is distinctly different from that on the law panel depicting "Lincoln's Proclamation of the Emancipation of the Negroes" on the east facade of the Capitol. In the law relief Lincoln is portrayed as a dignified American statesman proclaiming freedom for the slaves; as a buttress figure the "younger" Lincoln is cast as a rail splitter from the rural middle section of the nation. The Lincoln of the tower completes the regional sequence begun at his left with the Egyptian scribe by bringing the genius of civilization closer to the mid-continent Nebrakan, strengthening the impression of community afforded by the sequence as a whole.

But the most important—as well as the most visible—of the tower heroes is the Sower at its pinnacle. In this figure may be found a hero type which both represents and transcends traditional and regional matters. The sower was an image Lawrie used many times during his career, but nowhere was it better suited to the context than on the Nebraska Capitol. In George Evert Condra's 1919 edition of *Geography of Nebraska*, nearly three quarters of the chapter summarizing the state's "resources and industries" was given over to a discussion of agriculture, and the following chapter outlining "the sensible and right uses of these resources" noted:

It is thought by many that our great problem is to make such use of nature's stores that first, our own needs may be adequately supplied, and second, that those who live here many years after us shall not be impoverished as a result of our mismanagement and waste. It is our duty to maintain those conditions that insure successful industry and health of the people. Above all we should not deplete the fertility of the soil which is the state's greatest natural resource.⁴⁷

The significance of the Sower in a state which attaches such value to the soil is obvious. However, the finial figure is also important as a symbol of those served by the broad regional and traditional orders of the base below—and in turn the Sower acts as the culmination of each order. On the most fully universal level the Sower stands as an ideal image of the endeavors of mankind in relation to the soil throughout world history. The figure also relates to a more specifically national identity. Henry Nash Smith explains that the image of America as the “garden of the world” has long appealed to the public imagination; this garden has enjoyed a wide range of symbols, all of which centered about the “heroic figure of the idealized frontier farmer.”⁴⁸ Such a farmer represented the domestication of the West, and it was from his western homestead that the future of the nation would arise. As Hough’s Jesse Wingate implied, the explorers who extended the edges of the frontier were important only so long as those edges lasted. After them came the pioneer farmers who would begin with the real settlement of the land—and whose descendants would continue to carry on. These men and women were the hope of the nation and the Sower is their symbol. In fact, from his position atop the Capitol, this finial figure casts seed to symbolize the actual generation of Nebraska’s future. In this respect the Sower complements the heroes of the Pioneer Panel below, extending and heightening the meaning of traditional and regional themes begun there.

With this protean figure at the pinnacle, then, we are brought full circle. Soaring above the Capitol as the highest of those symbols of the “more abstract conceptions of life,” the Sower draws the local into the universal, the past and present into the future. In the end the finial figure stands as evidence that the strengths found in the sculpture of the square below serve as a firm base upon which to build out of the complex problems of post-war American culture. Lawrie’s Nebraska pioneers over the main north entrance to the Capitol strode out of the past bringing the strengths of that past with them into the 1920s—while the Sower above led the way from that present to a bright future.

NOTES

1. Hartley Burr Alexander, "America's Self-Revelation," in *Liberty and Democracy and Other Essays in War-Time*, by Hartley Burr Alexander (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1918), 155.

2. For general information regarding the architecture of the Nebraska State Capitol, see Eric Scott McCready, "The Nebraska State Capitol: Its Design, Background and Influence," Diss. University of Delaware, 1973.

3. Quoted by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and William Seale, *Temples of Democracy: The State Capitols of the USA* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 3.

4. Quoted by McCready, 135.

5. *Ibid.*, 137.

6. Exant documentation does not indicate precisely when or why the foyer figures were eliminated, but the 24 figures intended to grace the tower shaft were eliminated in 1926 when the sculptural program was simplified. See Hartley Burr Alexander to Nebraska State Capitol Commission and Goodhue Associates, July 6, 1926, Nebraska Capitol Commission (hereafter NCC), Correspondence, Hartley Burr Alexander File, Nebraska State Historical Society (hereafter NSHS).

7. Robert Sklar, ed. and intro., *The Plastic Age*, The American Culture Series, No. VII (New York: George Braziller, 1970), 6.

8. *Ibid.*, 5. For a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Charles C. Alexander, *Here the Country Lies: Nationalism and the Arts in Twentieth-Century America* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1980); and Arthur Frank Wertheim, *The New York Little Renaissance: Iconoclasm, Modernism, and Nationalism in American Culture, 1908-1917* (New York: New York University Press, 1976).

9. Josiah Royce, *Race Questions, Provincialism and Other American Problems* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1908), 64.

10. *Ibid.*, 61.

11. For a comprehensive list of Alexander's publications, see "Bio-Bibliography of Hartley Burr Alexander," TS, Hartley Burr Alexander File, Bio-Bibliography Collection, Archives, University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

12. Alexander to Goodhue, n.d., quoted in Goodhue to Lawrie, December 2, 1922, Nebraska Capitol Correspondence, November 9, 1922, to February 20, 1923, Box 35, Lawrie Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Robert Soucy, *Facism in France: The Case of Maurice Barres* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1972), 113; and Alexander to Goodhue, n.d., quoted in Goodhue to Lawrie, December 2, 1922.

15. Although originally published in a variety of periodicals, these essays were collected in Alexander's 1918 volume, *Liberty and Democracy*.

16. Alexander to Goodhue, n.d., quoted in Goodhue to Lawrie, December 2, 1922.

17. The matter of assigning credit for the subjects of the sculptural program on the Nebraska State Capitol has long been problematic. In fact, while Alexander has frequently been cited as the general thematic advisor, the Capitol Commission did not engage him as a consultant until early 1922, nearly six months after the commission had received a comprehensive list of the sculpture from Lawrie and Goodhue. Even then, Alexander's official role was that of "trained literary man," providing advice only in connection with inscriptions. See Goodhue to George E. Johnson, August 12, 1921, NCC, Correspondence, Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue File, August, 1921; NCC Minutes, October 13, 1921, 111; NCC Minutes, January 20, 1922, 131, NSHS.

It was only later, in 1926, that Alexander was made official thematic advisor, and by that point the subjects had been fully developed. See NCC Minutes, May 25, 1926, 540; NCC Minutes, June 22, 1926, 545, NSHS; and Lawrie to Robert Lee,

Photographic Productions, University of Nebraska, July 16, 1955, University of Nebraska File, Box 11, Lawrie Papers.

18. Royce, 64, 66.

19. T. S. Eliot, "The Function of Criticism," in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1975), 68.

20. Alexander, "Nebraska State Capitol: Synopsis of Decorations and Inscriptions," TS, n.d. (submitted to the Capitol Commission in 1926), State Building Division, Nebraska State Capitol, 2.

21. *Ibid.*, 4.

22. Alexander to Goodhue, n.d., quoted in Goodhue to Lawrie, December 2, 1922.

23. Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 27-8.

24. In his memoirs, Lawrie related incidents regarding a horse and an Indian in such a way as to suggest that he found them to be parallel experiences: "Proctor's studio was in one of the hothouse wings of Horticulture Hall, the walls and roof of which were glass. He would send me to Buffalo Bill's show which was being put up outside the grounds for one of the bronchos which I would lead to the studio for Proctor to use as a model. I had brought the broncho back and forth several times when a man who worked there said, "Why do you lead this Cayuse? Why don't you get on his back and ride him?"

"Not wanting to appear timid, I mounted the broncho. The plaster caster gave him a slap on the rump and out we went rodeo fashion. The broncho did not heed my direction and dashed into the hot beds of rare plants, breaking the glass that covered them. Someone finally seized the broncho and rescued me. I was unhurt except for the torture over whether I would lose my job. Proctor managed to smooth it over with the authorities and I was allowed to continue at the Fair.

"Another chore I had in Proctor's studio at the Fair was to go to Buffalo Bill's and get young Chief Red Cloud and bring him over to pose and then take him back. He either could not or would not speak a word of English. One time I gave him a ham sandwich. He took a big bite, spat it out and said something I can't spell, but I knew what he meant."

See "Boy Wanted" TS, Box 46, File 12, 23; Box 47, File 18, 14; File 21, 20, Lawrie Papers. Boxes 46-48 in the Lawrie Papers contain pages of various drafts of an autobiography Lawrie was working on prior to his death. They have not been published and the pages in these files are in no particular order. Nevertheless, they contain much important information regarding the sculptor's life and career. Lawrie intended that they be published under the title "Boy Wanted," recalling that his first contact with his profession had been the result of responding to a newspaper advertisement beginning with these words.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Las Casas is depicted pleading for "the cause of the Indian" in one of the law panels on the east facade, but this only emphasizes the Indian's position as an outsider—there is no reference to Indian law in the important "History of Law" series. See below.

27. This is in marked contrast to most popular views of covered wagons and wagon trains. It was far more common for illustrators and those producing popular prints to show wagons heading toward, emerging from, or actually negotiating the mountains. See, for example, *American Progress* (1873), a chromolithograph issued by George Crofutt after an 1872 John Gast painting; *The Rocky Mountains* (1866), a lithograph issued by Currier & Ives; and illustrations by Dorothy Handsaker in Eugene C. Barker, Walter Prescott Webb and William E. Dodd, *The Growth of a Nation* (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Company, 1928), especially 370-374.

28. Hamlin Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border* (1917; rpt. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 45.

29. See Nicholas J. Karolides, *The Pioneer in the American Novel, 1900-1950* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 17-18; and Howard W. Odum and Harry E. Moore, *American Regionalism: Approach to National Integration* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938), 576.

30. Lawrie to Robert Lee, July 16, 1955.

31. See John Burke, *Buffalo Bill: The Noblest Whiteskin* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1973), 96-100.

32. Quoted in Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950), 107.

33. In the 1910s, during his last years with the Sells-Floto Circus, Buffalo Bill was used more as an advance man, drumming up publicity in towns the circus was shortly to arrive in, rather than as an actual performer. Such a shift in roles reflects a growing perception of Cody as a figure who delivered the West rather than one who was a part of it. See Burke, 273.

34. "Boy Wanted" TS, Box 46, File 4, 75; Lawrie to Robert Lee, July 16, 1955; and Lawrie, "Lawrie Tells of Association with Goodhue and Alexander on Nebraska Capitol," *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star*, July 17, 1932, 5c, col. 4.

35. Lawrie to Alexander, August 25, 1924, quoted in Lawrie, "The Nebraska Sculpture," *Shelter: T-Square Club Journal* (October, 1931), 15.

36. "The Panel of the Pioneers" by Lee Lawrie Now to Be Seen Over the Main Entrance to the Nebraska Capitol," *Lincoln Sunday State Journal*, June 14, 1925, 1, cols. 6-7.

37. Smith, *Virgin Land*, 144.

38. Karolides, *The Pioneer in the American Novel, 1900-1950*, 247-8.

39. Emerson Hough, *The Covered Wagon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, Publishers, 1922), 326.

40. Titles for all panels in the "History of Law" series are from Alexander, "Nebraska State Capitol: Synopsis of Decorations and Inscriptions," 8-9. These titles vary slightly in some other sources.

41. Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880's* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1950), 361.

42. Grant Gilmore, *The Ages of American Law*, Expansion of the 1974 Storrs Lectures (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1977), 64, 74-77.

43. *Ibid.*, 42-3.

44. Corresponding to these figures on the south side of the Capitol are ten portrait figures representing "the great Legislators of the Western World." See Alexander, "Nebraska State Capitol: Synopsis of Decorations and Inscriptions," 9. While these lawgivers relate to the "History of Law" sequence, they are less important in the sculptural program as a whole.

45. Alexander, "Nebraska State Capitol: Synopsis of Decorations and Inscriptions," 11.

46. *Ibid.*, 11-12, and "Insert page 12." In Alexander's synopsis each figure was accompanied by an appropriate inscription, but these were never used.

47. George Evert Condra, *Geography of Nebraska*, 9th ed. (1906; rpt. Chicago, and Lincoln, Nebraska: The University Publishing Company, 1919), 160.

48. Smith, *Virgin Land*, 123.