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Article Summary: Robert W Furnas’ publication *Nebraska Press Recollections*, a state press history completed in 1874, endeavored to provide dates of establishment, suspension, and change of ownership of Nebraska newspapers that existed at the time and/or prior to 1874. While largely accurate, it failed to mention the *Nebraska Herald* of Nemaha. A 42-year feud ensued regarding which was the oldest continuously published paper in the state: the *Nebraska Advertiser* [Brownville] or the *Nebraska City News*.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Robert W Furnas, John McPherson, Thomas R Fisher, Theodore C Hacker, J Sterling Morton, Charles H Gere, Dan W Carpenter, Sylvester Franklin Wilson, William N Byers, George W Fairbrother Sr, Thomas Morton, William M Hicklin, H A Reid, Milton W Reynolds, Theodore H Robertson, Reid Morton, Hiram D Hathaway, John Blue, Thomas McLaughry, J Dan Lauer, Andrew S Holladay, Alfred T Andreas, Albert Watkins, Addison E Sheldon, William Caffrey, William Caffery, George W Fairbrother Jr, Benjamin F Sanders, H J F Wert, William W Sanders, Joseph A Worrall, R W Hawkins, Mr Shields, Mr Humphrey, Lewis E Lyanna

Names of Publications: *Nebraska Press Recollections*; *Nebraska Palladium*; *Nebraska Advertiser* [Brownville]; *Nebraska Farmer*; *Daily State Journal* [Lincoln]; *Nebraska State Journal* [Lincoln]; *Nebraska City News*; *Omaha Herald*; *The People’s Paper* [Humboldt]; *Rocky Mountain News* [Denver]; *Nebraska Herald* [Plattsmouth]; *Beatrice Express*; *Nebraska Herald* [Nemaha]; *Daily Nebraska Press* [Nebraska City]; *Omaha Nebraskian*; *Brownville and Nemaha County*; *Nebraska City Weekly News*; *Nebraska City Times*; *Nebraska City Daily Times*; *Nebraska Chronicle* [Nebraska City]; *Dakota City Mail*; *Omaha Republican*; *Lincoln Blade*; *Calvert Courier*; *Nemaha County Journal*; *The Granger* [Auburn]; *Nemaha County Herald*; *Nebraska City News-Press*

Keywords: Second Nebraska Volunteer Cavalry; Union Indian regiment; Nebraska State Historical Society; Nebraska press; Illinois Editorial Association; Nebraska Press Association

Photographs / Images: Robert W Furnas; masthead *Nebraska Palladium*, 1854; Thomas Morton; J Sterling Morton; *Nebraska Advertiser* masthead 1874; William Caffery; George W Fairbrother; *Weekly News* masthead 1874

Robert W. Furnas

"Nebraska Press Recollections," and the Oldest Newspaper Controversy

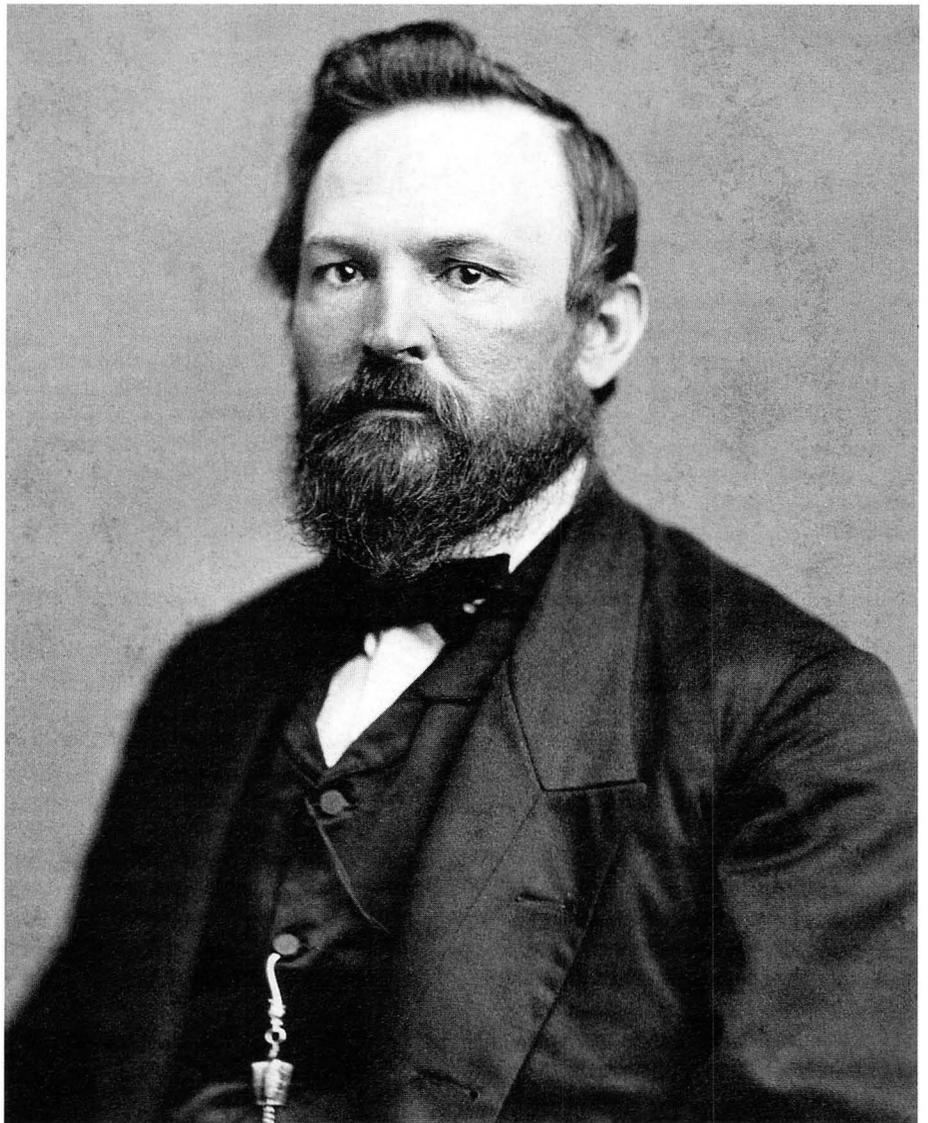
By Patricia C. Gaster

In 1874 Robert W. Furnas, one of Nebraska's most tireless and enthusiastic promoters, was struggling through a single term as state governor. A grasshopper invasion and subsequent economic problems made the year a disappointing one for him politically, but he drew satisfaction from other accomplishments, including the publication of a brief history of Nebraska journalism entitled "Nebraska Press Recollections," for which he had been gathering information for at least four years.

Although only twenty years had passed since Nebraska Territory's first newspaper, the *Nebraska Palladium*, was issued at Bellevue, newspaper activity had exploded since then, and Furnas's "Recollections" indicate the breadth and intensity of that activity—as well as an ongoing dispute over which of Nebraska's newspapers was the oldest continuously published.¹

Furnas's reputation as a journalist was impressive. By the time he arrived in Brownville from Ohio in 1856 at the age of thirty-two, he had already worked as a printer, editor, and publisher. Shortly after arriving he and Dr. John McPherson established the four-page *Nebraska Advertiser* at Brownville. The first issue appeared on June 7, 1856.²

Furnas continued to edit the *Advertiser* until the Civil War changed the course of his life. In 1862 he was appointed colonel of a Union Indian regiment and served in southern Kansas and Indian Territory, and in 1863 he led the Second Nebraska Volunteer Cavalry. Furnas



Robert W. Furnas served a term as governor (1873–75) and was active in agriculture, education, civic affairs, and the army, but remained close to his earliest profession, journalism. He founded the *Nebraska Advertiser* in 1856, the *Nebraska Farmer* in 1859, and published "Nebraska Press Recollections," a history of Nebraska newspapers, in 1874. NSHS-F987-3

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NEBRASKA PALLADIUM.

BY D. E. REED, & CO

BELLEVUE CITY, DOUGLAS CO., NEBRASKA, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 30, 1854.

VOL. 1. - NO. 5

The state's first newspaper, established in Bellevue in 1854, was the *Nebraska Palladium*. With its demise in 1855, and the rapid establishment, consolidation, and failure of many others in the following years, an ongoing dispute arose about which was the oldest continuously published paper. *Nebraska Palladium*, August 30, 1854 (digitally enhanced microfilm image)

turned the *Advertiser* and the *Nebraska Farmer*, an agricultural periodical he had founded in 1859, over to Thomas R. Fisher and Theodore C. Hacker. He and Fisher were listed as proprietors until July 1863; Furnas did not return to the *Advertiser* until the beginning of 1870, and he retired as editor at the end of that year.³

Furnas was aware that he lived in a critical time for gathering territorial and early state history, and in 1878 he helped organize the modern Nebraska State Historical Society (actually the third state historical organization established. He served as its president until 1890 and then again from 1904 to 1905. He also served as editor of the Society's first bound volume, published in 1885.⁴

At least as early as 1870 Furnas began to collect information on the history of the Nebraska press. On August 25 of that year a group of Nebraska newspapermen met in Lincoln to form a state press organization. Officers were elected, the constitution and bylaws of the Illinois Editorial Association were adopted, and Furnas was invited to speak at the next meeting. He subsequently began to collect information for "a detailed history of every newspaper now in existence, or that has ever existed in the Territory or State." A form letter from Furnas dated October 15, 1870, asked individual Nebraska newspapermen to "furnish me at your earliest convenience such information, relative to your paper."⁵

The modern Nebraska Press Association was organized in February 1873, and the group delegated Furnas to write a state press history. "Nebraska Press Recollections" was completed in January 1874, less than a year later. Furnas wrote J. Sterling Morton on January 28 that he had completed the paper (forty-seven penciled pages) only the night before

and stressed his concern with accuracy: "Really feel as [if] I *must* read proof." He wrote again to Morton on February 3, "I will . . . publish here where I can read proof carefully."⁶

Furnas's history of the Nebraska press was published serially April 23 and 24 in the *Daily State Journal* of Lincoln, and April 24 and May 1 in the weekly *Nebraska State Journal*. "Nebraska Press Recollections" was condensed from Furnas's notes and personal observations as well as from the data submitted by state newspaper editors in response to his requests for information. He submitted it to the *State Journal* at the request of *Journal* editor Charles H. Gere, also NPA president. "In compliance with your request," wrote Furnas to Gere, "I have condensed information and recollections of the Press in Nebraska, collected and in my possession, and submit for publication as you desire."⁷

"Recollections" consisted largely of the dates of establishment, suspension, and change of ownership of Nebraska newspapers that existed at the time of or prior to its publication in 1874, and included the names of proprietors, publishers, and editors. The large number of dates and names justified Furnas's concern with proofreading. He admitted that much was "from personal recollection, and doubtless is not perfect as to minutiae." Furnas stated further that newspapers about which he knew little were springing up almost weekly, and even of such established papers as the *Nebraska City News*, he remarked, "I have not been able to obtain exact [beginning] date and details, although often promised." He concluded his efforts with the hope that the publication of "Recollections" would "lead to full and complete reports and correction of errors."⁸

"Recollections" also included a few

of Furnas's own brief reminiscences and anecdotes, including memories of an 1856 stagecoach trip through the Missouri Valley with Dan W. Carpenter of the *Omaha Herald* and a brief description of eccentric Sylvester Franklin Wilson and *The People's Paper* of Humboldt. Particularly interesting is his admission that in 1859, just three years after he had settled in Brownville, he had planned to relocate to the new goldfields on Cherry Creek in present-day Colorado. However, when he learned that William N. Byers of Omaha had already purchased equipment of the defunct *Bellevue Gazette* and left for Denver to establish a newspaper (which became the *Rocky Mountain News*), Furnas "abandoned [arrangements to move] because of the 'claim' being 'jumped.'"⁹

"Recollections" was reprinted in whole or in part by several southeastern Nebraska newspapers, including the *Nebraska City News* (May 16, 23, 30), the *Nebraska Herald* at Plattsmouth (April 30, May 7, 14), and the *Beatrice Express* (May 14). There were minor variations in spelling and punctuation. The *News* omitted several introductory paragraphs that appeared in the *State Journal*; the *Nebraska Herald* reprinted from the *Journal* without change. The *Beatrice Express* published only a small portion.

The *Nebraska Advertiser*, with which Furnas had launched his newspaper career in Nebraska in 1856 and with which he was still closely identified, did not reprint. *Advertiser* editor George W. Fairbrother Sr. thought "Recollections" was interesting, but was indignant that Furnas had not mentioned Fairbrother's *Nebraska Herald*, established with Theodore Hacker in November 1859 at Nemaha (then Nemaha City). Fairbrother and Hacker owned and published the *Advertiser* in 1874. This must have been

Robert Furnas and the Oldest Newspaper Controversy



In April 1855 Thomas Morton (left) and J. Sterling Morton (they were not related) took over the *Nebraska City News*, also first published in 1854. Its issues were numbered from the defunct *Palladium*, whose equipment and the subscription list they acquired, and they considered it the state's oldest continuous newspaper. NSHS-P853-1557; Thomas W. Tipton, *Forty Years of Nebraska at Home and in Congress*, Nebraska State Historical Society, 1902, opp. 24

one of Furnas's most embarrassing omissions. Although both men were mentioned elsewhere in "Recollections" (Hacker as one of "two old 'Stand-bys' of the *Advertiser*"), Fairbrother still demanded, "Now Gov., didn't you entirely forget the *Herald*?"¹⁰

Despite a few such inaccuracies, "Recollections" is still of interest as an overview of territorial and state newspapers more than 125 years ago. A Nebraska City contemporary of the *News*, the *Daily Nebraska Press*, called it a concise and nearly accurate account; the *Beatrice Express* noted that much in "Recollections" had never before been published. And Furnas's history further highlighted a controversy that had arisen within twenty years after the first newspapers were established in Nebraska Territory, a controversy over which paper was the oldest—particularly the oldest continuous newspaper.¹¹

The oldest Nebraska newspaper being published in 1874 was the Democratic

Nebraska City News (until 1858 the *Nebraska News*). It was first published at Sidney, Iowa, in the autumn of 1854 and then moved across the Missouri River to Nebraska City, where the November 14 and succeeding issues were printed. After J. Sterling Morton and Thomas Morton (they were not related) took control of it in April 1855, they numbered succeeding issues from the defunct *Nebraska Palladium* at Bellevue. Thomas Morton, who had been printer for the *Palladium*, obtained printing equipment and a subscription list. Thus the *News* saw itself as the state's oldest continuous newspaper and the successor to the *Palladium*. Keenly conscious of its age, the *News* remarked on July 12, 1858, that as the oldest weekly in the state, it was contemplating establishing a daily.¹²

The *News*'s chief rival for the oldest continuous newspaper honor was the *Nebraska Advertiser*, dating from 1856. The dispute is reflected in a national

newspaper directory for 1870, which identified the *Advertiser* at Brownville under Furnas as "the oldest paper in the State." Similarly, the *Nebraska City News* under William M. Hicklin, publisher, and J. Sterling Morton, editor, was the "oldest paper in either Kansas or Nebraska."¹³

The *Nebraska City News* of May 16, 23, and 30, 1874, reprinted "Nebraska Press Recollections" serially—with some additions and corrections. Editor H. A. Reid prefaced Furnas's history on May 16 with praise for the governor's commendable industry and perseverance and conceded the report "seems to be in the main very accurate." However, the *News* made a few additions and corrections (most of which related to the oldest newspaper controversy) "on the authority of our old original printer, Thomas Morton." Specifically it disputed Furnas's claim that the Nebraska City fire of May 12, 1860, and the brief absorption of the *News* by the *Nebraska City Times* in 1870 had caused the *News* to lose issues, and therefore disqualified it as the state's oldest continuously published newspaper.¹⁴

Thomas Morton had worked in 1854 as a printer for the *Palladium*, first at St. Mary, Iowa, and then across the Missouri River at Bellevue. When the *Palladium* ceased publication in April 1855, Thomas Morton became associated with the *News* at Nebraska City. Morton retained his connection with the *News* for most of the years until his death in 1887. He and J. Sterling, who became editor on April 12, 1855, made it the leading Democratic paper of Nebraska Territory. Later under Milton W. Reynolds, editor from 1857 to 1861, thousands of copies were circulated to government officials and prominent persons in the East to advertise Nebraska Territory.¹⁵

Furnas had tangled with the Mortons and the *Nebraska City News* before, most notably over the public printing while J. Sterling was secretary of Nebraska Territory from April 30, 1858, to May 19, 1861. The territorial secretary was responsible for money allocated

Nebraska Advertiser.

ESTABLISHED 1856.
Oldest Paper in the State.

BROWNVILLE NEBRASKA THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 1874.

VOL. 18—NO. 44

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ESTABLISHED 1856.
Oldest Paper in the State.

from congressional appropriations for public printing, but usually followed the wishes of the territorial legislature in selecting the public printer. However, J. Sterling decided that he, not the legislature, would control the public printing and selected Theodore H. Robertson of the *Omaha Nebraskian* and Thomas Morton of the *Nebraska City News* as public printers for the territory. Later the House and Council elected a new public printer: Robert Furnas, a member of the Council, editor of the *Nebraska Advertiser*, and critic of J. Sterling Morton. Secretary Morton never recognized Furnas as the public printer, and the matter was not officially resolved during Morton's term of office.¹⁶

Furnas had emphasized the *Advertiser's* continuity of publication even before the 1860 fire in Nebraska City. His *Brownville and Nemaha County in 1859*, a short historical pamphlet, noted that the first number of the *Advertiser* had appeared on June 7, 1856, and it had been published regularly since. Furnas wrote in the *Advertiser* on April 28, 1859, that "we have published it now near three years, during which time it has in no instance failed to appear regularly on publication day."¹⁷ In July 1862 the *Advertiser* tried to counter recent *News* claims of its "great antiquity" by noting that the *Nebraska Palladium*

When Furnas's "Recollections" was published in 1874, the *Nebraska Advertiser* was chief rival to the *News* for oldest continuous newspaper status, and made that claim on its banner. It dated from 1856, two years later than the *News*, but Furnas did not consider the *News* a continuation of the *Palladium*, and contended it had lost its continuity through a brief consolidation with the *Nebraska City Times*. *Nebraska Advertiser*, Apr. 30, 1874 (digitally enhanced microfilm image)

had predated the *News* and that the "Omaha *Nebraskian* was also in actual running order before the type and material of the *News* was brought over from Sidney [Iowa]." The indignant *Advertiser* editorial ignored the *News's* claim of descent from the *Palladium* and the beginning date of the *Nebraskian*—January 1855. Significantly, the *Advertiser* did not claim the oldest paper title for itself.¹⁸

It was not until June 23, 1870, that Furnas added "Oldest Newspaper in the State" to "Established 1856" on the front page of the *Advertiser* after the consolidation of the *Nebraska City News* with the *Times* earlier that month. "Since the death of the *News*," remarked the *Nebraska Herald* on the same day, "the Brownville *Advertiser* takes position as senior newspaper of the State."¹⁹

Furnas's assertion in "Recollections" that the *Nebraska Advertiser* was the state's oldest continuous newspaper provoked an indignant response from Nebraska's other oldest paper. The crux of the *News* rebuttal in May 1874 to Furnas's claim was Reid and Thomas Morton's insistence that their paper's weekly edition had been published regularly in both 1860 and 1870. "The *Nebraska City Weekly News*," they asserted, "has never missed an issue since November, 1854, notwithstanding the office was once totally destroyed by fire."²⁰

Reid and Thomas Morton were correct in asserting that the May 12 fire did not interrupt the weekly *Nebraska City News*. The May 19 issue following the fire noted:

By the kindness of our friends of the Brownville Advertiser establishment we are enabled to continue issuing the Ne-

braska City News. We shall be obliged to print our paper in Brownville for a couple of issues yet, when we hope to have our splendid new office fully prepared.

Thomas Morton had already left for the East to buy new type and equipment. The *Advertiser* in a report of the Nebraska City fire on May 17, 1860, noted that "until new material arrives, their paper [the *News*] will probably be printed at Brownville." Thomas Morton again referred to this arrangement with the *Advertiser* in the *News* on May 20, 1874, after "Recollections" had appeared in print. Morton as soon as possible equipped a new *News* printing plant in Nebraska City, and on June 16, 1860, the *News* appeared with an altered typography.²¹

A more difficult problem for Reid and Thomas Morton was the brief period following the purchase of the *News* by the new *Nebraska City Times* in June of 1870. The *Times* was established in April of that year by a faction of Democrats opposing J. Sterling Morton. Thomas Morton and Reid maintained (in correcting Furnas's assertion that the *News* lost its identity after purchase by the *Times*), that "the *Times* was printed entirely with the material of the *News* office, and its weekly edition was published as the *Nebraska City Times and News*—hence there was no actual suspension of the *News* at all."²²

The *Nebraska City Daily Times* of June 9, 1870, the first issue of the *Times* following its consolidation with the *News*, was numbered as a continuation of the *Daily Times*, begun in April, not as a continuation of the *News*. Other indications of a clear break between the *News* and *Times* were a "Valedictory," by former *News* publisher William M.

Robert Furnas and the Oldest Newspaper Controversy

Hicklin, who “quits, he is not in the paper business any longer, he bids his friends adieu”; and a “Valediction” by editor J. Sterling Morton. “The ancient *News* passes to rest, perhaps forever,” Morton wrote. “Let it be remembered that it lived not in vain, because it had both enemies and friends.”²³

References to the *Times* from other newspapers also distinguish clearly between the *News* and *Times*. The Republican *Nebraska Herald* at Plattsmouth, edited by Hiram D. Hathaway, on April 28, 1870, noted the receipt of a copy of the newly founded *Times* and commented, “It was about time the Democrats of Nebraska City done something to throw off the chains that [J. Sterling] Morton had them bound with.” The *Daily Nebraska Press* of Nebraska City reported on June 8 that the *Times* (after consolidation with the *News*) would be published by a joint stock company consisting of thirty-six men and firms. Dr. John Blue, a newcomer to Nebraska City from Missouri, was to be editor-in-chief of the paper, with Thomas McLaughry to serve as associate editor and business manager and J. Dan Lauer to be local editor.²⁴

On June 16 the *Herald* published several brief articles dealing with the consolidation of the *Times* and the *News*. One, reprinted from the Republican *Nebraska Chronicle* at Nebraska City, was entitled “The News Squelched.” The *Herald* concluded, “The ‘oldest paper in the world’ has gone dead—the *Nebraska City News* is no more. Hicklin says it ‘could not keep up with the *Times*!’”²⁵

The *Times* daily was suspended in November 1870, after the excitement generated by the recent state election had subsided, but the weekly edition continued. In December 1870 Thomas Morton bought the weekly *Times*, and the January 7, 1871, issue carried the earlier name of *Nebraska City News*. Dr. Blue was retained as editor. The *News* in its first issue following the name change, that of January 7, 1871, said, “It is the oldest, most widely-read, and

frequently quoted periodical in Southern Nebraska,” and several weeks later on January 28 added its claim to the masthead.²⁶

Subsequent Nebraska historians differed on the subject. Nemaha County physician, journalist, and local historian Dr. Andrew S. Holladay called the *Nebraska Advertiser* the oldest newspaper in the state in 1876 as did Alfred T. Andreas in 1882. Despite J. Sterling Morton’s close association with the *News*, the Morton-Watkins multi-volume history of the state, published between 1906 and 1913, conceded that the *News* could not be said to be the oldest continuous newspaper in Nebraska:

The *Nebraska Advertiser*, . . . is said to be the oldest continuous publication in Nebraska, an honor which would belong to the *Nebraska City News* but for a slight break in 1870 when the *News*, for a time, lost its identity in the *Times*.

Despite this concession, Morton-Watkins, when discussing the territorial press in 1856, labeled the *Nebraska City News* as one of Nebraska Territory’s “very aggressive political journals”—and the *Advertiser* only as “industriously newsy.” It also pointed out that the *News* had always been at Nebraska City, whereas the *Advertiser* had been moved several times within Nemaha County.²⁷

Albert Watkins in 1917, about five years after the *Advertiser* was suspended, said that the *Nebraska City News* had been published from 1854 until that date with the exception of “the time . . . when it was merged into the *Times*, of Nebraska City, . . . and therefore may be fairly called the oldest newspaper in the state.” However, Addison E. Sheldon in his 1921 “History of the Nebraska Press” stated that the territorial press had no living survivor “having continuity of publication under one name,” a probable reference to the *Nebraska City News* and *Times*.²⁸

The publication of “Recollections” and of the *Nebraska City News*’s response focused southeastern Nebraska’s attention on the oldest continuous newspaper argument. A article in the *News* on May

30, 1874, entitled “That ‘Oldest Paper,’ Again,” included not only Morton’s and Reid’s further explanations of their earlier corrections of Furnas, but reprints from other newspapers on the controversy.

The *Dakota City Mail* sidestepped the question of whether the *News* or *Advertiser* was the oldest continuously published paper by nominating a new candidate: the *Omaha Republican*. The *News* supported the *Advertiser*’s subsequent dismissal of the *Republican* as the oldest paper, but then attacked the *Advertiser*’s claim to be that oldest paper. The *Lincoln Blade*, edited by William Caffrey, associated with the *Advertiser* from July 1871 to January 1874, predictably supported the *Advertiser*. Caffrey charged that the *News* “winked out or lost its identity with the *Morning Times*, and several months elapsed without an issue of the *News*. Also, after the fire the *News* lost issues.” The *Beatrice Express* chided:

Why doesn’t the “oldest paper” in Nebraska give us a rest on the subject of its age? We mean the *Nebraska City News*. If it were settled which is the oldest sheet—the *News* or the *Brownville Advertiser*—there would be a little more room for occasional reference on the part of the most ancient contestant to the fact of its accouchment and after struggles in life; but that is an open question, and hence it isn’t delicate for either one of the two ‘oldest papers’ to flout the other for its lack of enterprise in having been born a month too late.²⁹

The *News* responded by repeating former claims of the regularity of the weekly edition:

In 1870 the *Daily News* “winked out,” as Caffrey says; but the *Weekly News* did not. It was issued awhile as the *Times* and *News*, being printed entirely and only on the *News* office types and press.³⁰

The *News* concluded by citing Thomas Morton: “Mr. Morton set the first types [for the *Palladium*] that were ever put up within the boundary lines of Nebraska, . . . and our statement of facts is made on his authority.” A parting blast was aimed by the *News* at Caffrey, accused of initiating in the *Advertiser* “a standing line at the head of its columns,

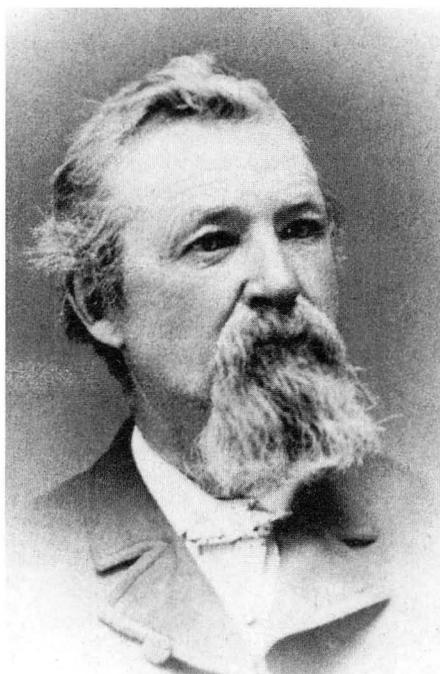
'oldest paper in the State,' which is simply a standing falsehood."³¹

William Caffrey, who became editor of the *Advertiser* in July 1871, was active in Nebraska politics and journalism during the early 1870s and was a strong backer of Furnas. He proposed the first direct primary known to have been held in Nebraska, Nemaha County's Republican primary of 1871. In January 1873 he officiated as chairman at a preliminary meeting of the Nebraska Press Association in Lincoln, and attended a subsequent meeting in February that adopted a constitution and bylaws. He left the *Advertiser* in January of 1874, and in April published the first issue of the *Lincoln Blade*, a Republican daily.³²

Caffrey supported the *Advertiser's* longevity claims in both the *Advertiser* and the *Blade*. When he became editor of the *Advertiser* in 1871, he retained "Oldest Newspaper in the State" on the front page, begun more than a year before under Furnas; and began his salutatory "as editor of this, the oldest paper in the State." In December of 1872, he again declared the *Nebraska Advertiser* to be Nebraska's oldest paper, "having been born in 1856 and never changed name or missed an issue since."³³

In January 1874 Caffrey sold his share in the *Advertiser* to George W. Fairbrother, Sr. A former territorial and state legislator. Fairbrother carried on the paper's tradition of strong, politically active owners and editors. In early 1882 Fairbrother moved the paper from Brownville to Calvert (platted only the year before), where it was consolidated with the *Calvert Courier* of his son, George W. Fairbrother, Jr.³⁴

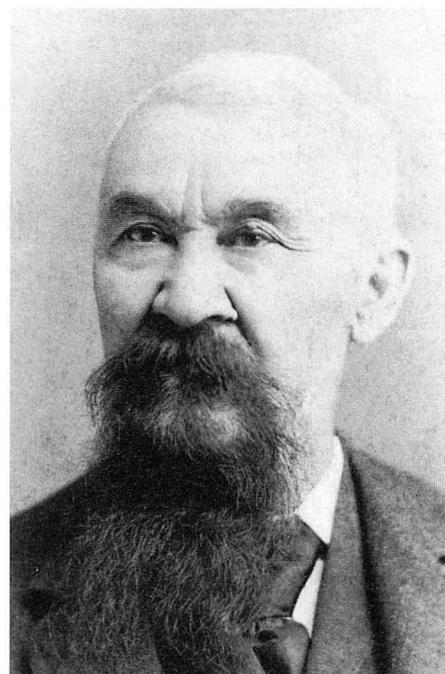
The removal of the *Advertiser* accompanied an ongoing effort to move the Nemaha County seat from Brownville to a more central location in the county. The two rival towns of Calvert, a station on the Burlington Railroad, and nearby Sheridan, on the Missouri Pacific, combined in 1882 under a new name, Auburn, hoping that together they could accomplish what neither could do



William Caffrey, a Furnas backer, became editor of the *Advertiser* in 1871, and supported its claim to be the oldest newspaper. In 1874, as editor of the *Lincoln Blade*, he wrote that the *News* had "winked out or lost its identity with the *Morning Times*." The *News* responded that the *Advertiser's* "standing line... 'oldest paper in the state' " was "a standing falsehood." NSHS-P853-813

alone—secure the county seat from Brownville. Nemaha County voters in February of 1883 did vote to make Auburn the county seat, although the county courthouse at Brownville remained in use until 1885.³⁵

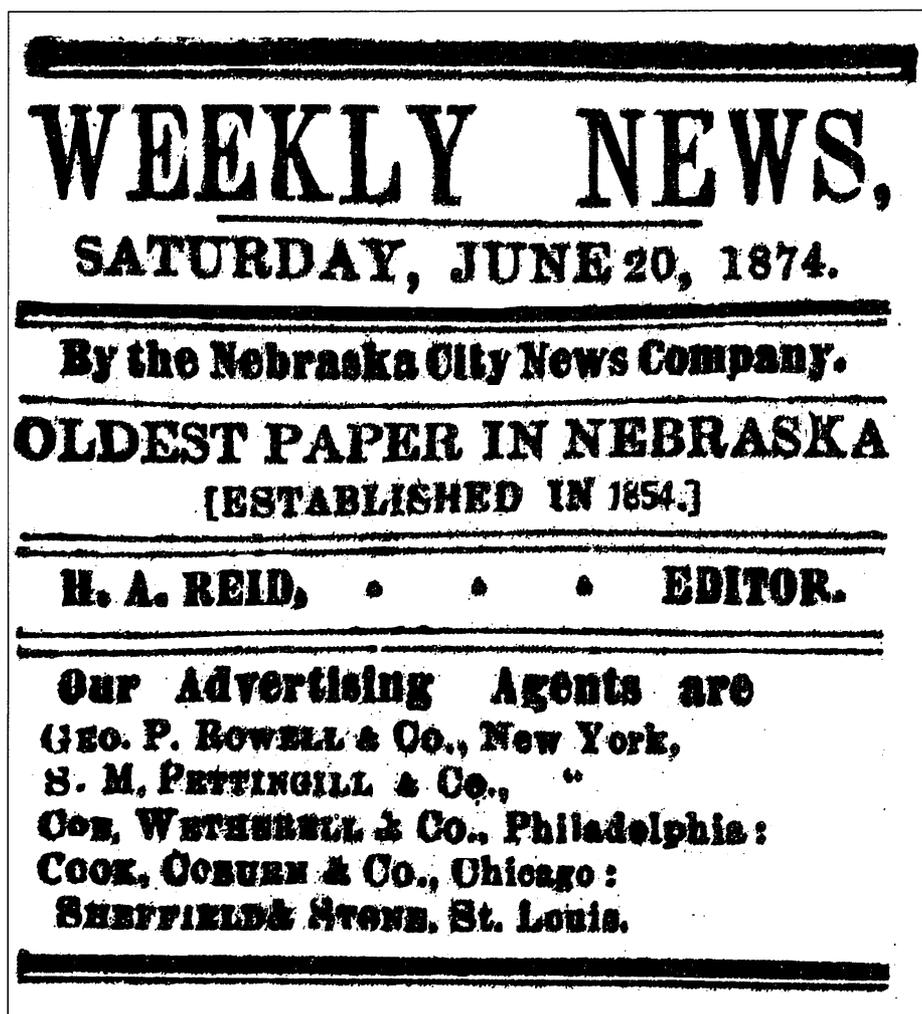
In November 1882 the *Advertiser* was consolidated with the *Nemaha County Journal*, established only the month before in Auburn, to form the *Nemaha County Journal and Nebraska Advertiser* under H. J. F. Wert and Benjamin F. Sanders. Wert and Sanders numbered the first issue (that of November 18, 1882) as Volume 1, Number 4, of the *Journal* and Volume 27, Number 22, of the *Advertiser*. The partnership between Wert and Sanders was dissolved at the end of 1882; in January of 1883 Sanders alone had charge of the paper.³⁶



In 1874 George W. Fairbrother bought Caffrey's share of the *Advertiser* and, a few years later, moved it to Calvert, which soon consolidated with rival town Sheridan to become Auburn. The *Advertiser* consolidated with the *Nemaha County Journal* to form the *Nemaha County Journal and Nebraska Advertiser* under H. F. J. Wert and Benjamin F. Sanders. NSHS-P853-1557

Nebraska State Historical Society files of succeeding issues for the next twelve years, from 1883 to 1895, are incomplete.³⁷ William W. Sanders, brother of B. F., acquired the *Nemaha County Journal and Nebraska Advertiser*, in September 1884. W. W. Sanders later restored the name *Nebraska Advertiser*, and in 1887 moved it from Auburn, the county seat, to the town of Nemaha, about five miles south of Brownville. In 1889 he consolidated it with the *Nemaha Times*, which he had previously owned.³⁸

Although "Oldest Paper in the State" had disappeared from the front page of the *Advertiser* after it merged with the *Nemaha County Journal* in 1882, the claim was not abandoned. W. W. Sanders, a long-time resident of Nemaha County and former partner of Furnas in a nursery



After several attempts to re-establish the *Advertiser* failed, the forty-year feud ended, leaving the *News's* masthead claim "Oldest Paper in Nebraska," uncontested. In 1925 the *News* merged with the *Nebraska Daily Press*, and today's *Nebraska City News-Press* now carries oldest paper honors. Nebraska City *Weekly News*, June 20, 1874 (digitally enhanced microfilm image)

business, continued through the years to support the *Advertiser* as the state's oldest continuous paper. In 1904, twenty years after his purchase of the paper in 1884, he reiterated: "The *Advertiser* is the oldest paper of the state of continuous publication." In 1906 on the occasion of the *Advertiser's* fiftieth anniversary, Sanders noted that he had been associated with the paper for nearly twenty-two years, longer than any other one man during the period of its existence.³⁹

Furnas upheld the *Nebraska Advertiser's* claim until his death July 1, 1905. In a January 1904 speech to the Nebraska Press Association in Lincoln, Furnas reminisced about his arrival in Brownville from Ohio more than forty years before, noting that "the paper that I established then is published yet in Nemaha City, and is the oldest continuously published paper in the state." Similarly, in a tribute to Dr. John McPherson (who had first induced Furnas to come to Nebraska Territory

and helped him establish the newspaper in Brownville), Furnas stated, "The paper, *Nebraska Advertiser*, . . . has been regularly and continuously published from that date to the present, being the oldest continuously published paper in Nebraska."⁴⁰

The *Nebraska Advertiser* survived the death of its founder, Furnas, in 1905, and the departure of its longest serving editor, W. W. Sanders, in 1909, by only a half dozen years or so. Joseph A. Worrall, a well-known Nebraska tramp printer, had arrived at the *Advertiser* office in August 1908 and stayed on as editor, publisher, printer, and general manager of the *Advertiser* for the next four months while Sanders was ill and unable to work. Following another bout of illness in June 1909, Sanders leased the *Advertiser*, probably to R. W. Hawkins, and moved to Garretson, South Dakota. The paper was suspended a month or so later when Hawkins left for Oklahoma.⁴¹

Sporadic attempts were made to reestablish the *Advertiser*. The *Lincoln Star* reported in early 1910 that the *Advertiser*, still identified as the "oldest paper in Nebraska," had been "revived by Mr. Shields an experienced newspaperman." Joseph Worrall returned to act as editor from April 1910 until the end of that year. E. S. Galloway replaced him as editor from January 1, 1911, until the *Advertiser* was suspended in September.⁴²

In April of 1912 *The Granger* in neighboring Auburn reported that the *Advertiser* would be "started up again" (by a Mr. Humphrey and son, according to the *Nemaha County Herald*). But a brief notice on June 18 concerning the recent visit to Nemaha of Furnas's old associate on the *Advertiser*, Theodore C. Hacker, indicated that the paper was probably gone for good. Hacker came from Red Cloud "on his annual visit to look after the graves of father, mother and wife in Nemaha cemetery. As he passed up the street his eyes rested on the sign 'The Advertiser,' and he had to heave a sarcastic sigh." Perhaps "sorrowful" might have been a more

fitting word than “sarcastic.”⁴³

The death of the *Advertiser* ended the forty-year feud between Nebraska’s two oldest newspapers. The dispute was important, at least to the disputants, in 1874 and still forms an interesting historical footnote. Many of the *Advertiser*’s friends at last conceded the issue. Lewis E. Lyanna, an early business partner of Furnas, recalled in June of 1912 that “for a long time [the *Advertiser*] claimed to be [the] oldest paper in Nebraska, but . . . a Nebraska City paper is older.” In November 1925, the *News* merged with the *Nebraska Daily Press*, to form the antecedent of today’s *Nebraska City News-Press*, which now has the oldest paper honor.⁴⁴

Notes

¹ Vol. 1, No. 1 of the *Nebraska Palladium* (shortly afterward the *Nebraska Palladium and Platte Valley Advocate*) appeared on July 15, 1854. It was actually printed across the Missouri River from Bellevue in St. Mary, Iowa, until November of that year. J. Sterling Morton and Albert Watkins, *Illustrated History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Company, 1913) 2:337–40. A weekly military journal published at Fort Atkinson preceded the establishment of Nebraska Territory by nearly thirty years.

² Bill M. Woods, “The History and Influence of the Press of Nemaha County, Nebraska” (Peru State Teachers College, 1944), 6, 7; Morton-Watkins, *History*, 1:657, 2:359.

³ *Ibid.*; Robert C. Farb, “The Military Career of Robert W. Furnas,” *Nebraska History* 32 (Lincoln: Mar. 1951): 18–19; *Nebraska Advertiser*, Apr. 24, 1862.

⁴ Anne Polk Diffendal, “A Centennial History of the Nebraska State Historical Society, 1878–1978,” *Nebraska History* 59 (Fall 1978): 311–23, 429.

⁵ Henry Allen Brainerd, *History of the Nebraska Press Association* (Lincoln: 1923), 1:4; Arthur J. Riedesel, *The Story of the Nebraska Press Association, 1873–1973* (Lincoln: Nebraska Press Association, 1973), 7–8; Robert W. Furnas to [Rulo] *Register*, Oct. 15, 1870, Robert W. Furnas Papers, RG1, SG10, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln. Earlier territorial press meetings had been held in 1859 and 1864.

⁶ Riedesel, *Press Association*, 8; Robert W. Furnas to J. Sterling Morton, Jan. 28, Feb. 3, 1874, J. Sterling Morton Papers, MS7, NSHS. The assertion by Furnas that he had been delegated by the NPA to write a state press history “something over a year since” appeared in an introductory paragraph

to “Recollections” in the *Nebraska State Journal*.

⁷ Transcript from *State Journal* in Henry Allen Brainerd Papers, MS455, NSHS. Brainerd, *History*, 1:4; Riedesel, *Press Association*, 7–8.

⁸ Robert W. Furnas, “Nebraska Press Recollections,” *Nebraska State Journal*, Apr. 24, May 1, 1874.

⁹ For a few months in late 1872 Sylvester Franklin Wilson published *The People’s Paper*, printed in Lincoln and later Nebraska City for circulation in Humboldt. See also A. T. Andreas, comp., *History of the State of Nebraska* (1882; reprint, Evansville, Ind.: Unigraphic Inc., 1975), 1321; and Raymond E. Dale, comp., *Otoe County Pioneers, A Biographical Dictionary* (Lincoln, 1964), 10:2801–2.

“Recollections,” *Nebraska City News*, May 16, 1874. Succeeding quotations from “Recollections” are from the *News* rather than the *State Journal* in order to include bracketed material found only in the *News*.

¹⁰ Woods, *Press of Nemaha County*, 41; “Recollections,” *Nebraska City News*. Fairbrother’s diatribe against Furnas for omission of his *Nebraska Herald* (not the *Nebraska Herald* established at Plattsmouth by H. D. Hathaway in 1865) appeared in the Apr. 30, 1874, issue of the *Nebraska Advertiser*. Fairbrother was mentioned in “Recollections” as the current editor of the *Advertiser* and as cofounder of the *Tecumseh Chieftain* in 1869. Hacker was noted for his association with the *Advertiser*, beginning in 1862.

¹¹ *Daily Nebraska Press* (Nebraska City), Apr. 30, 1874; *Beatrice Express*, May 14, 1874.

¹² W. W. Cox, “Reminiscences of Early Days in Nebraska,” *Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska State Historical Society* (Lincoln, 1893), 80–81; Albert Watkins, “Fifty Years of Nebraska’s History Epitomized,” *Sunday State Journal*, June 10, 1917; James C. Olson, *J. Sterling Morton* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1942), 50–51; J. Hyde Sweet, *Centennial Comments* (Nebraska City: *Nebraska City News-Press*, 1954), 8; Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska, The Land and the People* (Chicago/New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1931) 2:405–6; *Nebraska City News*, July 12, 1858.

¹³ *American Newspaper Rate Book and Directory* (New York: Nelson Chesman, 1870), 685.

¹⁴ “Recollections,” *Nebraska City News*.

¹⁵ Obituary, Thomas Morton, *Nebraska City News*, Aug. 12, 1887; Morton-Watkins, *History*, 2:337–40; Olson, *Morton*, 51; “Thomas Morton set First Type,” *Nebraska Daily News-Press*, Nov. 14, 1929.

¹⁶ Olson, *Morton*, 79–89; Morton-Watkins, *History*, 2:368. For a pro-J. Sterling Morton view of the public printing controversy: “The Public Printing,” *Nebraska City News*, Sept. 8, 1860.

¹⁷ Robert W. Furnas, *Brownville and Nemaha County in 1859* (Brownville, R. W. Furnas, 1859); *Nebraska Advertiser*, Apr. 28, 1859, quoted in Morton-Watkins, *History*, 2:371.

¹⁸ *Nebraska Advertiser*, July 19, 1862. Albert Watkins in 1917 gave the beginning date of the *Nebraskan* as January 17, 1855. Watkins, “Fifty Years.”

¹⁹ Furnas served as editor of the *Advertiser* from Jan. 6, 1870, to the end of the year, when he retired from the paper. Woods, *Press of Nemaha County*, 7; *Nebraska Herald* (Plattsmouth), June 23, 1870. All subsequent references to the *Nebraska Herald* are to the Plattsmouth paper.

²⁰ “Recollections,” *Nebraska City News*.

²¹ “That ‘Oldest Paper’ Again,” *Nebraska City News*, May 20, 1874; *Nebraska Advertiser*, May 17, 1860.

²² “Recollections,” *Nebraska City News*. The *Nebraska City Times* did occupy the *News* offices after the consolidation, according to the *Nebraska State Journal*, June 24, 1870, and the *Nebraska Herald*, June 16, 1870. However, no issue of the weekly *Times* survives to verify the name.

²³ *Nebraska City Daily Times*, June 9, 1870. This is the only issue of the *Times* in NSHS collections. Hicklin bought the *News* from Thomas Morton in November 1869 (with Morton staying on as foreman of the composing room) but disposed of the property the following June to the *Times*. Dale, *Otoe County Pioneers*, 5:1216, 7:1857; *Nebraska Herald*, Nov. 11, 1869; *Nebraska City News*, Dec. 29, 1870.

²⁴ *Nebraska Herald*, Apr. 28, 1870; Morton-Watkins, *History*, 2:365; Dale, *Otoe County Pioneers*, 4:1147–49. The *Daily Nebraska Press*, June 8, 1870, also reported the officers of the *Times* company: president: S. H. Calhoun; vice-president, James Thorn; secretary, J. Dan Lauer; treasurer, William E. Dillon.

²⁵ *Nebraska Herald*, June 16, 1870.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Nov. 24, 1870; *Nebraska Chronicle* (Nebraska City), Nov. 16, 1870. “The Nebraska City *Times* has changed hands, and that old typographical warrior, Thomas Morton, is again in possession.” *Nebraska Herald*, Dec. 29, 1870, reprinted from the *Nebraska City Chronicle*; *Nebraska City News*, Jan. 7, 28, 1871. See also Morton-Watkins, 2:345 n. 1.

²⁷ Andrew S. Holladay, “History of Nemaha County,” *Nemaha County Granger* (Brownville), July 14, 21, 1876; Andreas, *History of Nebraska*, 1482; Morton-Watkins, *History*, 1:288, 2:360. See also Morton-Watkins, 2:344–45, for a discussion of the *News* and *Times*.

²⁸ Watkins, “Fifty Years”; Addison E. Sheldon, “History of the Nebraska Press,” *Omaha Sunday Bee*, June 19, 1921. Sheldon believed, “The Nebraska City Press [founded in November 1858] probably comes nearest continuous existence.”

²⁹ “That ‘Oldest Paper’ Again,” *Nebraska City News*; Morton-Watkins, *History*, 2:360. The *Omaha Republican* dated only from the spring of 1858. Morton-Watkins, *History*, 2:352; “Recollections,” *Nebraska City News*.

Robert Furnas and the Oldest Newspaper Controversy

³⁰ "That 'Oldest Paper' Again," *Nebraska City News*.

³¹ *Ibid*; Morton-Watkins, *History*, 2:337–38 n. The last page of the Nov. 18, 1854, issue of the *Palladium* included a column with this head: "This is the FIRST COLUMN of reading matter set in the Territory of Nebraska. This day put in type on the 14th of November, 1854, by Thomas Morton." Douglas C. McMurtrie, an authority on printing, has since concluded that the first printing in what is now Nebraska was actually done by the Latter-day Saints at Winter Quarters in 1847. Work Projects Administration, comp., *Printing Comes to Lincoln* (Lincoln: Woodruff Printing Co., 1940), 20.

Actually the "standing line" was first added on June 23, 1870, when Furnas, not Caffrey, was editor.

³² *Beatrice Express*, July 1, 1871, Jan. 29, Apr. 16, 30, 1874; Andreas, *History*, 1:225; *Sunday State Journal*, Sept. 1, 1907; *Nebraska Advertiser*, Dec. 19, 1872; "Nebraska Press Association," *The Daily State Journal*, Mar. 1, 1873.

³³ *Nebraska Advertiser*, July 6, 1871, Dec. 19, 1872; W. A. Pollock to editor R. O. Whitehead, *Brownville Democrat*, Aug. 15, 1873: "Your neighbor of the *Advertiser* [Caffrey] is playing a singular role. He claims that the *Advertiser* is the oldest paper in Nebraska and he also claims to be the peculiar friend and champion of Gov. Furnas."

³⁴ Woods, *Press of Nemaha County*, 7, 46, 49; Morton-Watkins, *History*, 2:360.

³⁵ Paul A. Gilmore, "Newspaper Activity in Nemaha County Began Far Back in Territorial Days," *Nemaha County Herald* (Auburn), Dec. 1, 1938; "A New Name," *Nebraska Advertiser*, June 6, 1882; Jane Graff, *Nebraska, Our Towns: East South-east* (Seward: Second Century Publications, 1992),

131–32; "Annual Home-Coming at Picturesque Old Brownville on River," *Sunday World-Herald*, Aug. 31, 1913.

³⁶ *Nemaha Journal and Nebraska Advertiser* (Auburn), Nov. 9, 18, 23, 1882, Jan. 4, 1883.

³⁷ According to the *Fremont Weekly Herald*, July 7, 1883, the paper may have been briefly suspended. NSHS newspaper files also include a single copy of the *Auburn Daily Advertiser*, dated Dec. 26, 1885. Proprietors were Knapp, Peck, and Thomson; the editor was George R. Peck. The paper carried no volume or number

³⁸ W. W. Sanders, "Fifty Years Ago," *Nebraska Advertiser*, June 1, 1906; Eunice Haskins, "Pioneer Newspaper Days in Nebraska Recalled by W. W. Sanders, Who Started Career as 'Devil' on Brownville Democrat in 1872," *Sunday State Journal and Lincoln Sunday Star*, Nov. 29, 1931; Morton-Watkins, *History*, 2:358 n. 1; Woods, *Press of Nemaha County*, 42. Sanders in "Fifty Years Ago" also mentions (Albert) Dillon & (J. D.) Croan in association with the *Advertiser* before he bought the paper in September 1884. For information on Dillon and Croan: Andreas, *History*, 1166.

³⁹ W. W. Sanders, "Fifty Years Ago;" Haskins, "Pioneer Newspaper Days"; *A Biographical and Genealogical History of Southeastern Nebraska* (Chicago/New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1904) 2:450–52; *Nebraska Advertiser*, June 24, 1904.

⁴⁰ Robert W. Furnas, "Early Reminiscences," *Proceedings of the Thirty-second Annual Session of the Nebraska Press Association* (Broken Bow: Purcell Bros. Book and Job Printers, 1904), 43; "Dr. John McPherson," *Proceedings and Collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society* (Lincoln,

1907), 144. Perhaps significantly, the tribute read to Furnas at the NSHS Annual Meeting, Jan. 17, 1906, referred to the *Advertiser* as "published continuously from that time [June 7, 1856] to this," but did not claim it as the state's oldest continuous newspaper.

⁴¹ Sanders, "Fifty Years Ago"; Haskins, "Pioneer Newspaper Days"; Woods, "Press of Nemaha County," 8–9; *Nebraska Advertiser*, Aug. 21, Dec. 18, 1908; *The Granger* (Auburn), Aug. 31, 1909.

Worrall's obituary in the *Lincoln Star*, May 14, 1931, eulogized him as "one of the last of the type once known as 'tramp printers'" and recalled that he had once conducted papers at Syracuse (*Syracuse Herald*, 1885–98) and at Nemaha (almost certainly the *Advertiser*). See also *Nemaha County Herald* (Auburn), May 22, 1931; Dale, *Otoe County Pioneers*, 10:2848; "Editors of Nebraska, 1854–1930," Brainerd Papers, MS455, NSHS.

⁴² *The Granger*, Apr. 19, Dec. 27, 1910, Jan. 3, Jan. 31, Sept. 19, 1911; *Lincoln Daily Star*, Feb. 1, 1910. E. S. Galloway was a southeastern Nebraska newspaperman for thirty-two years, many of them on the *Nemaha County Herald*. *Sunday Journal and Star* (Lincoln), Oct. 25, 1959.

⁴³ *The Granger*, Apr. 23, June 18, 1912; *Nemaha County Herald*, Apr. 19, 1912. Woods in his "Press of Nemaha County," 8–9, 53, reported that the *Advertiser* was consolidated with the *Nemaha County Herald* at Auburn sometime in 1912. If so, the name was not continued.

⁴⁴ "An Old Nebraska Printer," *The Sunday State Journal*, June 16, 1912; Morton-Watkins, *History*, 2:359; "Annual Home-Coming," *Sunday World-Herald*; *Nebraska Daily News-Press*, Nov. 20, 1925.