The history of Blair, Nebraska, 1869-1920

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THE HISTORY OF BLAIR, NEBRASKA, 1869-1920

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of History
and the
Faculty of the College of Graduate Studies
University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Frieda H. Wurdeman
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Accepted for the faculty of the College of Graduate Studies of the University of Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

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PREFACE

The major obstacle to writing a comprehensive history of Nebraska is the fact that so little research has been done in local history. The Blair area has been chosen for this study because of its historical significance and also for the reason that it affords a means for study in community development.

Sincere appreciation is expressed to Dr. Frederick W. Adrian, for his helpful suggestions and guidance, during the preparation and writing of this thesis. Sincere appreciation is expressed also for the assistance given by the staff of the Gene Eppley Library at the University of Omaha, the staff of the Omaha Public Library, the staff of the Nebraska State Historical Society Library, Mrs. Victoria Smith, Lyle Guyer, Walter C. Huber, Dr. K. T. Jipp, Clara Johnson, B. P. McDermott, Reed O'Manlon, Seymour Smith, Edith Neale, and L. W. Svendgaard.
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INTRODUCTION

Blair, situated on the Missouri River at the eastern edge of Nebraska, is in the original territory of Nebraska, opened for settlement by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.\(^1\) (Figure 1, p. 2) Prior to this Act small settlements had been made at Fort Kearny, on the Platte River, and at Bellevue on the Missouri.\(^2\) There were ferry landings along the Missouri River that later became the towns of Nebraska City, Plattsmouth, and Omaha. They prospered because of river transportation and trails to the interior. Blair followed a different pattern of development. Blair was unique in that, though situated on the Missouri River, it came into being as a railroad town rather than as a result of the river. Much of the surrounding region was settled before the town was founded and this gave impetus to its growth. Blair as a railroad town rapidly developed into an industrious trading community.

The future site of Blair was originally included within the boundary of Burt County. When the boundary lines of Washington County were redefined, after the

\(^1\)United States Statutes at Large, Vol. X, p. 279.

FIGURE I

ORIGINAL TERRITORY OF NEBRASKA

contest for the territorial capital, the area in which Blair was to be located was included within Washington County. Douglas County had entered the contest for the territorial capital with Omaha as an entry while Washington County supported Florence. The South Platte counties favored Nebraska City or Plattsmouth. Douglas County was victorious and Omaha became the capital of Nebraska Territory.\(^3\)

The electoral districts or counties were established by Acting Governor Cuming, who succeeded Francis Burt as governor of Nebraska Territory. He divided the area along the Missouri River into election districts or counties—four north of the Platte River, Burt, Dodge, Douglas, and Washington, and four south of the Platte River, Cass, Forney, Pierce, and Richardson.\(^4\) (Figure 2, p. 4). After election Governor Cuming was accused of gerrymandering. The boundary lines of Washington County were redefined. The south boundary line was located two miles north of Florence and the north boundary line was located twenty-four miles north of the south line.\(^5\)


\(^4\)Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, pp. 248-61.

\(^5\)Laws, Resolutions and Memorials, Territorial and State, of Nebraska, Vol. 1, p. 100.
Figure 2: Boundaries of Counties in Territory of Nebraska

Fort Calhoun, one of the first towns incorporated in Nebraska Territory, was established as the county seat of Washington County.

Many towns were incorporated by the first territorial legislature. There were seventeen in all, fourteen of which included the world "city" in the name of the town. Sites for towns were claimed by pre-emption according to the Townsites Law of 1844. This law gave, to those who claimed townsites, rights similar to those granted by the Permanent Preemption Act of 1841. Many of the towns incorporated by the Nebraska territorial legislature were located along the Missouri River, at good steamboat and ferry landings.

Steamboat navigation on the Missouri River had been opened by the Major Long expedition. The Western Engineer of this expedition had come up the Missouri as far as Engineer Cantonment, located on the Missouri, on the shores of Washington County. (Figure 3, p. 6) Following Major Long's expedition, the military forces

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6 Olson, History of Nebraska, pp. 85-86.


8 Addison Erwin Sheldon, Nebraska: Old and New, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1937), p. 11.
FIGURE 3

HISTORIC SITES IN NEBRASKA

Addison Erwin Sheldon, Nebraska: Old and New (New York: The University Publishing Co., 1937), p. II.
at Fort Atkinson, near the future site of Fort Calhoun, in Washington County, used river boats for transportation. Later the Missouri River was proved navigable above Fort Atkinson as far as the mouth of the Yellowstone River. River boats were used too for private expeditions up the Missouri. The Missouri River boats were a constant and indispensable part of frontier life in this region.

Early pioneers arrived by river transportation and they depended upon the river boats for transportation of supplies and provisions after settling in the river towns or the regions surrounding the towns. For example, the residents of DeSoto, a town located at a good boat landing on the Missouri River about four miles southeast of the future site of Blair, had all supplies and merchandise shipped in by steamboats. Charles Selz, who conducted a general store in DeSoto in 1856, received all of his goods by this means. (Figure 4, p. 8) Lumber


12This information was received through the courtesy of Mrs. Victoria Smith, resident of Omaha, and daughter of Charles Selz of DeSoto. See hand-drawn map in the Appendix, p. 101.
A STEAMBOAT AT THE BANK

FIGURE 4
STEAMBOAT AT THE BANK

was brought, in this manner, to the new towns. 13

DeSoto, which was incorporated in 1855, prospered and by 1859 had more than five hundred inhabitants and between fifteen and twenty business houses. It was noted for its pioneer journalism; it had three papers--The DeSoto Pilot, Washington County Sun, and The DeSoto Enquirer. The town also had three banks--the Waubeek Bank, DeSoto Bank, and the Corn Exchange Bank.

As DeSoto prospered it sought the county seat of Washington County. In the winter of 1859 a crowd of DeSoto citizens went to Fort Calhoun to take the county seat by force. The Fort Calhoun people barricaded themselves in the log courthouse and held off the DeSoto band until the second day. By compromise the county seat was turned over to DeSoto where it remained until 1866 when by popular vote it was relocated at Fort Calhoun. 14 DeSoto also lost a number of citizens who moved to Blair when that town was founded.

Cuming City, located two and one-half miles north-


west of the future site of Blair, was settled in 1855. By 1857 the town had fifty-three dwellings, two churches, three hotels, several boarding houses, three stores, and several saloons. The Nebraska Pioneer, the town's paper, was one of the early papers published in Nebraska Territory. In 1857 Cuming City ranked third in importance in Nebraska Territory and this region was the most densely populated section of Washington County. When Blair was founded all moveable structures including the churches were moved to the new town and the site of Cuming City reverted to farmland.

Much of the region around Cuming City and DeSoto was occupied after the towns were incorporated. Land could be obtained in a number of ways. The most popular method was under the Permanent Preemption Act of 1841. Claims could be staked out by the settlers, a residence established, and other requirements of the act met. By the time the land in Washington County was being settled, amendments had been added to the Act of 1841, which permitted land to be pre-empted before surveys were made.

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17 *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. V, p. 455 ff. "An act to appropriate the proceeds of the sales of public lands, and to grant preemption rights."
made. Considerable land was taken in this manner then paid for at the regular price of $1.25 per acre when the public sales were held. Claim clubs were formed at Cuming City, DeSoto, and Fort Calhoun; club members could claim three hundred and twenty acres of land. Claim club laws were enforced by vigilance committees; right of ownership was thus protected. When the early claims were made no one held a deed to the land. The land claimed by pre-emption rights was not kept as a separate record but was included with cash sales. In addition to outright purchase and pre-emption, land could be obtained also by means of soldiers' bounty warrants.

The future site of Blair was claimed as farm land and settled in May, 1855, by Jacob Carter, T. M. Carter, and Alexander Carter, who came from Scioto, Ohio. Part of this land formed a natural valley between the bluffs immediately west of the Missouri River; this valley came

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19*Carr, Men and Women of Nebraska*, p. 23.


22*Omaha Arrow*, July 28, 1854.

23*Carr, Men and Women of Nebraska*, pp. 60, 137-38.
to be called Carter Valley after the original settlers.
The old military trail of 1855 between Omaha and Decatur passed through Carter Valley. A boulder marks this trail and also the site of the first schoolhouse in the district, then known as Carter Valley District.  

A post road was established in 1856 from Omaha to Fort Calhoun, DeSoto, and Cuming City. The following year a stage line was established from Omaha to Dakota Territory. The line passed through Saratoga, Florence, Fort Calhoun, DeSoto, Cuming City, Tekamah, Decatur, Blackbird, and Omadi. As soon as the land was surveyed and section lines established, Washington County began to build roads. The law provided that all men over thirty years of age were required to give a certain amount of labor on the county roads for their poll tax. These roads contributed to the development of the towns and the surrounding area throughout Washington County.

Friendly relations with the Indians was another factor which contributed to the settlement of Washington County. The first council with the Indians had been held

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by Lewis and Clark in 1804 at the original Council Bluff. Later fur traders and missionaries aided in maintaining peaceful relations with the Indians. In 1854 a delegation of Indian Chiefs headed by Chief Logan Fontenelle, head chief of the Omahas and the confederate tribes, went to Washington to negotiate a treaty with President Pierce. They ceded their lands, west of the Missouri, to the government of the United States. The Omaha Indians retained forever 300,000 acres of land in northeast Nebraska as a reservation. The region around the future site of Blair and the rest of Washington County did not suffer from Indian wars such as occurred in central and western Nebraska.

The Homestead Act of 1862 was an additional encouragement to settlement. After the Civil War this Act attracted many settlers to the region where Blair was later founded. By this time farmers were beginning to employ machines. This had been brought on in part by

27 Daughters of the American Revolution, *Historical Markers in Nebraska*, p. 54.


30 Olson, *History of Nebraska*, pp. 24-25, 135.
the scarcity of labor during the Civil War. Before the war was over the self-raking reaper appeared, followed by the harvester and later by the twine binder. The well bucket was displaced by the pump which in turn gave way to the windmill, thereby relieving the daily drudgery of pumping water. The invention of barbed wire made possible the fencing and protecting of the crops planted. Thus production of grain and forage crops was increased.

Much progress had been made in Washington County before the founding of Blair. The towns of DeSoto and Cuming City were thriving communities. Much of the surrounding farm land had been occupied and was under cultivation. Roads traversed the county and the people were connected with the outside world by means of the Missouri River steamboats. By 1860 faster transportation than that provided by stage coaches, freight wagons, and steamboats was desired.
CHAPTER II

THE FOUNDING OF BLAIR

Residents of the area, where the future site of Blair was located, were in hopes of obtaining the transportation facilities provided by a railroad. In 1864, the Northern Nebraska Airline Railroad Company was organized. This seems to have been for promotional purposes as no steps were taken toward the construction of a railroad. In 1867 the company was reorganized with the object of building a railroad from DeSoto to Fremont, Nebraska. A land grant of seventy-five sections of land was donated to the company by the State of Nebraska, in support of the enterprise. Construction of a railroad from DeSoto to the north was begun; about four miles of railroad, called the DeSoto Plug, was built. In 1868, The Northern Nebraska Airline Railroad Company disposed of its franchise to the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad Company, the company of John I. Blair and a number of his associates.

John I. Blair, of New Jersey, railroad builder and philanthropist, had joined with Oakes Ames and others in getting the charter for the Union Pacific Railroad.

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1Shrader, A History of Washington County, Nebraska, p. 242.
2Carr, Men and Women of Nebraska, p. 69.
Blair's operation extended into Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota, Missouri, and Texas. At one time he was president of sixteen different railroads. He was instrumental in selecting the sites of eighty towns in the west. Through gifts of land and money, John I. Blair helped build more than one hundred churches. He was a trustee of Princeton University.3

The company of John I. Blair and his associates, The Sioux City and Pacific Railroad Company, had a railroad from Sioux City, Iowa, south along the Missouri River, to California Junction in Iowa. Plans were made to build a railroad across Washington County, in Nebraska, to connect with the company's Iowa line. The company received 42,610.95 acres of land from the United States government4 and in addition a grant of 47,327.10 acres from the State of Nebraska.5

The Sioux City and Pacific Railroad Company was also aided by the residents of Washington County. In June of 1868, the citizens of Washington County held a special


5Olson, History of Nebraska, p. 170.
election at which $75,000, in county bonds, was voted to the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad Company, for the purpose of building a railroad, from the Missouri River, across Washington County, to Fremont, Nebraska. The exact point at which the railroad was to cross the Missouri River and what town would be selected as the eastern terminal, in Nebraska, caused considerable controversy. Citizens of DeSoto hoped the river would be crossed at the site of their town and that DeSoto would be the eastern terminal of the railroad, in Nebraska.

The railroad company, however, decided to cross the Missouri River about four miles above DeSoto. This crossing was chosen because Carter Valley afforded a natural opening through the bluffs immediately west of the river. The greater part of the Carter Valley land was owned by three brothers--Jacob, Alexander, and T. M. Carter, who had claimed and settled the land in 1855.\(^6\)

The Sioux City and Pacific Railroad Company purchased the land, owned by the Carter brothers,\(^8\) and

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\(^6\) Carr, Men and Women of Nebraska, p. 69.

\(^7\) Ibid., pp. 49-50.

additional land belonging to James Stewart, William Temple, and C. H. Beckman, making a total in all of 1075 acres. The town which was to be the eastern terminal of the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad, in Nebraska, was located on this land. Ostensibly the land was bought by the railroad company but in reality the purchase, from the original settlers, was made by John I. Blair. He had the town surveyed with spacious streets and extensive resident and business lots. (Figure 5, p. 19) A public auction was held on March 10, 1869, at which some lots brought as much as $350, with the sale totaling $61,000. The town, which was the eastern terminal of the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad, in Nebraska, was named Blair in honor of its founder, John I. Blair.  

Construction began at once in the new town. In March of 1869, the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad depot was completed; part of it was used as a hotel and eating house. Clark and Donovan erected a building which at first served as a storehouse for railroad supplies; later

deeded the land to Jacob Carter, Book of Deeds, 8, p. 216. Jacob Carter deeded the land to John I. Blair, Book of Deeds, 9, p. 107. This information was furnished by courtesy of Walter G. Huber, Attorney, Blair, Nebraska. 


10 Carry, Men and Women of Nebraska, p. 50.
Figure 5

Map of Blair, Nebraska

Copied from a map in the office of the City Clerk of Blair, Nebraska, on which the original town was shown.
it was occupied as a store by J. J. Adams. This was actually the first trading establishment in Blair. Soon a dry goods store was opened by C. C. Herman. H. C. Riordan, who had a hardware store in DeSoto, moved his business to Blair and formed a partnership with F. W. Kenny Sr., under the name of Riordan and Kenny. A. Castetter, who had conducted the Waubeek Bank of DeSoto, moved his family to Blair and started a banking and real estate business. F. H. Langley, formerly of DeSoto, was the first physician in Blair. The new town also attracted citizens from Cuming City and the surrounding area.

A board of trustees, duly appointed by the county commissioners, served as the first governing body for Blair. J. H. Post was chairman, C. B. Herman treasurer, and M. V. Wilson clerk. A. T. Chapin was made constable and W. C. Walton was appointed attorney. A committee of three was appointed by J. H. Post to prepare a form of by-laws and ordinances. These were submitted to the board for adoption.

The establishment of a governmental organization for Blair implied a degree of permanence and stability which caused additional people to come. A post office

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12 Shrader, History of Washington County, Nebraska, pp. 161-62.
was established with Charles E. Laughton as the first postmaster. The first school in Blair was taught by Sarah E. Kibby. The first marriage was that of Hans Grimm and Lizzie Harda in the spring of 1869. Henry Siert Jr., born May 21, 1869, was the first child born in Blair. The first religious services were held by E. G. O. Groat, a Baptist minister, in April 1869, on the platform of the railroad station. The Reverend Tingley, who was present at the services, became pastor of the Congregational Church. In the summer of 1869, the Methodist Episcopal Church, of Cuming City, was moved to Blair. The Reverend Jacob Adrian became its pastor, having a few months before delivered his first sermon in Blair in a passenger coach at the railroad depot.13

During the time the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad was under construction in Washington County, the citizens of Omaha were making efforts to have a railroad built connecting Omaha with points to the north. In 1869, the Omaha and Northwestern Railway Company was organized and almost at once began construction northward. Washington County voted $150,000 in eight per cent twenty-year bonds to aid the company while Douglas County voted $2000,000

13 Carr, Men and Women of Nebraska, pp. 50-51.
in ten per cent twenty-year bonds for the same purpose. The State of Nebraska granted the Omaha and Northwestern Railway Company 2000 acres of land per mile of construction.14

The line of the Omaha and Northwestern Railway Company reached DeSoto from Omaha in 1870.15 The company entered into a lease with the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad Company for the use of the short track from DeSoto to the north. The Omaha and Northwestern Railway was authorized to use the right of way of the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad Company upon such terms as were agreed upon by the two companies.16 This made possible communication between Omaha and Blair and trains began regular runs.

Transportation afforded by the railroads was advantageous to the newly founded town of Blair and also to the surrounding area. Missouri River steamboat transportation, though still important to the upper Missouri River region, was declining. It was noticeable in the history of steamboating on the Missouri that as railroads reached

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14 Ibid., pp. 65-66.
15 Ibid., p. 66.
16 Laws, Joint Resolutions and Memorials of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Nebraska, Part II, Special Laws (City of Lincoln, January 5, 1871), p. 621.
points along the river steamboat traffic below those points began to languish and finally died.\textsuperscript{17}

When the railroads came, there were long years of cooperation and competition between railroading and steamboating. The battle between the railroads and the steamboats finally resulted in the former becoming victorious. The victory of the railroads was not to be regretted, it was a victory in line with progress. The country had passed beyond the use of Missouri riverboat transportation. It had served its purpose and served it well; it filled a great place in the early development of the country west of the Missouri River. The explorers, the fur traders, the Mormons, the government agents, the army, the gold seekers, and finally the early settlers had all depended, in a greater or lesser degree, upon Missouri River transportation. Since steamboat transportation was being replaced by railroad transportation Blair was fortunate in having the facilities provided by the railroads.

Prospects for the newly founded town looked promising; the possibility of moving the county seat of Washington County to Blair was considered. It had been forcibly removed from Fort Calhoun in 1858 and located

\textsuperscript{17}William E. Less, \textit{A History of Steamboating on the Upper Missouri} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1952), pp. 59-75.
at DeSoto until 1866. Then an act of legislature authorized the selection of a site for the county seat by popular vote. As a result of this election Fort Calhoun again became the county seat. Three years later the county seat referendum was held and this time Blair was victorious. All county offices, county papers, and county property were moved to Blair.

The legislative act of 1866, requiring the election of a site for the county seat, also made provisions for the building of a courthouse and jail. The county commissioners were authorized and required to levy a five mill tax for the purpose. This tax was to be levied annually until the required amount was received. As sufficient funds had not been accumulated previous to 1869 these buildings were erected at Blair.

While the new town had a number of advantages it was seriously handicapped by the lack of roads. In 1869 the legislature authorized the construction of a number of roads in the county. One of these was to connect Blair with Tekamah in Burt County.  

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18 Laws, Resolutions and Memorials, Territorial and State, of Nebraska, 1861-1869 (City of Omaha: A. D. Ballcombs, Printer to the State, 1869), p. 284.

19 Laws, Resolutions and Memorials of the Fourth and Fifth Session of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Nebraska (City of Lincoln, October 8, 1868 to January 7, 1869), p. 509.
and Michael Waltemier were appointed, by the legislative act, as commissioners to establish the road. The commissioners were to employ one competent surveyor, the necessary number of assistants and teams, and incur whatever expense was necessary to locate the roads. A report was to be made of their work and a map of the road furnished to the county clerk, within thirty days after the road was located. Washington and Burt Counties were to pay the expenses. Three dollars a day was allowed each commissioner; the surveyor was allowed four dollars a day. Men with teams were paid five dollars a day.20

Roads were also to be built from Blair to North Fork, in Madison County, and from Blair to West Point in Cuming County. County commissioners of each county and road supervisors of each road district, through which any part of the road from Blair to North Fork was located, were to open the road and build all bridges without delay. Specific provisions were also made to locate, lay out, and establish the state road from Blair to West Point.21

Legislation for the state roads from Blair to Tekamah, to North Fork, and to West Point was enacted in the State Capitol at Lincoln. The territory of

20Ibid., p. 507.
21Ibid., p. 510.
Nebraska became the State of Nebraska on March 1, 1867, and the Capitol was relocated at Lincoln, July 29, 1867. This took place at the time construction plans were in progress for the railroad of which Blair became the eastern terminal in Nebraska.

Blair was indeed fortunate. It was laid out and built in the midst of a well developed farming country. Then the town, founded in the railroad era, had the advantage of immediate railroad facilities. Connecting state roads to the surrounding towns and communities were soon constructed.

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CHAPTER III

THE DEVELOPMENT OF BLAIR

Blair developed rapidly during the first decades after its founding. The community attracted residents not only from Nebraska and surrounding states but also from Canada and even from Europe.\(^1\) Good railroad facilities and the fact that Blair was located in a productive agricultural area with sufficient rainfall encouraged settlers to come there. (See Figure 6, p. 28)

In 1870, a year after Blair was founded, it had a population of 496. Of the 496 residents, 416 were native and 78 foreign born.\(^2\) The population of the Blair precinct totaled 917 of which 765 were native born.\(^3\) Washington County had a population of 4,452.\(^4\) The people, who settled in Blair and the surrounding area, brought various abilities and useful handicrafts to the community.

\(^1\) Carr, Men and Women of Nebraska, pp. 82-184.


\(^3\) Ibid., p. 255.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 47.
The census enumerator for Washington County, in 1870, prepared a report on industries in Blair City. Two tinware establishments had done $2,700 worth of business, Marcus Johnson, a boot and shoe manufacturer, produced eighty pairs of boots and shoes worth $900, while a harnessmaker, N. A. Whipps, had made ten sets of harness valued at $360. Jobbing and repairing to the amount of $2,000 was done by the blacksmith, John Terry. Hilton & Son, publishers, and printers, operated two hand presses and received $2,000 for job printing and newspapers. 5

Steps were taken to provide for the safety and welfare of the residents of Blair. Provisions were made for the digging of two wells to be placed under the supervision of the town marshal. A hook and ladder company was organized. 6 Plans were made for the construction of sidewalks. These were to be of good lumber; width and manner of construction were specifically designated. The city marshal, who was also fire marshal, was empowered to examine the condition of buildings and flues


6"By-Laws, Ordinances, Minutes and Provisions of the Trustees of the Town of Blair." In the office of the City Clerk, Blair, Nebraska.
and order needed repairs where fire hazards existed. 7

In 1872, the Board of Trustees ordained that by virtue of the Act of Legislature of the State of Nebraska entitled, "An act to incorporate cities of the second class and to define their powers, approved March 1, 1871," the town of Blair be declared incorporated as under the provision of the Act, as a city of the second class, under the corporate name of the City of Blair.

A special election was called for August 24, 1872, to elect a mayor, police judge, marshal, and two councilmen from each ward to hold office until April, 1873. The following officers were elected: mayor, J. H. Hugate; councilmen, William Maker, E. M. Denny, John W. Tew, and M. Gallagher; police judge, John S. Bowen; marshal, Rics Arnold. 8

The City of Blair prospered up to 1873. At that time the entire county suffered from financial difficulties. The failure of the country's leading brokerage firm, Jay Cooke & Company, in September of 1873, precipitated the most severe panic the country had suffered. This firm was financing the building of the Northern Pacific Railroad and numerous other projects for

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7Ibid.

8Ibid.
developing the West. The failure of Jay Cooke & Company was followed by runs on banks and trust companies, also the closing of many business concerns. The Wall Street Stock Exchange closed for ten days; there was a partial suspension too of specie payments.9

In Nebraska many business companies closed their doors. The prices of stocks and farm produce dropped precipitously; it was impossible, for quite some time, to sell as stable a product as wheat. While Blair and the surrounding region experienced difficulties because of the panic of 1873, the area did not suffer to the extent that the plains country farther west did, where drouth and disappointment caused many settlers to abandon their homes.10

In addition to financial troubles, caused by the national panic of 1873, the central states, from their northern boundary to Texas on the south, suffered devastation brought on by an invasion of grasshoppers. A Nebraska resident of that time, who saw the grasshopper invasion, described it thus:

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On a clear hot July (July 26) day a haze came over the sun. The haze deepened into a gray cloud. Suddenly the cloud dissolved itself into billions of gray grasshoppers sweeping down upon the earth. The vibration of their wings filled the air with a roaring sound like a rushing storm. As far as the eye could reach in every direction the air was filled with them. Where they lighted they covered the ground like a heavy crawling carpet. Growing crops disappeared in a single day. Trees were stripped of leaves. Potatoes, turnips, and onions were pursued into the earth. Clothing and harness was cut to shreds if left exposed. Wheat and oats were mostly in the shock but the grasshoppers covered the shocks, cut the bands, and gnawed the grain. At times the grasshoppers were four to six inches deep on the ground. Many people were faced with starvation because there were no crops for food.

A Nebraska Relief and Aid Society was formed September 18, 1874. The organization took steps for relief at once. Newspapers aided in the work for relief and railroads agreed to transport relief supplies free of charge. The Nebraska State Grange and the United

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12Dick, The Sod House Frontier, p. 204.


List of Nebraska Crop Reports:
1869-Big Crop
1870-Failure
1871-Good Crop
1872-Good Crop
1873-Short Crop
1874-Failure
States Army helped in the distribution of clothing, food, and fuel. A bill was passed by the United States Congress which appropriated $100,000 for relief to those who had suffered from the grasshopper plague; Nebraska received a share of this. Thirty thousand dollars was appropriated for special distribution of seeds to the stricken area. The Nebraska legislature authorized the issuance of $50,000 in state bonds for the same purpose. The Federal law allowed those who had suffered from the grasshopper invasion to be absent from their lands until July 1, 1875, without losing their homestead or preemption rights. At the same time the period for payment on their lands was extended for one year. While grasshoppers returned in 1875 and again in 1876 they were not as numerous and the damage was not so great. The Omaha and Northwestern Railway Company, which entered Blair from the south, was also affected by the panic of 1873 and the grasshopper invasion of the following year. The stringency of the monetary market of 1873 and 1874, coupled with the ravages of the grasshoppers in Nebraska, led to a default in the payment of interest on first mortgage bonds and precipitated legal troubles for the company. In the end, foreclosure

14 Shelden, Nebraska: The Land and the People, Vol. I, p. 496.
15 Carr, Men and Women of Nebraska, p. 67.
proceedings were instituted which led to the eventual sale of the railroad. It was purchased by the Union Trust Company as trustee for the bondholders and was operated by the newly organized Northern Nebraska Railway Company. This company began extending the road; by May 1879 it was completed to Oakland, Nebraska. The road was later purchased by the Chicago and Northwestern Railway Company and came to be known as the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railway.

Since the Blair area had been settled for some time, the people were better able to withstand the loss of crops and low prices but they too had difficulties, during the panic of 1873, and subsequent grasshopper invasion. The Blair Times carried a number of notices of mortgage foreclosure sales, on farms in the area, but there was nothing to indicate extreme hardship like that experienced in newly settled areas.

Farther west "Many pioneers sold or gave away their claims and returned East. . . ." 16 Those who were determined to stay had to live on dried buffalo meat. Some people went to the older settled regions where the men found work as hired hands. The effects of the financial

depression were reflected in the decline of assessed valuation per acre of Nebraska farm land—17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Valuation per Acre</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>$4.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>4.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>4.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>$3.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>3.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>3.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>3.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the years immediately following the panic, efforts were made by the State Immigration Society and the railroads in Nebraska to encourage emigration. In 1875 the State Immigration Society published a pamphlet entitled *The State of Nebraska as a Home for Emigrants.* 18

The pamphlet stated this is not

... an advertising scheme for anybody or anything but merely intended to present Nebraska to the emigrating masses and to the world generally, by the plain and truthful statement of her advantages and resources.

After praising the climate and productivity of the soil, methods for acquiring land were outlined. A homestead of 160 acres required an outlay of eighteen to twenty dollars, with five years residence. A timber claim of 160 acres required fourteen dollars and the planting of forty acres of forest trees, with cultivation for eight years. Preemption of 160 acres of land

17Sheldon, *Nebraska: The Land and the People,* p. 570.

18The State of Nebraska as a Home for Emigrants. Prepared and published by George L. Brown, State Secretary of Immigration, Lincoln, Nebraska (Journal Company, State Printers, 1875). At Nebraska State Library, Lincoln, Nebraska.
required $207 to $409 with cultivation and six months residence. Land could also be purchased outright. School lands were available at prices ranging from three to ten dollars per acre. Privately owned lands could be purchased from the owners or from their agents, for two and a half to ten dollars per acre. Professional people and mechanics as well as people interested in agriculture were also urged to come to Nebraska.

This pamphlet was sent to individuals upon request and it was also available for bulk distribution. Lists of names of interested parties were solicited. Twenty thousand copies were printed in the English language, ten thousand in German, four thousand in Swedish, three thousand in the Danish language, and three thousand in the Bohemian language.

The Union Pacific and the Burlington railroad companies, in their pamphlets on Nebraska, claimed for the state the advantages of a central location, with superior railroad facilities, and a soil and climate that guaranteed every agricultural pursuit would be as replete with pleasure as with profit.19 No arguments were neglected that might bring an extra dollar to the

West. Appeals were made to residents of the United States and foreign countries. Pamphlets were prepared and published in several languages for distribution abroad.

The railroads also sent open or secret agents abroad. To the poverty stricken they portrayed Nebraska as a land of plenty and to the oppressed, the West was the home of the free. Immigrants were given every possible assistance and were guarded from the agents of rival companies. The head of the land department of one of the railroads, speaking of the immigrants, stated:

I met them several times by the trainload and at one time swiped a whole trainload from the two Kansas roads, each of which had a special train waiting their arrival at Atchison, but I stole the whole bunch except less than a dozen unmarried young men, and carried them all by special train free to Omaha, Nebraska.20

The Burlington railway alone spent $969,500.35 in advertising for settlers. The expense of selling their lands in Nebraska was placed by the Union Pacific at $855,414.92.21

The Union Pacific Railroad Company had between 10,000 and 12,000 acres of land in Washington County. These lands were outside of the twenty mile limit for

21 Ibd., p. 15.
selection of land, by the railroad company. The selection of Washington County lands by the Union Pacific was opposed by Carl Schurz, the Secretary of the Department of Interior, but subsequently their selection was sustained by the Supreme Court of the United States. Most of the Union Pacific lands in Washington County were settled during the years from 1870 to 1900. The settlers paid from five to ten dollars per acre. By 1903 all of the Union Pacific lands in Washington County had been sold.²²

Many of the settlers in the Blair area took advantage of the tree planting act and benefited economically thereby in fruit production later.

This Act [approved February 12, 1869] exempted from assessed value of each farm, for each acre of forest trees planted and cultivated $100 and for each acre of fruit trees $50. . . . Many settlers paid their real estate tax by planting trees on their land.²³

The trees were to be kept in growing condition for five years. In 1876 enough trees were planted in Washington County to allow for $75,000 exemption on the assessed valuation of real estate.²⁴ Four years later 59,629 apple, 1,819 pear, 3,287 peach, 3,277 plum, and 9,960

²²Carr, Men and Women of Nebraska, p. 70.

²³Sheldon, Nebraska! The Land and the People, p. 476.

cherry trees, and 19,013 grape vines were reported under cultivation. "Washington is the banner county in Nebraska for fruit trees," The Blair Times boasted, "now let her ambitious sons unite to carry off the palm for Arbor Day tree planting."

By 1876 Blair and its trade area was making good recovery from the depression. The shipping of livestock was the big business of the town in that year. It was reported that shipments were as follows: James Foley $100,000; W. W. Kenny $50,000; Herman Bros. $60,000; O. Dodson, $20,000; J. W. Wilson $15,000. In addition A. S. Warrick, Charles Blackstone, R. Blair, Wm. Hilgenkamp, and other farmers shipped stock extensively on their own account.

Wheat was produced in sufficient quantity, in 1876, to supply a local flour mill. This mill was owned by M. B. Dexter, Eli M. Trenton, V. G. Langley, T. M.

25Johnson, History of Nebraska, p. 574.
26The Blair Times, April 6, 1876. Arbor Day was founded, on motion of J. Sterling Morton, by the state board of agriculture, January 4, 1872. The second Wednesday of April was Arbor Day. The Nebraska legislature, in 1885, changed the day to April 22 in honor of Morton's birthday and made Arbor Day a legal holiday. Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, Vol. I, pp. 460, 462.
27John A. Rhoades, Blair the Town Beautiful (Blair, Nebraska: Enterprise Office).
The cultivation of a larger area of land and increased production of grain in the Blair area was aided by the use of barbed wire fencing to replace the sod, wood, dirt, or osage hedge fences. The windmill came into use shortly after barbed wire. It was used by railroads as well as by farmers and ranchmen. Barbed wire and the windmill were only two of the new inventions.

Machine power gradually replaced manpower in the Blair region. A list of farm machinery sold in the City of Blair by 1874 was as follows:

- Spencer Gang Breaking Plow
- Iron Beam Plow
- Farmer’s Friend Drill
- Corn Planter
- Hand Planter
- Walking Cultivator
- Riding Cultivator
- Winnebago Weeder
- Keystone Header
- Bluff City Header
- The Star Wagon
- Avery Stalk Cutter
- Aucken Stalk Cutter
- Haines Header
- McCormick Reaper & Mower
- Harrow
- Pumps
- Marsh Harvester

28 Ibid.
30 The Blair Times, March 19, 1874.
Larger amounts of capital were required for machine farming than had been needed by the early homesteaders who used hand tools. It was difficult to produce enough to meet the prices of the new machinery. A Marsh Harvester capable of harvesting eight acres of wheat a day cost $215. The customary charge for harvesting was two dollars per acre. An early purchaser who mortgaged the machine and counted on harvesting the neighbors' grain might get the machine paid for. A late purchaser usually had difficulty in getting enough fields to harvest to pay off the mortgage on the machine. During this time of transition from hand labor to machines, residents of the Blair region began to take notice of freight rates.

The rates in the West were extremely high in contrast with freight rates in the East. This condition led to the Granger movement of the seventies. A number of Granges were organized and were holding meetings in the vicinity of Blair by the early seventies. After 1872,

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32 The Blair Times, March 19, 1874. Information given in this issue in regard to a mortgage on a Marsh Harvester.

33 Robbins, Our Landed Heritage, p. 271.

34 The Blair Times, March 19, 1874. Twelve Granges had their meetings listed in this issue of the paper.
"cooperation was a recognized part of the work of any state group as soon as organized and in many states county councils, afterwards officially recognized as Pomona Granges, were formed to further the business of the order." 35 A Pomona Grange was organized in Blair April 8, 1876. The meeting was held in the Cooper Opera Hall where a constitution and by-laws were to be adopted and other important business transacted. 36

While the Granger movement was primarily an agricultural movement for intellectual and social advancement it did include some political activity and also business enterprises. The movement was successful eventually in establishing the right of states to regulate, in some degree, the business of common carriers. 37 Business enterprises of the Grangers included: cooperative stores, manufacture of machinery, banking, and insurance. 38 The hard times occasioned by the panic of 1873, together with the grasshopper plague, probably gave impetus to the Granger movement around Blair.

36 The Blair Times, April 6, 1876.
37 Hicks, The Populist Revolt, p. 96. Also Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, Vol. I, p. 521. "In the legislature was vested power to fix railroad rates and to prevent unjust discrimination of all kinds."
38 Buck, The Granger Movement, pp. 238-78.
The depression of the years 1873 and 1874 did not slow settlement appreciably in the Blair area. The population of the City of Blair increased from $494 in 1870 to 1317 in 1880. There was also considerable construction during the years following the panic. The State Bank Building and the Mayle & Hungate Building were erected in 1881. The Kenny & Stewart Building was constructed the following year while the Haller Building, later known as the Redfield Building, was built in 1883 and the Matthiesen Building in 1886. During the 1880's Blair experienced a boom period.

Construction of the Chicago & Northwestern Railway bridge across the Missouri River at Blair was started in 1882. This brought a number of people to Blair. While the bridge was not actually authorized by Congress until June 27, 1882, detailed engineering studies, borings, et cetera, were started in November of 1881. Construction work was actually started in September, 1882. George S. Morris, who also built the railroad company's Sioux City

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41 Rhoades, Blair the Town Beautiful.
bridge, was the chief engineer. The total construction cost of the bridge was $1,127,090.84 but $402,000.00 was absorbed by protective work for channel control. The bridge was opened to traffic in November of 1883.42 (See Figure 7, p. 45)

This major engineering project at Blair stimulated local trade and temporarily increased valuations. While the assessed valuation of personal property in 1884 totaled $124,043.00;43 by 1890 it had decreased to $72,993.00.44 The decrease in property valuation did not indicate a comparable decrease in population. Blair's population increased from 1,317 in 1880 to 2,069 in 1890.45

As the population of Blair increased additional services were provided by the city council, which had replaced the board of trustees when Blair became a city of the second class in 1872. A board of health was established consisting of mayor, president of the city council, chief

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42 B. F. McDermott, Office of Division Engineer, Chicago and Northwestern Railway Company, Norfolk, Nebraska, to the author, April 22, 1964. Appendix, pp. 102-103.
43 "Assessor's Record Book for the City of Blair," 1884. Nebraska State Historical Society Library, Lincoln, Nebraska.
44 "Assessor's Record Book for the City of Blair," 1890. Nebraska State Historical Society Library, Lincoln, Nebraska.
C. & N.W. RAILROAD BRIDGE NEAR BLAIR.
ONE OF THE FINEST BUILT OVER THE MISSOURI RIVER.

FIGURE 7
CHICAGO AND NORTHWESTERN RAILROAD BRIDGE NEAR BLAIR

of police, and a physician selected by the council. One of the duties of the board was to protect the public health in case of outbreak of contagious disease. Ordinances were passed which regulated drays, wagons, omnibuses, hacks, and other vehicles. No horses were to be hitched to the lamp posts, awning posts, shade trees, or ornamental trees. Wagons, carts, drays, barrows, or other vehicles were not to be left on the public streets. Interferences of any kind left on the public streets such as lumber, wood, stone, bricks, boards, or rubbish would be declared a nuisance. Any animals found running at large would be seized by the pound master and advertised for sale. Various efforts were made to provide for the safety and welfare of the residents.

At a special election June 29, 1885, the City of Blair authorized $20,000 in bonds for the construction of a water system. Lots nine and ten in block thirty-three were purchased for $200.00 for wells and a pump house. Three acres were purchased for reservoirs at a cost of $300.00. A contract was let to the Fairbanks Company on August 31, 1885, for a battery of two inch driven wells; a brick pump house; duplex pump for pumping 800,000 gallons per day; two reservoirs of 3,500

46 "City Council Records." In the office of the City Clerk of Blair, Nebraska.
barrels each; 3,555 feet of eight inch main; 3,500 feet of six inch main; 8,040 feet of four inch main; fire hydrants, and 1,000 feet of fire hose. The system was constructed and in operation by 1886. 47

Blair's first electric light and power plant was constructed in 1889 by a company composed of A. P. Howes, Dr. W. H. Palmer, F. W. Kenny, Frank Castetter, W. C. Walton, and F. H. Matthiesen. The company was incorporated in 1889 with $12,000 worth of capital stock. It continued in operation until 1900 when E. C. Capps purchased the electric light and power plant. 48

In 1890 The Blair Courier enumerated the advantages of the city as follows: two railroads, an electric light system, a water system, mills, canning factory, factory making household remedies, broom factory, horse collar factory, largest marble works in the state—outside of Omaha, two elevators, a courthouse costing $40,000 when completed, building and loan association with a capital of $200,000, no empty houses, eleven churches, efficient city council and mayor, and intelligent friendly citizens. 49

47 The Utilities of the City of Blair (Pamphlet prepared June, 1962).
48 Shrader, A History of Washington County, p. 166.
49 The Blair Courier, July 5, 1890. (See Figure 8, p. 48).
WASHINGTON COUNTY COURT-HOUSE, SHOWING COUNTY JAIL
AND SOLDIERS' MONUMENT.

FIGURE 8
WASHINGTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE

The City of Blair, though it had experienced some regression after the boom period, was not having any particular financial difficulty in 1890, the year of the great drouth and crop failure in Nebraska. The residents of the Blair region, which had been settled longer than the western part of the state, were better equipped to withstand drouth and crop failure. The situation in the western part of the state was so bad that the legislature in 1891 appropriated $200,000 with which to buy food and seed for the settlers. Two years later a nation-wide panic struck.

The entire United States suffered a destructive financial panic in 1893. Banks failed, factories shut down, merchants failed in all parts of the country. In Nebraska, twenty-one banks with a total capital of $22,400,000 failed during 1893; nearly all the remaining banks in the state were having financial difficulties.

"Every farmer and every businessman," according to one historian, "lived from day to day in harassed anxiety not knowing what disaster the morrow would bring forth." Thousand of homesteaders left their claims. Entire streets of houses with boarded windows were seen in some towns. Sheriff sales and mortgage foreclosures filled

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50 Sheldon, Nebraska: Old and New, p. 356.
51 Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, p. 733.
the columns of the newspapers. Eastern towns in Nebraska were thronged with people hunting work. This was the beginning of a long period of depression.

During the winter of 1893-1894 cities and towns in Nebraska did their best to provide food and shelter for the unemployed. Wheat in Nebraska, in 1894, sold for forty-nine cents per bushel, and in 1896 corn sold for twenty-one cents per bushel. In 1896 corn had to be used for fuel. The Nebraska legislature appropriated $250,000 more to aid the destitute. Though crops were better, prices were still low. Past debts along with taxes consumed the crops and distress and discontent continued.

The Republican Party and the Democrat-Populist Party, of the Blair area, carried on an active political campaign in the elections of 1896. When Governor Silas A. Holcomb spoke at the principal Democrat-Populist rally in Blair, the Republicans claimed that the "Silverites" and "Pops" had dragged the county with a net to get the largest audience of the campaign. General John C. Corwin

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52 Faulkner, American Economic History, p. 521.
53 Sheldon, Nebraska: Old and New, p. 357.
54 The Weekly Leader, October 10, 1896, Blair, Nebraska.
who spoke at the main Republican rally declared there would be a "landslide" for William McKinley in Nebraska. 55

William Jennings Bryan, Democrat-Populist candidate, won Nebraska's eight electoral votes but William McKinley was victorious in the presidential election of 1896. D. H. Mercer, Republican candidate for Congress in the Second District, the one in which Blair was located, won the election by a close vote. 56

By 1900 economic conditions in the Blair area had improved. The region had not suffered as badly during the drought and the panic of the nineties as had the western part of the state. Blair had even gained in population during the decade. 57

55 Ibid., October 24, 1896.

56 Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, p. 765.

CHAPTER IV

THE STEADY GROWTH OF BLAIR

The City of Blair had developed steadily from the time of its founding in 1869 to 1900, when the population totaled 2,970. In the years ahead from 1900 to 1920 the trend continued.

Early in 1900 steps were taken to secure a post office building in Blair. Ex-congressman Dave Mercer had obtained an appropriation of $43,000, from the United States government, for the purpose. The City of Blair furnished a site for the building and construction began immediately. The new post office was completed and ready for occupancy in 1901. ¹ (See Figure 9, p. 53)

A public reading room was established in 1900 through the efforts of Mmes. Crowell, Castetter, Kenny, and Van Deusen. They attended a city council meeting October 2, 1900, to request aid for their project. ² The city council provided $20.00 a month to support the public reading room which was also called a library.

¹Carr, Men and Women of Nebraska, p. 185.

²"City Council Records," October 27, 1899 to December 19, 1911. City Clerk's Office, Blair, Nebraska.
Government Post-office, Blair

FIGURE 9

U. S. GOVERNMENT POST OFFICE, BLAIR, NEBRASKA

In 1903, the Nebraska legislature passed an act which provided that persons in villages or cities, who were subject to the poll tax, or required to contribute a certain amount of labor on the streets of the city or village, were not to pay a road tax or work on the roads. As a consequence, the city council of Blair passed an ordinance which required all male inhabitants of the city, between the ages of twenty-one and fifty years, to work upon the streets of Blair at certain times during the year. The work was to be done between April and the first day of November. The men could do the work themselves or hire substitutes to perform the required labor upon the streets and alleys. Work could also be done upon the public highways adjacent to the city and within five miles thereof. All work was to be done under the direction of the city council and at such time and place as designated by the street commissioner.

A number of other acts were passed by the state legislature which proved advantageous to Blair. These

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3 Laws, Joint Resolutions and Memorials of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska (York: Nebraska Newspaper Union Printers, Binders, 1903), pp. 437, 479.


5 Laws, Joint Resolutions and Memorials of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, 1903, pp. 218-24.
included the legalization and sale of municipal bonds, for local improvements, by cities of the second class. 6 Cities and villages in this category were also permitted to authorize an improvement levy by a vote of two-thirds of the city council or board of trustees. 7

During this period, the Federal Government and the states were not the only agencies concerned with railroad legislation. The city council, in 1905, required trains, running on tracks within the corporate limits of Blair, not to exceed a speed of eight miles per hour. Bells weighing at least thirty pounds were to be placed on each engine and were to be continuously rung by the engineer or fireman in charge of the engine, while passing over any tracks located within the corporate limits of Blair. 8 The action was considered necessary as a safety measure.

As the population of Blair and the adjacent area increased, the need for commercial establishments and individual services grew proportionately. In 1903 the number of businesses and professional people were listed as follows: doctors; lawyers; dentist; optician; undertaker;

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6Ibid., p. 248, April 3, 1903.
7Ibid., pp. 531-34, April 11, 1903.
auctioneer; blacksmith and machine repair shop; bakery;
three banks; telephone company; books and periodical shop;
bridge contractor and builder; buggy, implement, and hardware store; cafe; canning company; clothing and hats store;
an establishment selling cordwood, piling, and telephone poles; confectionery and ice cream store; farm machinery
and carriage establishment; farm and city insurance company; flour mills, which also sold fuel; furniture and rug store; three grocery stores; laundry; two hardware and ranges stores; two livery and feed stables; two lumber dealers; two meat markets; two millinery stores; printing company; publishing house; three real estate firms; and shoe store. 9 Horse drawn vehicles were the principal
means of transportation, other than railroads, of the professional and business people, and the residents of Blair at that time.
The entire population of Nebraska depended upon horse drawn vehicles as the principal means of transportation, other than railroads, during the first year of the twentieth century. These vehicles included: the family carriage, with its fancy black trappings and kerosene

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9 *Plat Book of Washington County, Nebraska, Blair Nebraska* (The C. H. Scoville Co., 1908), pp. 82-85. This book was loaned by the courtesy of Lyle Guyer, Realtor of Blair, Nebraska. Lyle Guyer was a descendant of a pioneer family of the early town of DeSoto, Nebraska. (See Figure 10, p. 57).
lamps; the surrey; the one-horse buggy; and several different kinds of wagons. At the turn of the century Blair residents owned 182 carriages and 276 horses.  

The first horseless carriage in Nebraska was owned by William Hayward of Nebraska City, about 1895. In 1902 the first horseless carriage appeared on the streets of Lincoln. People in horse drawn vehicles had difficulty when they met the horseless carriages.

The horses had become reconciled to the bicycles but what a rumpus these snorting little vehicles without horses attached to them created, no one but an early settler can possibly appreciate. It was not a case of scaring an occasional colt but every horse that ever came within sight or within hearing was rearing even before its driver had seen or realized what for. Old plugs ready to be pensioned to the pasture for life became yearling colts again in rejuvenated pep and power.

The first law regulating motor vehicles was enacted by the state legislature in 1905. Motor vehicles were defined as all vehicles propelled by any power other than muscular power, excepting however tractors, engines, road rollers, and any vehicles which were used on rails or tracks. The law regulated their use in operation on the highways, and on the streets of cities and villages within Nebraska. According to the law a motor vehicle

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10 "Assessor's Book for the City of Blair," 1899. In Nebraska State Historical Society Library, Lincoln, Nebraska.

11 Sheldon, Nebraska: Old and New, pp. 40, 402.
could travel a mile in six minutes in city limits while the speed on highways was not to exceed a mile in four minutes. The motor vehicle had to be brought to a stop immediately at a signal of the driver of an approaching horse drawn vehicle, and had to remain stationery until the horse drawn vehicle passed. Caution was required in passing a horse drawn vehicle and assistance had to be given the driver if needed. A fine of $25 to $50 was provided by the law of 1905.\(^\text{12}\)

By 1906 there were three motor vehicles in Blair.\(^\text{13}\)

The total number in the state was 1,087 with $1087 collected for registration fees. Two years later the number totaled 4,200 and fees collected amounted to $5148.65. By 1910 the number of motor vehicles had reached 7,500 and registration fees totaled $16,617.25.

Further state legislation regulating motor vehicles was enacted in Nebraska in 1911. Speed limit in cities was not to exceed twelve miles per hour, except at street intersections, where speed limit was set at six


\(^{13}\) This information given through the courtesy of Reed O'Hanlon, Sr., Attorney of Blair, Nebraska, son of Clark O'Hanlon who was a resident of DeSoto and Blair. For information on motor vehicles in Nebraska see Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, p. 866.
miles per hour. Registration fees were increased to $2.00 and motorcycles, for the first time, were to pay a fee of $1.00 for registration. All fees were to be paid to the county treasurer and placed in the county road fund for the construction and maintenance of permanent roads.

Numbers on car number plates were to be four inches high; these and the name Nebraska were to be lighted after sunset. The law of 1911 also contained regulations regarding brakes, non-resident owners, and passing speed. The statute did not limit in any way the power of local authorities to enact any ordinance, rule, or regulation affecting motor vehicles, provided it was not in violation of the state statute.\[14\]

Certain traffic regulations in regard to motor vehicles were enacted by the city council of Blair. For example, all motor vehicles parked in Washington Street between Fourth and Sixth Streets and on Walker Avenue between Front and Lincoln Streets were to be parked along the center of the streets. Motor vehicles were allowed to stand at the curb, on the above named streets, for a period not exceeding twenty minutes. Fines for non-observance were not to be less than $3.00 or more

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than $50.00. For traffic safety the mayor was to appoint a special officer for the City to be known as a motorcycle policeman.

Safety measures for fire protection were provided by the city council. Fire limits were established. Buildings within these limits were to be constructed of stone, brick, cement, or other non-combustible material; the roofing cornice and gutters, likewise, were to be of non-combustible materials. Provisions were also made for better fire fighting apparatus and accommodations for the fire department.

The City of Blair purchased lots 13, 14, and 15 in block 56 as the site for a municipal building. A contract was let with Peter Kiewit, contractor of Omaha, for the erection, construction, and completion of a city hall on the lots purchased by the City, at the agreed price of $12,173.00. The building was to be completed by October 6, 1912.

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16 Ibid., July 20, 1915.


The first floor of the city hall when completed had a fire apparatus room for the fire department, a room for the city council, and also offices for the city officials and employees. The second floor was originally intended for an opera house; it was later also used for a dance hall. When completed in 1912, the city hall was dedicated with appropriate ceremonies and speeches.\(^{19}\)

At a special election, September 29, 1911, the city council was authorized, by a majority of eighty-eight votes, to issue $35,000 in bonds for the construction of a light plant and electric distribution system. A site for the plant was purchased January 16, 1915, for $1,500. Opposition to construction of the plant caused delay but on August 31, 1915, a contract was let for construction of the plant. The city purchased the private distribution system in operation at that time. On March 2, 1916, the new plant was ready for operation and there were 463 customers.\(^{20}\) The light and water departments of the city were combined, with H. L. Morris as the first commissioner.

On September 5, 1916, the library board of Blair

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\(^{20}\) "Light Plant History" in *The Utilities of Blair, Nebraska*, June, 1962.
was informed by the city clerk that voters had approved acceptance of a Carnegie gift of $10,000 for the construction of a library building. The community provided a site for the building, raising the money by popular subscription. In October the president of the library board appointed E. M. Beatty, head of the Beatty Construction Company, a member of the new building committee. On October 6, 1917, the Blair Carnegie Library was officially opened with appropriate ceremonies. 21

May McQuarrie, who had served as the librarian of the first library in Blair, located in the city hall, was appointed the first librarian of the Blair Carnegie Library. 22

On April 6, 1917, the United States entered World War I and men of the Blair area served in the armed services and other war services. 23 Residents of Washington County subscribed to the bond issues of World War I and they contributed liberally to the Red Cross. The drives for the war effort, sponsored by


22 The Pilot Tribune, June 8, 1959. May McQuarrie served as librarian of the Blair Carnegie Library from 1917 until 1958 when Clara Johnson became the City Librarian of Blair.

the Red Cross in Washington County, exceeded their quota. 24

A contribution to the war effort was made by the Blair area in the production of food. Through the Food Production Act of August 1917, the Secretary of Agriculture was authorized to cooperate with local and state officials and with private and public agencies to effectually carry out the powers of the Act for stimulating agricultural production. A second Act of August 1917 gave the President power to control foods and fuels, and to purchase, store, and sell wheat and other commodities under certain conditions. 25

The National Food Administration had the power to regulate and limit the use of sugar, wheat, butter, and other foods. Meatless and wheatless days urged the consumers to curtail the use of these foods and to use substitutes instead. Then to further aid in the amount of food that could be sent to the allies and the armed services, every means was used to stimulate the farmers to greater production. The farm bureau and county agents were an aid in stimulating food production for the war

24 Shrades, A History of Washington County, Nebraska, p. 294.

While statistics are not available for Blair, it seems safe to assume that the farmers in this area contributed to the increased production of food in Nebraska. Corn and wheat production in Nebraska during this period was as follows:

**ACREAGE AND PRODUCTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Corn Acreage</th>
<th>Corn Production</th>
<th>Wheat Acreage</th>
<th>Wheat Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910-15</td>
<td>6,537,736</td>
<td>160,303,583</td>
<td>3,294,586</td>
<td>58,014,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>6,740,803</td>
<td>190,070,419</td>
<td>3,310,313</td>
<td>68,773,581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>7,932,050</td>
<td>223,488,778</td>
<td>902,255</td>
<td>12,602,574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>6,954,061</td>
<td>123,298,649</td>
<td>3,827,659</td>
<td>43,241,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>7,039,811</td>
<td>182,250,823</td>
<td>4,383,731</td>
<td>61,231,602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>7,560,355</td>
<td>255,544,816</td>
<td>3,592,995</td>
<td>60,560,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the National Food Administration had no legal authority to fix agricultural prices, its war-time purchases made up such a large proportion of the food supplies that this tended to fix prices. It could guarantee minimum prices and these were placed high enough to stimulate production. Prices in the Blair region and the rest of Nebraska rose during World War I:

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27 Olson, *History of Nebraska*, p. 279.
NEBRASKA FARM PRICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wheat</th>
<th>Corn</th>
<th>Oats</th>
<th>Barley</th>
<th>Potatoes</th>
<th>Hay</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>8.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>9.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>8.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>8.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>6.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>5.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>7.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>15.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>17.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Railroads which passed through Blair (the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis & Omaha and the Chicago & Northwestern) were operated by the government during World War I. The absolute necessity of subordinating transportation facilities to the purpose of winning the war brought this about. For account purposes it was declared that the railroads of the United States were taken over as of January 1, 1918.

The report of the Nebraska State Railway Commission to the governor, at the close of 1918, included earlier figures and shows a substantial increase in the total freight revenue and ticket sales over that of previous years. It seems reasonable to assume that some

28 Ibid., p. 278.

of the increase in freight revenue, reported for Blair in 1918, was due to increased shipment of agricultural products from Blair:

Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis & Omaha Railway

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station</th>
<th>(Year ending June 30)</th>
<th>(Year ending December 31)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$47,588.46</td>
<td>$53,015.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$59,190.27</td>
<td>$58,373.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chicago & Northwestern Railway

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station</th>
<th>(Year ending June 30)</th>
<th>(Year ending December 31)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$20,101.39</td>
<td>$21,619.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$36,071.47</td>
<td>$54,019.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Included in the Nebraska State Railway Commission's report to the governor, in 1918, was a report in regard to the Blair Telephone Company. This company had no bonds or bills payable and no other liabilities in 1918. It had a surplus reserve and undivided profits of $40,049.63. Federal control and operation of railroads

Ibid., p. 703.
continued during World War I and for some time after the war. Transition from wartime operation of the railroads, by the government, back to private operation took place in 1920.\(^{31}\)

Use of automobiles for transportation in Nebraska had greatly increased by 1920. Whereas in 1910 there were only 15,000 automobiles registered in the entire state of Nebraska, by 1920 the number had grown to 225,300. In 1910 there were few automobiles in use by farmers and possibly no trucks. By 1920 automobiles in use on farms totaled 104,453 and 6,584 trucks were owned by Nebraska farmers. Sixteen thousand trucks, other than farm trucks, were in use in Nebraska in 1920.\(^{32}\) Legislation was in progress for better roads.

As early as 1916, Congress began to subsidize local highway construction. During the years from 1917 to 1921 the Federal Government provided $1,600,604.97 for Nebraska highways. The state legislature appropriated $694,000 to carry on its part of the roads project. A state and federal aid road system of 5,000 miles was

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\(^{32}\)Sheldon, *Nebraska: The Land and the People*, p. 1091.
projected. Blair, according to the plans of the highway department, was to be connected with all the other county seats of Nebraska.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 956, 97.}

A number of changes were instituted soon after the war. The area of the city was enlarged when the council annexed adjacent property.\footnote{"City Council Records," 1920. City Clerk's Office, Blair, Nebraska. Ordinance No. 42, October 5, 1920. See Map of Blair, Figure 11, p. 70.} A sanitary sewer system was completed the same year.\footnote{The Utilities of Blair, 1962.} Provisions were made at that time for paving the streets.\footnote{"City Council Records," 1920. City Clerk's Office, Blair, Nebraska. Ordinance No. 414, November 3, 1920.}

In the two decades following 1900 Blair had secured a post office, a city hall, and a public library. The fire department was provided with necessary apparatus and quarters. An electric light and distribution system was placed in operation and a main sanitary sewer system constructed. Provision was made for the paving of the streets of the city. Many changes had taken place during the transition from horse drawn vehicles to motor transportation.
Figure 11
Map of Blair, Nebraska
with additions.
CHAPTER V

CHURCHES, SCHOOLS, AND ORGANIZATIONS OF BLAIR

When Blair was founded in 1869 church services were held in the railroad depot and in houses until church buildings were constructed or were moved in from nearby towns.

The First Methodist Church was moved to Blair from Cuming City in 1869. Reverend Adrianos was the first pastor of this church. The building which was moved from Cuming City served until 1883. At that time the corner stone was laid for a new church building located at Colfax and Fifth Streets. When this was completed in 1884 a parsonage was also constructed.¹

Reverend E. O. Groat held the first Baptist church service in Blair, at the new railroad depot. The Baptist church building of Cuming City was moved to Blair in 1872. A parsonage was constructed in 1879. A new Baptist church building was erected and dedicated in 1893. Reverend J. Sheppard wrote a thirty-two stanza

¹Sources of information in regard to the history of the churches of Blair, during the years 1869-1920, were: The Pilot Tribune, Historical Edition, April 25, 1949; Shrader, A History of Washington County, Nebraska; Atlas of Washington County (Fremont: Midwest Atlas Co., 1963).
poem about the history of the First Baptist Church in Blair.

Traveling missionary priests held Catholic church services at the Blair depot and also in homes. Father Burns organized St. Joseph’s Catholic Church in 1871, which was later called St. Francis Catholic Church and finally named St. Francis Bor/gin Catholic Church. The first building was erected in 1871, the second in 1889, with Father Schmitt in charge of the construction. A rectory was built in 1900.\(^2\)

The First Central Congregational Church was organized in Blair in 1870. Reverend Marshall Tingley came to Blair from Sioux City, Iowa, and in 1873 plans were made for a church building which was constructed and dedicated in 1874. A parsonage was added in 1887. The Women’s Missionary began in 1883; later in 1887 the Ladies Social Union was formed. The Blair First Central Congregational Church celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of its organization in 1895.

Immanuel Lutheran Church held services in McMollens schoolhouse in 1870. Reverend Julius Frese of Logan Creek was the pastor. In 1876 Immanuel Lutheran congregation was organized under the guidance

of Reverend Bergt. The first church was built in 1880. In 1881 the church had its first resident pastor, Reverend Hofius. A new church building was constructed and dedicated in 1889. Reverend John Lang became pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church in 1896.

In 1874, the Church of Christ in Blair was incorporated. It seems that this church merged with the First Christian Church. The Methodist church building was purchased in 1883 and remodeled. An addition was built in 1895. In 1918 the church building burned. Within two years a new building was erected.3

The Seventh Day Adventist Church was organized in Blair in 1879 with Solomon Myers the first elder. Services were held in the homes of members until 1883 when a meeting house was built. A church edifice was erected later.

Pastor A. M. Andersen who moved from Argo to Blair held church services in Blair in 1879. The First Lutheran Church congregation was organized there in 1884. A church building was constructed at that time. Previous to Pastor Andersen's arrival Reverend Hansen of Omaha had visited the Danish settlements in Washington County and had conducted church services in the Danish language.

3Atlas of Washington County.
The First Lutheran church building was enlarged in 1891. A new building was erected in 1902; later a parsonage was added.

Trinity Lutheran church services were held in the homes of members and in the courthouse until 1888 when a new church building was erected and dedicated. Reverend Wents in 1891 was the first resident pastor.

Free Methodists organized the southeast Nebraska district in 1884. Their Blair church was organized in 1889 with Reverend Beuchar as pastor. In 1890 a church building was constructed by the Free Methodists of Blair.

The Episcopalian Church of Blair was organized, at a meeting called to order on June 5, 1882, by Reverend Dougherty Cannon of Cathedral Chapter, Diocese of Nebraska. Plans for construction of a church building were discussed at a meeting held June 12, 1882. A building committee was appointed. By November 28, 1882, the erection of a new church building was completed. A parish house and rectory were constructed later.

THE SCHOOLS OF BLAIR

The City of Blair took pride in its schools and the effective school system, which was built gradually.

after the founding of the town. C. G. Bisbee, county superintendent of Washington County, renumbered the school districts in the county when Blair was founded in 1869. The Blair school district was given number one. On June 8, 1869, Bisbee visited the Blair school and reported:

I have this day visited the Public school at Blair, taught by Miss Sarah Kibby, and find a small log house, poorly seated, a useless blackboard, no globe, outline maps or other apparatus, and yet notwithstanding the rain and mud, the teacher commanding the respect and obedience of her pupils. The pupils were quiet and studious.

Teachers were needed in Washington County and applicants were examined at Blair in the fall of 1869. Of seven people who took the examination, one was given a certificate for one year and six received certificates for six months. Teachers received scant pay and schools had little with which to buy necessary books, apparatus, and supplies.

Money for schools was apportioned by dividing one-fourth of the available funds equally among the twenty-nine districts of the county. The remainder was divided equally according to the number of children in the school census. In January of 1870 school funds to be divided

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5 C. G. Bisbee, "Records of County Superintendent of Public Instruction for Washington County, Nebraska," 1869-1873, p. 6. In the office of the County Superintendent of Washington County, Blair, Nebraska.

6 Ibid., p. 22.
toted $1552.38. One-fourth of this, $389.75, was divided equally among the twenty-nine districts of Washington County, which gave Blair $13.36. The remaining sum of $1162.78 was divided equally among the 1,261 pupils in the county, allowing $.92 per pupil. Blair District No. 1 with 139 pupils received $128.17. The total for Blair, $13.37 and $128.17, was $141.55. It was the duty of the county superintendent to divide these funds for the schools of Washington County.  

A teachers' institute was organized at Blair in the fall of 1870. Twenty Washington County teachers attended. Following the institute a Teachers' Association was organized.  

December 18, 1871, the county superintendent visited the Blair school. At that time the teachers were O. G. Secord, Mary Fausett, and Vesta Noyes. There were three departments in the school, Primary, Intermediate, and High School. The Primary department was crowded and uncomfortable but the instruction was "good, and classes ready in recitation." The Intermediate department was not so crowded and the pupils were more industrious. High School pupils were reported industrious and "prompt in recitation."

7Ibid., pp. 22-31.
8Ibid., pp. 71-72.
The school, in the estimation of the county superintendent, was making fair progress.

By 1871, the population of Blair was sufficient to have a high school. The district had 185 scholars which was more than the required number of 150. When a school district had more than 150 pupils between the ages of five and twenty-one it could become a high school district, when the majority of the voters so desired. There were six members on the board of the high school district. They selected a moderator, director, and treasurer. The high school district, Blair District No. 1, was then established.

In 1872, the erection of a new high school was commenced in Blair. This building was completed by 1873. (See Figure 12, p. 78) The teachers in 1873 were C. G. Secord and Mary Faucett. When the county superintendent visited the high school department he reported that the method of instruction was "good, discipline

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9 Ibid., p. 112.

10 Ibid., p. 97.


12 The Blair Times of June 20, 1872, quoted in The Pilot Tribune of April 22, 1954. The building being constructed in 1872 was later called Old Central Building.
BLAIR HIGH SCHOOL—ONE OF THE MOST ARTISTIC IN THE STATE.

FIGURE 12

BLAIR HIGH SCHOOL

excellent, and the students prompt in recitation." He described the building as new and commodious, well furnished, although apparatus had not been purchased at that time. The high school, in his opinion, was making fine progress.

The new building in addition to a high school department also had a grammar department and primary department. The tuition fee for non-resident pupils was $4.00 per term in the high school, and $3.00 per term for the grammar and primary departments. 13

In cities of the second class such as Blair, where grade and high schools were established, the city could attach adjacent territory for school purposes. The school district of the city was a body corporate and possessed the powers of the usual corporation. The school board was elected by the voters of the district and all the teachers were certified. Boundaries of the Blair school district were increased in the years following the incorporation of Blair as a city of the second class. By 1896 the Blair school district included sections 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17. 14

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13 The Blair Times, March 19, 1874.
14 Laws, Joint Resolutions and Memorials of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Nebraska, Part I, General Laws (City of Lincoln, February 25, 1875).
W. K. Fowler, superintendent of the Blair schools in 1896, issued a pupil's manual which gave information about the duties of pupils in regard to admission to the rooms of the building, excuses for absences or tardiness, and promotion or demotion. Duties were given in regard to written reviews. A suggested reading course of home reading was listed for grades one to eight. Textbooks were listed and a synopsis was given of the primary and grammar department work. Holidays and vacation times were listed. 15

A teacher's manual was also issued by the Blair superintendent of schools, W. K. Fowler, in 1896. 16 The teacher's manual included a course of study, textbook lists, supplementary reading, and suggested programs for school work. Every effort possible was made to increase the efficiency of the Blair school system. According to this manual average daily attendance of the primary department, in 1895-1896, was 352. The average attendance of the grammar department for the same period was 300, and

15 W. K. Fowler, A Pupil's Manual (City of Blair, District No. 1, Washington County, 1896). This manual was issued by the superintendent of the Blair schools in 1896.

16 W. K. Fowler, A Teacher's Manual (City of Blair, District No. 1, Washington County, 1896). The manuals are on deposit in the Nebraska State Historical Society Library, Lincoln, Nebraska.
that of the high school was 82. Total average attendance was 73.4.

Graduation exercises were held for students who completed the work of the Blair High School. Invitations, sent out by the class of 1894, included the program to be presented. There were numbers by the High School chorus, piano duets and solos, and orations by class members. Diplomas were presented to the six graduates by the deputy state school superintendent, Alice E. D. Gordy. In 1895 the number of students completing the work of the Blair High School had more than doubled. There were fifteen graduates in the class of 1895.  

To arouse interest in the school work of the elementary grades as well as in that of the high school, a meeting was held for the teachers of the Washington County schools and the Blair city schools on March 4 and 5 in 1898 in Blair. Friday forenoon, March 4, teachers inspected instruction and progress in arithmetic in the various grades of the Blair schools. Friday afternoon the teachers inspected instruction and progress in vocal music in the Blair schools. On Saturday teachers and

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17 This information was taken from an invitation to graduation exercises held for graduates of Blair High School. Invitations were in the Nebraska State Historical Society Library, Lincoln, Nebraska.
school patrons attended a union meeting in the high school at Blair.

In 1899 graduation exercises were held for those students who had completed the eighth grade work of the Blair schools. There were forty-four in the eighth grade graduating class. Graduation exercises were similar to those held for high school graduates. In 1900 at the annual graduation exercises held for the eighth graders of the Blair schools there were forty-eight in the graduating class.

In 1901 the college which had been founded adjacent to Blair was given the name of Dana College. Dana began as a part of Trinity Seminary. This Seminary was founded by Dr. A. M. Andersen, for the purpose of training young men in the service of the church. H. F. Dexter of Blair donated land for the site of the first building of Trinity Seminary and the citizens of Blair contributed $4,000.00 toward the structure. The Danish church contributed the rest of the funds needed and the seminary building was constructed on the site northwest of Blair. The four

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18 Announcement and invitations in Nebraska State Historical Society Library, Lincoln, Nebraska.

19 Invitations to the Annual Graduating Exercises of the Grammar Department of the Blair Public Schools, 1899 and 1900. In the Nebraska State Historical Society Library, Lincoln, Nebraska.
story brick building was one hundred and ten feet long, sixty-four feet wide, and sixty-one feet in height. The first story contained laboratories, library, and dining room. On the second floor were the chapel, reception room, recitation rooms, and commercial hall. Dormitories for the young men were on the third and fourth floors.

Trinity Seminary was dedicated as a school of theology at Blair, Nebraska, October 21, 1886; Dr. A. M. Andersen became the first president. Meanwhile in 1897 another branch of the Danish Lutheran Church in America joined with the church association in Blair. Trinity Seminary was then made the official theological school of the united church and Reverend S. P. Vig became president of the college. In 1899 the college of Elkhorn, Iowa, was consolidated with Trinity Theological Seminary of Blair. The college was made coeducational; Dana became a new part of the college and in 1901 was officially known as Dana College. Trinity Seminary was later moved to Dubuque, Iowa.

Accommodations were inadequate for the larger enrollment. A ladies dormitory was built and north and south wings were added to the main building. In 1902 a spacious gymnasium was erected and equipped. Plans were made, in 1903, for an additional structure with an
assembly room, and accommodations for fifty students.
Funds were subscribed for the building which was to be
completed for the beginning of the winter term.

In 1903 the faculty of Dana College consisted of
members who were graduates of colleges of Europe and
America. In addition to the theological school the
college offered work in these six departments:

1. The Academic school provided three years of
   preparatory training.

2. A four year college course provided all the
   branches of study essential for a liberal education.

3. The normal course prepared young women and
   men for all grades of public school work. Mastery of
   common and professional branches was acquired.

4. The commercial department aimed to develop
   thorough and practical business men and women.

5. In the music department, piano, organ, and
   stringed instruments were taught. Vocal music was also
   an important feature of this department.

6. Domestic science department.

Attendance at Dana College continued to increase. During
the first few years of the school most of the students were

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20 Sources of information in regard to Dana College
were: Carr, Men and Women of Nebraska, and pamphlet "Dana
College," Blair, Nebraska.
Danish immigrants. By 1911 the largest percentage of the students had been born in the United States.

Blair High School offered a normal training course, as early as 1909, which was of great assistance to teachers in the area. A normal training high school such as that in Blair was not designated to function as a normal training school only. Normal training was one phase of the high school training; the course was both academic and vocational. Graduates from the course could qualify for a teacher's certificate and receive thirty-two college entrance credits. The combination normal training and college curriculum course of Blair had these requirements:


22 Public Documents of Nebraska, 1919-1920, Vol. I. 26th Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to the Governor of Nebraska, pp. 84-85. For academic requirements for county certificates, see p. 72.

9th Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Semester Periods</th>
<th>2nd Semester Periods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English I</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Bookkeeping)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6 weeks)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algebra</td>
<td>Algebra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electives</td>
<td>Electives</td>
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---
10th Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Semester Periods</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geometry</td>
<td>Geometry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botany</td>
<td>Botany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European History</td>
<td>European History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
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11th Grade

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civics</td>
<td>Public School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td>Geography and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or Mathematics</td>
<td>Pedagisanship</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

12th Grade

<table>
<thead>
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<th>2nd Semester Periods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy and Rural</td>
<td>Observation and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Management</td>
<td>Methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American History</td>
<td>American History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar and</td>
<td>Reading and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthography</td>
<td>Physiology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By 1919 twelve seniors completed the combination normal training and college curriculum course of Blair High School. In 1920 seventeen seniors completed the course. All of these qualified as teachers in the elementary grades in Washington County. The county required eighty-one teachers in 1920. There were eight males and seventy-three

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23 Ibid., pp. 87-94.
female teachers in Washington County that year. The males received a total of $7,649.00 in pay while the females received $68,003.45.

School buildings of Washington County were in good shape. District Number 20 had a building that was equipped with a furnace and lighting, heating, and ventilation were arranged on scientific principles. The building of District Number 29 could be used as two rooms. The partition was arranged to slide upwards so the entire building could be used as one room for evening entertainments. The school buildings in the towns were all modern in every way and compared favorably with any in the state. It seems there was no difficulty in regard to compliance with the compulsory school attendance law.24

The Nebraska Childrens Code Commission was appointed by Governor McKelvie in 1919. The report of this commission was the first social survey of Nebraska society. Two of the features of the commission's report were regulation of child labor and control of motion pictures.25 These problems required study and were discussed in the years ahead.

25 Sheldon, Nebraska: The Land and the People, pp. 981-83.
In 1920 business conditions were still good in Nebraska; land prices were high and so were the prices of agricultural products. Prices had continued to rise since 1915. Experienced economists in 1920 warned that a fall in prices was surely coming and that people should pay off debts and decline speculative investments. Some people looked for a fall in prices and business slackening, a year after the close of World War I. Business conditions though continued to be good. The price of World War I in destruction and dislocation of distribution was deferred for some years. Business conditions it seems were fair in the Blair area in 1920.

Blair had four brick school buildings and one frame building with 847 pupils in attendance in 1920.26 The city was known for the effectiveness of its school system. The high school and the elementary school offered superior advantages to the pupils of the locality. A competent corps of teachers and administrators of the school system brought about better results each successive year.

Shortly after Blair was founded a number of organizations were formed in the town. In the years following the number was increased. The various organizations founded in Blair included:

- Ancient Order of United Workmen
- American Legion Auxiliary, Stanley Hain Unit No. 154
- American Legion, Stanley Hain Post No. 154
- Danish Brotherhood
- Daughters of American Revolution, Ni-Ku-Mi Chapter
- Degree of Honor, Auxiliary of Ancient Order of United Workmen
- Independent Order of Odd Fellowship, No. 14
- Modern Woodmen of America, Trabois Camp No. 1295
- Order of Eastern Star, McKinley Chapter, Auxiliary of the Masonic Lodge No. 161
- Royal Neighbors, Myrtle Camp, No. 2388, Auxiliary of the Modern Woodmen of America
- Washington County Bar Association
- Washington County Historical Society
- Washington County Pioneer and Old Settlers Union
- Washington County Lodge No. 21, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. Besides the Blue Lodge No. 21 there was also formed the Adoniran Chapter No. 13, and Knights Templar No. 15
Welcome Rebekah Lodge No. 27, Auxiliary of the
Independent Order of Odd Fellowship
Woodmen of the World, Blue Oak Camp, No. 23
Many friendly social and business activities were carried
on in the numerous organizations of Blair.
CHAPTER VI

LITERATURE

The literature of the Blair region had its beginning in the recordings and stories of: the explorers; the fur traders; army men; the Indians; the pioneers; and the early newspapers. These served later as source material, for fiction and non-fiction, also for poetry and drama.

Lewis and Clark in their travels through the Blair region and beyond recorded their experiences in the councils with the Indians, at the Old Council Bluffs on the west bank of the Missouri River, south of Blair. Their journals also included descriptions of the area. The Journals of Lewis and Clark, edited by Bernard DeVoto, is a condensation, of the early recordings of these explorers, for the general reader. The trail which Lewis and Clark followed through the Blair area has been re-traveled. Changes which took place later have been discussed by Olin Wheeler in The Trail of Lewis and Clark. Letters of the explorers have been edited and appear in


Adventures are told of the early steamboat pilots on the Missouri River, at the time when the region where Blair was later located depended upon river transportation for provisions. *Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River* takes in the entire period of steamboat navigation on the upper Missouri. It also includes a biography of the river pilot LaBarge.

Fort Atkinson, south of Blair on the Missouri River at the Council Bluffs of Lewis and Clark, has been the subject of a number of articles. Especially meritorious is that of Sally Ann Johnson, *Fort Atkinson at Council Bluffs.* W. H. Woods, first historian of Washington County, has been the guardian of the site and the relics of the Fort. His work contributed much to the building of the Historical Society in Washington County.

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4 Chittenden, *Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River*.


Interest in the Indian carvings on the rocks of Blackbird Hill, north of Blair in Thurston County, has been expressed in Sheldon's poetry:

The pictured rocks of Blackbird Hill,—
What legends wait the servant's skill;
Who can these curious carvings trace,
Cut in the sandstone's somber face? 7

The apocryphal story of the burial of the Omaha Chief Blackbird was told by Lewis and Clark. Chief Logan Fontenelle, also of the Omaha tribe, is the subject of Logan Fontenelle; an Indian Chief in Broadcloth and Fine Linens; Biographical Narrative. 8

The Song of the Indian Wars is a part of the epic cycle of Nebraska's poet laureate, John G. Neihardt. In early manhood Neihardt lived with his parents at Bancroft, near the Omaha Indian reservation north of Blair. Later in 1912 when Neihardt was married and literary critic for the Minneapolis Journal he returned to Bancroft with his wife; there he produced much of his work. 10 Neihardt's epic cycle consists of five books:

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7 Addison Erwin Sheldon, Poems and Sketches of Nebraska (Lincoln: State Journal Co., 1908), p. 34.

8 Charles Charvat, Logan Fontenelle, an Indian Chief in Broadcloth and Fine Linens; Biographical Narrative (Omaha: American Printing Co., 1961).


10 Ibid., pp. 21-22.
The Song of Hugh Glass; The Song of Three Friends; Song of the Indian Wars; Song of Jed Smith; and Song of the Messiah. The period with which Neihardt dealt was the great epic period beginning in 1822 and ending in 1900.

Of the distinguished Pioneer Heritage Series Blair could, it seems lay some claim to Man of the Plains. This narrative presents the events which took place in the region between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains during the opening and developing of the region.

W. H. Woods has been mentioned as the first historian of the immediate Blair region at the time when it was being settled and developed. John T. Bell and Perry Selden also wrote of the early history of Washington County. Early history of the Mormon settlement is given in "The Nebraska Winter Quarters Company and Florence" by Donald D. Danker.

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12 Donald D. Danker (ed.), Man of the Plains (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1911). One of the Pioneer Series.


East Central Nebraska folklore has been collected in *Pioneer Life in Nebraska: We Settled the Plains*, Series one and two. The College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Nebraska sponsored the series. A second collection of folklore in Nebraska was sponsored by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Folklore*, Books II and III of this series include a number of the early ballads.

*Nebraska Folklore* by Louise Pound includes cave lore, rain making, legends of lovers leaps, Nebraska strong men, popular ballads, and celebrations of special days. In the special days, she included the Fourth of July.

The celebration of July 4, 1890, was typical of the times. In Blair, it began with the firing of cannon at sunrise. Reception of visitors took place from eight to nine o'clock. A grand parade included music by the bands. The program included an address of welcome, songs by the chorus, and an oration by General Van Wyck. A

16 *Pioneer Life in Nebraska: We Settled the Plains* (College of Arts and Sciences, University of Nebraska, 1941), Series one and two.

17 *Folklore*, Books II and III, sponsored by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1941.

18 *Souvenir of July 4th celebration, Blair, Nebraska*, 1890.
basket dinner or picnic dinner was served at noon. The afternoon program included various races and contests. A four o'clock pageant was given in the park. The forty-two states, seven territories, District of Columbia, and Goddess of Liberty were represented by the young ladies of Blair. Following the pageant, at eight o'clock, a fireworks display took place.

The reunion of the Washington County Veterans Association, August 19 and 20, was celebrated with special programs, marches, and baseball games. The Washington County Farmers Institute had special meeting days. On one of these Governor Shallenberger was the featured speaker, his topic—"The State and the Farmer." A banquet was served at noon.

The churches of the Blair area had days that were set apart by special services. The schools, organizations, and individual families also had their special days. However, all worked together on civic projects.

NEWSPAPERS

The Pilot Tribune of Blair published a Seventieth Anniversary Edition on May 11, 1939. This centennial

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19 Printed Program, Washington County Veterans Association, 1891.
edition carried accounts of many events which had taken place in the early days of Blair. The Blair newspapers had been a valuable asset to the community, the historic edition was especially so.

The editors of *The Pilot Tribune* selected April 22, 1954, as the publication date for their eighty-fifth edition. This was the date on which *The Pilot Tribune* began its eighty-fifth year and the year in which Washington County celebrated its one hundredth birthday. The edition also honored Blair on its eighty-fifth birthday which had taken place five weeks previous to April 22, 1954.

*The Pilot Tribune*, in its eighty-fifth anniversary edition, traced the history of the paper from the time of its founding to the date of the anniversary edition. This special edition is also valuable for the local history it contains.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

Blair was founded in an area rich in history. Lewis and Clark camped south of there at the Council Bluffs in 1804. A few years later Fort Atkinson was erected nearby. Major Long arrived in the area on the Eastern Engineer in 1819. This inaugurated steamboat transportation on the upper Missouri River.

The founding of Blair as a railroad town marked the transition from steamboat to railroad transportation. The Blair area experienced a second transition in that crop production by hand labor was replaced by horse-drawn machinery in connection with the planting and harvesting of agricultural products. Many changes took place during this time.

The town of Blair became a city of the second class with a mayor-council form of government. Residences, churches, schools, a business district, and a courthouse were constructed. A water system and an electric light plant were installed. Streets and roads were improved and a railroad bridge was built across the Missouri River.

In the first decade of the twentieth century another change took place—automobiles began to replace horse-drawn vehicles. Progress continued in Blair; a
post office was built and the city acquired a Carnegie library. A municipal building was constructed with offices for the mayor, the city officials, and also adequate space for the fire department. The city progressed steadily as did the surrounding area, in spite of drouth, grasshopper invasions, and national panics.

Though people of Blair came from all parts of the United States, from Canada, and from Europe, they worked together harmoniously. All cooperated in the progress of Blair, in its institutions and in civic projects. Residents displayed interest in the affairs of the city and the state as well as in national affairs. Local newspapers contributed to this interest. Changes and adjustments in regard to new conditions proceeded smoothly.

The democratic government established in Blair was an important feature of community development. Along with opportunities Blair residents realized their responsibilities. With all cooperating a peaceful prosperous community and trade center was built.
APPENDIXES
Distances: approximate—no attempt at drawing to scale.

Omaha to Galbin 12 miles.
Galbin to Ft. Atkinson 1 mile.
Galbin to present de Soto site 3 miles.
Pike Store to old de Soto townsite 1 1/2 miles.
Old de Soto townsite to Omaha 3 1/2 miles.

My grandfather Charles Little had a general store in the old town of De Soto beginning about 1858.

Map of the De Soto area.

Drawn by Reverend L. Smith, of Omaha, Nebraska.
Mrs. G. J. Wurdeman
9325 Davenport
Omaha 14, Nebraska

Dear Madam:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated April 8, 1964 indicating your interest in the history of construction of Railway Company's Trans-Missouri Bridge No. S-72, 2.2 miles East of Blair, Nebraska.

Detailed engineering studies, borings, etc. were started in November 1881 and proved that the Blair Site chosen was much superior to the competitive Decatur Site but did entail an enormous amount of protective work to keep channel under bridge even in the construction years and also, of course, down to the 1930's when the Government work was expected to take the place of the protective work formerly maintained for the intervening years by the Railway Company.

Act of Congress dated June 27, 1882 authorized construction of the bridge at this location. The Missouri Valley and Blair Bridge Company, 3.36 miles long, was organized in 1882 and actually carried out the construction of the foundations under the comparatively pneumatic caisson method. Contract dated September 28, 1882 was made with the T. Saulpaugh and Company for construction of the masonry in the four piers above the foundation; contract dated December 2, 1882 was made with Keystone Bridge Company for the construction and erection of the superstructure; and grading contracts on the approaches were also let at that time.

Work was actually started September 1882 and was carried forward until November 1883 when the bridge was open to traffic.
Casual reading of basic reports fails to develop any information as to the total of men employed but is signed by George S. Morrison as Chief Engineer who must have been quite famous in his line of work as he also built the Railway Company's Sioux City bridge in 1888.

Construction costs total $1,127,090.84, of which protective work absorbed $402,000, to illustrate the difficulties of the channel control work.

It seems improbable that Blair itself had any engine terminal facilities of any size as the train serving the original train ferries were probably run on turn around basis from Missouri Valley, Iowa on the East and Fremont, Nebraska on the West. It is entirely possible that there were minimal facilities to service a switch engine if it were permanently assigned to service the Blair side of the ferry. I can find no record of any such facilities on the map on the Chicago and North Western side, running back to the 1890's but our record is not so complete on the C. St. P.M. & O.

The revenue records of Blair, Nebraska are not now available locally.

As you may well imagine, the information here supplied comes from a detailed engineering report signed at least by Mr. Morrison.

The superstructure was completely rebuilt in the late 1920's and there is a huge file of correspondence on it available on the rebuilding project.

I am not aware of the requirements of a historical thesis under current requirements but the subject report should, I believe, furnish an excellent basis for a research project from an engineering viewpoint or perhaps for the local public library record.

If any responsible, adult, person is interested, arrangements could be made to place a spare copy of this report in their hands for a reasonable time for recording and copying. Copy of the old time drafting plats would require the cooperation of an interested, careful, technician in xerox work, or some similar method of reproduction.

Yours very truly,

/B. P. McDermott/
B. P. McDermott
Division Engineer
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Oleson, Jacob Neils
Osborn, Charles
Osborne, Thomas J.
Ottomoeller, Henry
Parrish, Lynn
Parrish, Zee
Payzant, R. A.
Paulsen, Hans
Paulsen, John
Pearson, Oscar
Peebles, Leland T.
Peppmiller, Harry
Peters, Carl
Petersen, Charles
Petersen, Amandus
Petersen, Christ J.
Petersen, Emmanuel
Petersen, Peter
Petersen, Soren
Petersen, Ernest C.
Petersen, Alfred E.
Petersen, Leland
Petersen, Harold Olaf
Petersen, Henry
Petersen, Lawrence
Pfieffer, Chester
Pickell, George
Pickford, Harry
Pierson, Otis E.
Pilpik, Joseph
Plugg, Henry
Pohlman, Albert
Prochnow, Albert J. F.
Pruner, Gifford
Pruner, Orin
Rabes, Chris
Rabes, Hans
Rask, Anton
Rask, Ernest
Rasmussen, Carl
Rasmussen, Esk.
Rasmussen, James
Rasmussen, Lars
Rasmussen, Louis
Rasmussen, Sofus
Rathman, L.
Reeb, Lyle R.
Reeves, Opal
Reid, Earl C.
Reid, Raymond
Reenard, Ed John
Reich, Lyle
Rhea, Don L.
Richter, Harry
Riessem, Edward
Rix, Howard John
Rix, Ernest
Roberts, Lawrence
Robinson, Raymond H.
Rodgers, Thomas
Redman, Roland
Rosenbalm, Hayes
Rosenildes, George
Ross, George
Roth, Raul
Rounds, N. T.
Rothenburger, H. L.
Romonouski, W.
Rurup, Henry C.
Russ, Carl L.
Salsberry, William
Sand, Christian
Sanderson, A. J.
Scheffler, Orval
Schiller, Oral
Schmidt, Carl John
Schmidt, Ernest
Schmidt, Henry
Schmidt, William
Schroeder, Carl
Schroeder, Fred H.
Searing, Voorhees P.
Shinkle, Cleo
Shoemaker, Albert
Short, Grove J.
Shwarder, Frank
Silvey, William C.
Simmonson, M.
Simpson, Arthur
Simpson, George
Simpson, John
Skow, Walter
Smith, Grover I.
Smith, Clifford P.
Smith, Phillip Clifford
Smith, Henry Frederick
Snowden, George W.
Sproker, Ernest
Sproker, Fred Henry
Somers, Arthur
Spelts, George A.
Sprick, Fred
Sorensen, Martin C.
Sorensen, Chris
Staples, Fred
Stafford, James
Stalcup, Chester A.
Stange, George
Stanley, Walter
States, C.
Steel, C. C.
Steel, James
Steel, Robert
Stender, Emil
Steensen, Anders
Steppat, Eddie
Stewart, Donald
Stewart, Guy
Stewart, Theo. M.
Stork, Frederick
Stork, Martin W.
Stricklett, Cecil Victor
Stricklett, Gail
Stricklett, J. M.
Strode, Jacob C.
Struve, Herman
Soverkrubbe, Albert
Summer, Leon
Syddol, Alfred George C.
Sylvia, James
Taylor, Carleton S.
Theede, William F.
Thielfoldt, John
Thies, Sigmond
Thompson, Frank
Thompson, Gus
Thompson, Neale
Thompson, Robert
Thompson, T. F.
Thornbert, Earl
Timpe, Karl
Truhlsen, Henry
Utterback, John Millard
Utterback, Elmer Floyd
Vaughn, Burl B.
Vail, Sydney
Vesper, David

Vifguair, H.
Vig, Bennett
Von Knuth, C. H.
Vybral, Frank
Vand ausen, Raymond
Wahlgren, Howard
Waldenstrom, Carl H.
Walkenhorst, August
Ward, Leland Earl
Waterman, August A.
Waulborn, Henry
Webb, Fred
Weber, Harold D.
Weber, Leo
Wehmeyer, Walter
Wentworth, Forest
West, Ben
West, Elmon Dayton
West, Everett
Westerman, Edward
White, David
Whited, Seth O.
Whitford, Murray
Whitnack, W. E.
Wilcox, Marshall Ray
Wilkinson, Clyde
Williams, John
Wolf, Berry
Wolff, Frank
Wolff, Louis
Woolhisser, Emanuel
Wolsman, Detlef
Woodward Lyman Albert Jr.
Wright, Howard
Wright, William
Sulbern, Henry E.
Zimmerman, Fred

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1872 J. H. Hungate
1873 C. C. Crowell
1874 Dr. W. H. Pilmer
1875 J. H. Hungate
1876 F. W. Kenny
1882 Perry Seldon
1884 V. G. Lantry
1885-1887 W. G. Walton
1888-1890 W. G. Haller
1891-1892 A. C. Jones
1893 John McQuarrie
1894 E. A. Stewart
1895 Harry Seldon
1896 M. D. Bedal
1897-1898 A. C. Jones
1899 John McQuarrie

1900 J. H. Florck
1901-1902 W. D. Haller
1903 Clark O'Nanlon
1904-1905 L. A. Williams
1907 W. D. Haller
1908 C. R. Mead
1909-1910 W. K. Williams
1911 J. F. White
1912-1914 W. D. Haller
1915 J. F. White
1916 Magnus Johnson
1917 S. W. Chambers
1918 J. S. Roberts
1919-1920 H. Christenson

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