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## The founding of Florence, Nebraska, 1854-1860

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THE FOUNDING OF FLORENCE, NEBRASKA, 1854-1860

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of History

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Marian G. Miles

June 19, 1970

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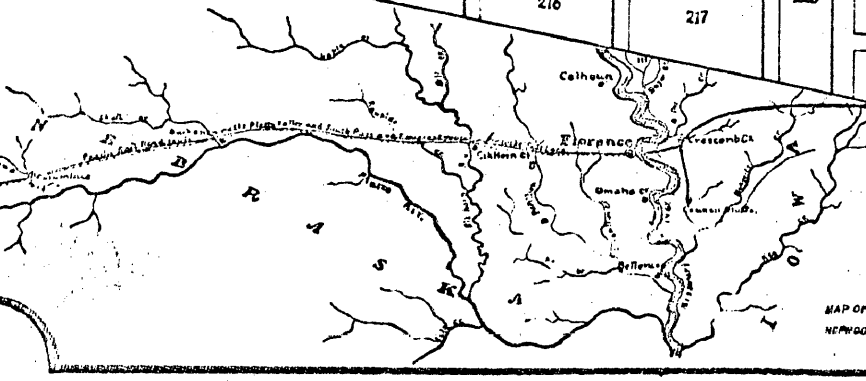
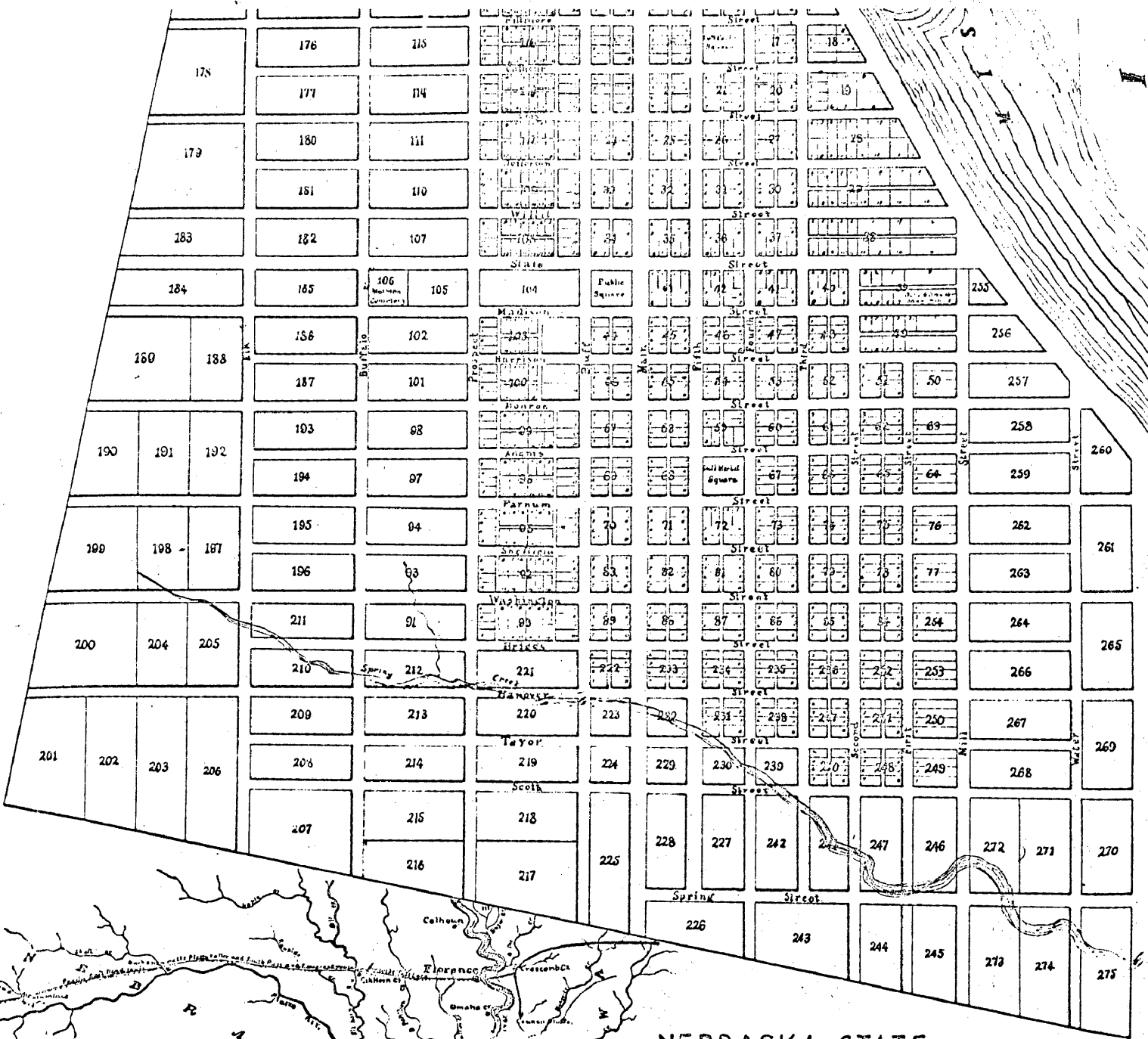
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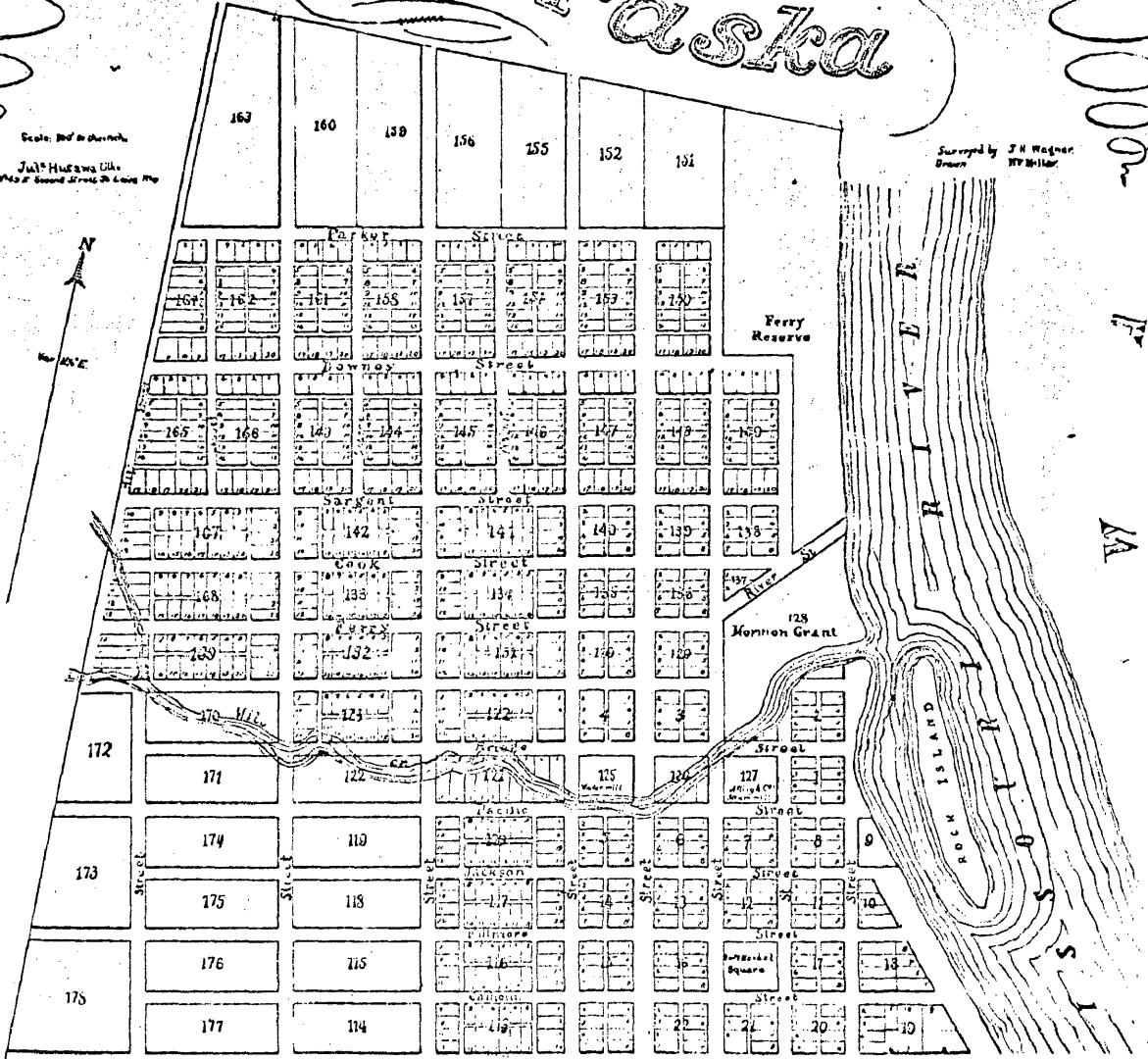
MAP OF FLORENCE, NEBRASKA, AS OF 1886  
NEIGHBORHOOD FROM GALVANCED MAP.

# FLORENCE

## Nebraska

Scale: 1/2" = 100 feet  
JAMES H. HARRIS, DRAFTER  
1914

Surveyed by J.H. Wagner  
Drafter



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the staffs of the Nebraska State Historical Society and the Omaha Public Library and to all of the librarians from whom I sought aid for their efficiency and interest in my research; to the Lyman Webers and other citizens of Florence who were extremely cooperative; to Joseph Hart who made the information of the Florence Historical Foundation available to me; to Forrest Pflasterer who graciously encouraged me, duplicated the material, and who, along with Dr. Frederick Adrian, my longtime mentor, provided support when I needed it most.

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## I. BEFORE THE SETTLERS CAME

The community of Florence, since 1917 a part of the city of Omaha, had a rather unusual history of settlement in that it was founded not once, but twice. In 1846 the area was occupied by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Winter Quarters, as it was then called, had a population of approximately 3500 inhabitants and was the scene of much activity.<sup>1</sup> Abandoned in 1848, it lay prey to plundering Indians and prairie fires until 1854 when James Mitchell and the Nebraska Winter Quarters Company laid claim to the area and established another settlement which they called Florence, Nebraska Territory.<sup>2</sup>

The Mormons were far from the first Europeans to be in this area. For quite some time the Missouri River had provided a byway for fur traders and explorers. Lewis and Clark had passed by here in 1804 and held their noted council with the Indians at the Council Bluff on the west bank of the Missouri River near present day Fort Calhoun. Manuel Lisa

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<sup>1</sup>E. Widtsoe Shumway, "Winter Quarters, Nebraska, 1846-1848, Aspects of Camp Life," Nebraska History, XXXVI (March, 1955), p. 43, citing Hosea Stout, "Diary of Hosea Stout," MS (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University), III, 38.

<sup>2</sup>"Articles of Incorporation, Nebraska Winter Quarters Company, 1854," Florence Nebraska File, Box 1, MSS205, Nebraska State Historical Society. Hereinafter referred to as "Articles," and hereinafter referred to as NSHS.

built a trading post in 1807 in the Missouri bottoms a few miles north of Florence, and Pierre Cabanne had a post in the area, a short time later, on the south bank of Ponca Creek.<sup>1</sup>

In 1819, Major Stephen H. Long established his "Engineer Cantonment" one-half mile north of Fort Lisa. His group along with Colonel Henry Atkinson, who spent the winter at "Camp Missouri" near present day Fort Calhoun, was a part of the "Yellowstone Expedition." The following spring Atkinson established a permanent post to be called Fort Atkinson on the bluff while Major Long proceeded westward along the Platte River.<sup>2</sup> George Catlin, later a noted American painter of Indians, passed by in 1832 and the Maximilian-Bodmer expedition moved upstream in 1833.<sup>3</sup>

In 1846, the Mormons, previously driven from settlements in Kirtland, Ohio, and Far West, Missouri, by hostile "Gentiles," were forced to leave Nauvoo, Illinois, and headed west across Iowa. Early in June the first contingents of the migration reached the Missouri River. At this time five hundred Mormon men were recruited to fight in the Mexican War. Appleton Harmon, one of the Mormon emigrants, summed up the Mormon dilemma as follows:

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<sup>1</sup>Today, a common marker at the northeast corner of Hummel Park notes the sites of the posts.

<sup>2</sup>Roger L. Nichols, General Henry Atkinson; a Western Military Career (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), p. 62, and James C. Olson, History of Nebraska (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), pp. 46-47.

<sup>3</sup>Most of the Bodmer paintings are now part of a collection at the Joslyn Memorial Art Museum in Omaha.

The raising of the battalion, the building of flatboats, the replenishing of our stocks, provisions, etc., preparatory to our start in the wilderness, took us until the fore part of August . . . the season had become so far advanced and many were sick . . . it was thought best to locate on the bank of the Missouri for the winter. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The majority of the Mormons at the main camp, designated Cutler's Park, on the west side of the river proposed to remain there for the winter.<sup>2</sup> As the people worked to organize and prepare the camp for the winter, however, they received ominous news. On September 17, word came from Peter Sarpy, the American Fur Company agent at Bellevue, "that the United States Marshall from Missouri was coming . . . after the Twelve."<sup>3</sup>

Already, the Mormon leaders must have had second thoughts about spending the winter at Cutler's Park. The latter part of August they went up the river to inspect the abandoned Fort Atkinson as a possible campsite. The main advantage was the stone and brick remaining but it was rejected for lack of timber.<sup>4</sup> On September 8, five leaders were appointed to find a new site for their winter encampment.

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<sup>1</sup>Maybelle Harmon Anderson, ed., The Journals of Appleton Milo Harmon, a Participant in the Mormon Exodus from Illinois and the Early Settlement of Utah 1846-1877 (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1946), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Juanita Brooks, ed., On the Mormon Frontier, The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844-1861 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1964), I, 184-85. Cutler's Park was a few miles south and a little west of Winter Quarters.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 194. The "Twelve" referred to the twelve men constituting the ruling body of the Mormon church.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

On September 11, the place was selected and approved, and surveying began. The new site was three miles north and a little east, on the river. According to Hosea Stout, ". . . there was a beautiful place there for a city &c."<sup>1</sup>

Winter Quarters was "laid out in forty-one blocks and 820 lots," and streets and spacing of buildings were closely supervised.<sup>2</sup> In three months seven hundred houses were completed and by spring, "one thousand homes overlooked the Missouri."<sup>3</sup> Log houses and dugouts constituted the main type of construction.<sup>4</sup> Other buildings were constructed including a water-powered grist mill.<sup>5</sup>

Between December 21, 1846, and March 21, 1847, there were sixty-seven recorded deaths at Winter Quarters of a population that had reached close to five thousand persons by spring.<sup>6</sup> Due to complaints by the Indian agent, however, the Saints were compelled to abandon still another location and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>2</sup>E. Widtsoe Shumway, "Winter Quarters, Nebraska 1846-1848," Nebraska History, XXXV (June, 1954), p. 116, citing Andrew Jensen (compiler), "Winter Quarters," Nebraska Settlements (Salt Lake City: Historian's Office, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), October 18, 1846.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 118, citing E. Cecil McGavin, The Mormon Pioneers (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, 1947), p. 135.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 116, citing Jensen, December 31, 1846.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., December 22, 1846.

<sup>6</sup>Gail George Holmes, "Reflections on Winter Quarters," a mimeographed monograph in possession of the Florence Historical Foundation.

move on. By the autumn of 1848, the citizens had either continued their migration on to Salt Lake City, or had moved back across the river to the town of Miller's Hollow.<sup>1</sup>

Brigham Young wrote Major Miller, the Omaha Indian agent, on November 19, 1847, requesting permission to move "such portion of our houses and fences which our people have cut and brought from the East side of the river, over the river again to the State of Iowa. . . ." <sup>2</sup> The request was denied,<sup>3</sup> but Apostle George A. Smith wrote on October 20, 1848: "Winter Quarters looks pretty much as it did, except the roofs and floors which had been brought to this side of the river."<sup>4</sup> Indians camped in the deserted shells of the houses and ate the potatoes, squash, and Indian corn which still grew, but "Winter Quarters afforded more flies and fleas than anything less than a star-gazer could well estimate."<sup>5</sup> Frederick Piercy visited the ruins in 1853 or 1854 and reported that someone

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<sup>1</sup>Shumway, pp. 124-25, citing Andrew Jensen (compiler), Historical Record (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1882-1890), VIII, 875, and "Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Office), March 8, 1846.

<sup>2</sup>Shumway, p. 123, citing "Journal History," November 19, 1847.

<sup>3</sup>Earl E. Olson, "The Mormons in Council Bluffs and Winter Quarters--Pioneers From 1846 to 1863," a speech to the Pottowattamie County Historical Society in 1964.

<sup>4</sup>Shumway, p. 125, citing "Journal History," October 20, 1848.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

had set fire to the last house remaining.<sup>1</sup> It is reasonable to assume, however, that at least some of the dugout houses were visible for many years.

Although there were no settlers at Winter Quarters for several years after the Mormons departed, there was considerable traffic through the area for both gold seekers and Mormon trains were moving west.<sup>2</sup> George A. Smith received the first ferry license issued by the supervisors of Pottowattamie County on May 22, 1849, to provide a ferry across the Missouri at the old Winter Quarters site known as the Winter Quarters ferry. His license, encompassing an area of one mile above and one mile below the site, was to run for twelve years and the fee was \$25.00 per year. The board, however, reserved the right to fix the rates and the conditions of the license. Rates were as follows:

Carriage Cost, 50 cents.

For all four-wheeled carriages or conveyances, 50 cents.

For all two-wheeled carriages or conveyances, 35 cents.

Every yoke of oxen, 12½ cents.

All loose cattle, 6½ cents each.

Sheep, 2 cents each.

Hogs, 3 cents each.

All horses, mules, or jacks, 10 cents each.

Man and horse, 25 cents.

Footman, 10 cents.

By the early 1850's a number of operators had received

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<sup>1</sup>Frederick Hawkins Piercy, Route From Liverpool to Salt Lake Valley, ed. by Fawn M. Brodie (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 101 (This book was first published in 1855.)

<sup>2</sup>The Frontier Guardian (Kanesville), June 12, 1850.

licenses to operate ferries across the Missouri in the area between Winter Quarters and the mouth of the Platte.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the Florence area had seen a large and varied traffic pass through before it was permanently settled. There had been explorers, fur traders, military men, sight-seers, Mormon settlers and emigrants, gold seekers, and many other emigrants.

As the movement to organize the region west of the Missouri as the Nebraska Territory gained momentum, speculators began to lay plans to organize companies and pre-empt land for townsites.<sup>2</sup> Prominent among them when the Nebraska Territory was opened for settlement on May 30, 1854,<sup>3</sup> was James C. Mitchell and the Winter Quarters Company.

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<sup>1</sup>Council Bluffs Iowa Nonpareil, July 26, 1936, Centennial Edition.

<sup>2</sup>Olson, History of Nebraska, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 83-85.



## II. THE FOUNDING OF FLORENCE

One of the early groups formed to secure a townsite in the newly organized Nebraska Territory was the Nebraska Winter Quarters Company. As the name indicated, the proprietors were interested in establishing a town at the place formerly occupied by the Mormons. Although the Company under this title was short-lived, they accomplished a great deal.

The first meeting of the Winter Quarters Company was held September 9, 1854, at the B. R. Pegram & Co. store in "Council Bluffs City, Iowa."<sup>1</sup> J. B. Stutsman was named temporary chairman and M. H. Clark appointed secretary. James C. Mitchell, Thomas Sebring, B. R. Pegram & Co., George Pegram, J. B. Stutsman, M. H. Clark, A. C. Ford, Ansel Briggs, A. B. Malcolm, Milton Rogers, A. I. Smith, Nathaniel Kilborn, and the firm of Baldwin & Cooper were owners of the claim which was described as a

tract or parcel of land situated lying & being in the Territory of Nebraska adjoining the Old Mormon or Winter Quarters Ferry Landing known and designated as being the Winter Quarter Claim embracing a section of country four miles in length on the Missouri River and extending back from three quarters of a mile to a mile and a half as staked & blazed out by James C. Mitchell in January last.<sup>2</sup>

The ferry privileges and landing "together with sufficient ground for Ferry purposes"<sup>3</sup> was not included but became

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<sup>1</sup>"Articles," NSHS.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

the property of the Ferry Company so long as it provided good service. The water privileges on the creek south of the ferry landing were not included either, but, along with "sufficient ground for mill purposes."<sup>1</sup> became the property of the Mill Company. James C. Mitchell, B. R. Pegram and others who composed this Company retained the privileges so long as they provided the necessary mills within a reasonable time after the Territory was opened for settlement. In the event sufficient service was not provided, the privileges were to become the property of the members of the Nebraska Winter Quarters Company in proportion to their interest in the Winter Quarters Claim.<sup>2</sup>

There were sixteen shares in the Company of which James C. Mitchell, B. R. Pegram & Co., and George Pegram owned two each. Thomas Sebring, J. B. Stutsman, M. H. Clark, A. C. Ford, Ansel Briggs, A. B. Malcolm, Milton Rogers, A. I. Smith, Nathaniel Kilborn, and Baldwin & Cooper each owned one share. "And whereas the said Town of Florence having been surveyed & layed off into Lots on the aforesaid Claim," the proprietors expressed their intent to promote their interest in the town and claim generally by increasing its worth "in every reasonable & proper manner."<sup>3</sup>

The proprietors of the claim then listed twenty-two rules and regulations to further their aims. They first provided for a president, secretary, and treasurer for six month

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

terms who also became the board of directors. Though all were expected to advance the interests of the Company, provision for payments for extra service was made. Lot sales were subject to approval of the board of directors and anyone disposing of his interest first had to offer it to the Company for purchase. All expenses and profits were to be shared proportionately by the members. Regular meetings were to be held on the first Saturday of each month; the location and time were to be decided later. Votes were to be based on shares and a majority of the share-holders constituted a quorum. The indenture also provided for special meetings, amendment of the rules by the majority, absentee voting, elections by ballot, selling of member's shares for delinquent payments, a two-thirds vote for approving expenses, a secret record of proceedings, and written approval of expenditures by the secretary and the president. Finally, the Company was called the Nebraska Winter Quarters Company.<sup>1</sup>

Permanent officers elected were J. B. Stutsman, president, James C. Mitchell, secretary, and B. R. Pegram, treasurer. The enthusiasm of the group was apparent for they adjourned after their first meeting "to meet again at this place this evening at 7:00 P.M."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes, 1854-1860, Nebraska Winter Quarters Company and Florence Land Company, Box 1, MSS205, NSHS. Hereinafter referred to as Minutes.

The first order of business at the evening meeting was to arrange for the officers to go to Winter Quarters "and take an inventory of the tools and other loose property there belonging to the Company and also to examine as to what improvements & expenditures (if any) . . . were necessary." A report was to be presented at the next meeting.<sup>1</sup>

At the September 13, 1854, meeting the inventory was reported as follows:

|                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Grain Shovel       | About 50 spikes      |
| 2 Dirt Shovels       | 1 Iron Square        |
| 1 Long handle Shovel | 1 Try Square         |
| 2 Spades             | Brace & Bitts        |
| 1 Crop Cut Saw       | 2 Brush Scythes      |
| 2 Hand Saws          | 1 Grass Scythe       |
| 1 Broad Axe          | 1 Whitewash brush    |
| 6 Choping Axe        | 2 Masons Trowels     |
| 2 Indian Axe         | 1 Plasterers Trowels |
| 2 Hand Axe           | 1 Pick               |
| 1 Adse               | 1 Mattock            |
| 1 Hammer             | 2 2 inch augers      |
| 2 Lath Hatchets      | 1 3/4 inch auger     |
| 2 Brows              | 1 1/2 inch auger     |
| 6 Gimblets           | 2 cooking stoves     |
| 21 Pad Locks         | 1 Drawing knife      |
| 3 Planes             | 2 Caul King Irons    |
| 1 Pair Compasses     | 21 Chisils           |
| 1 Lumber Wagon       | 21 Iron Weges        |

It was deemed necessary, also, to finish one partially constructed house, finish a warehouse, place the ferryboat in operating condition, and build a "tavern house to cost about six hundred dollars."<sup>3</sup>

In addition the members authorized the board of directors to select one hundred town lots to be advertised first at

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

private sale and then those remaining unsold were to be offered at public sale. The lots were to be selected at the discretion of the board of directors. In keeping with the organization of a new company, Mitchell, the secretary, was authorized to purchase books, stationery, and some blank quit claim deeds.<sup>1</sup>

A number of other items were considered at this time. Mitchell moved "that the Old Mormon Cemetary be fenced in with a good board fence & otherwise improved and butified and that the president be instructed to let the contract for the delivery of the Posts therefore."<sup>2</sup> The board of directors was empowered to establish or have established a brickyard if they felt it "advisable" and also to provide for the establishment of a newspaper "if it can be had on reasonable terms." The secretary was advised "to secure the half of the Rock & Timber Claim belonging to D. B. Hawley and the board of directors employ such hands to work thereon as they think proper."<sup>3</sup>

As authorized, the board of directors immediately advertised the one hundred lots in the Omaha Arrow in a glowing advertisement. The "choice" lots were located on the town site which was "a beautiful bluff bench immediately on the river." According to the advertisement there were "fine

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. The original language is used in quotations.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

streams," "excellent mill privileges," "extensive limestone quarries," and a "ROCK BOTTOM!!," on the river from one shore to the other.<sup>1</sup> Alden & Howe, real estate agents at Florence, lost no time in advertising their availability to other newcomers in the area.<sup>2</sup>

By the time the members met again on September 19, 1854, the board of directors had already drafted a plan for the inn and submitted it to a local builder, L. Mallis, for an estimate. Mallis was to perform the carpenter and joiner work, and "furnish all the material therefor to the turning of the key for the sum of One Thousand and Seventy-five dollars." The shareholders quickly approved the awarding of the contract to Mallis. Next, each share in the company was assessed \$20.00 to meet accruing expenses. Five was to be paid immediately; the remainder when called for by the treasurer.<sup>3</sup>

At the November meeting the first transfers recorded in the minutes were made, though many were to follow. J. B. Stutsman sold one-half of his share to Augustine and Benjamin Winchester but retained the voting rights. William Clancy presented a bill of sale from M. H. Clark for one-half of his sixteenth part of the Winter Quarters Company and one twentieth

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<sup>1</sup>Omaha Arrow, September 22, and 29, and October 6, and 13, 1854.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., October 13, and 20, November 3, and December 29, 1854.

<sup>3</sup>Minutes.

part of the Winter Quarters Ferry for \$1000.00. Clancy was to manage both interests dividing the profits equally. At the same time, Clark transferred to Thomas Henshall one-half of one share and reserved to O. N. Tyson or himself "six average village lots." Other sales included one share selling for \$1000.00 and another one-half share for \$350.00. The latter sale included the wording "my interest in the town site of Florence." This was the first time the name Florence was recorded in the minutes though it had been used in the indenture.<sup>1</sup>

The eager stockholders also handled various other business items. The directors reported that they had approved a second story on part of the tavern under construction at an additional cost of approximately \$200.00. A motion to purchase "a half share of the Company stock and tender it to Elder John Taylor one of the twelve Apostols of the Mormon Church for the purpose of securing his influence in favour of Florence," was passed unanimously. The members also directed the president to purchase "a horse-power for a sawmill & let Mssrs Mace & Folsom have it to attach to a Mill to be erected by them at or near Florence and to be p[ai]d for by them in lumber." The secretary was instructed to select ninety-six lots to be divided by lot among the members at the next meeting.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Two days later the members met again. At this time, the number of shares were increased to thirty-two and owners of one-half shares were authorized a full vote. After they drew for lots, President Stutsman announced that James C. Mitchell should pay \$50.00 for Lot One Hundred and Four which contained four acres. Mitchell was already building a house on the property and the money was to be paid from dividends.<sup>1</sup>

After the first flurry of activity, a series of uneventful meetings followed including one with no quorum. On January 12, 1855, several claims were allowed and Benjamin Winchester presented a bill for lithographing the Florence plot for \$77.75. The members expressed their thanks to him "for the able manner in which said lithograph was got up." An account of \$20.30 was allowed Alden & Howe for use of the ferry.<sup>2</sup>

The members instructed President Stutsman to do a number of things. He was to have the company claim lying outside the townsite surveyed into 320 acre lots. In what seemed their most ambitious proposal to date, he was to "contract for the building of a good comfortable house on each lot." He was also directed to contract for "getting out a quantity of Rock and chopping not less than one hundred or more than 300 cords wood."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



In January of 1855, James C. Mitchell signed a verification attesting to certain facts about Florence and the Winter Quarters Company. He wrote that the town plot of Florence comprised between eleven and twelve hundred acres of land and that the claims outside the town plot approximated three thousand acres. The latter claims contained "lime stone Rock," and, Mitchell wrote, ". . . there is scarcely a doubt of there being coal in large quantities. . . . in some places [it] can be picked up by the bucket-full. . . ." He also attested to the fact that there was "a good and commodious Hotel and a Large stable in progress of erection . . . besides several Log Houses . . . and several Houses Frame & Log on the different claims belonging to the Company."<sup>1</sup>

At a later meeting in March, things began to be rather mundane. Several accounts were approved, a \$40.00 assessment on each share was made and President Stutsman, apparently a very responsible individual, was empowered to contract for a bridge over Mill Creek.<sup>2</sup>

When the stockholders met on April 11, it was recorded that A. I. Smith had sold one-half interest in one share to Henry M. Pomeroy and one-half interest in one share to Clinton Backus for \$250.00. It was then resolved that the

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<sup>1</sup>James C. Mitchell verification, Box 1, MSS205, NSHS.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes.

Nebraska Winter Quarters Company be dissolved and all the property and business of that Company be transferred into the hands of the Florence Land Company. The Company adjourned sine die.

Stockholders as of the date of transfer were:

|                     |               |                      |    |
|---------------------|---------------|----------------------|----|
| J. B. Stutsman      | 2 Shares      | James C. Mitchell    | 21 |
| B. R. Pegram        | 1             | N. Kilborn           | 2  |
| C. Voorhis          | 1             | A. J. Smith          | 1  |
| John A. Klein       | 1             | M. Rogers            | 2  |
| Clinton Backus      | $\frac{1}{2}$ | Thomas Henshall      | 1  |
| Henry M. Pomeroy    | $\frac{1}{2}$ | William Clancy       | 1  |
| Henry Springer      | 1             | Hugh J. Downey       | 21 |
| Thomas Sebring      | 1             | George Pegram        | 2  |
| Benjamin Winchester | $\frac{1}{2}$ | Estate of S. T. Cary | 1  |
| A. B. Malcolm       | 2             | Ansell Briggs        | 2  |
| Augustine           | $\frac{1}{2}$ | W. I. Cooper         | 1  |

The above named stockholders were "entitled to a number of shares in the Florence Land Company in proportion to their interest in the Nebraska Winter Quarters Company as above set forth." This was signed April 11, 1855, by James C. Mitchell, ex-secretary, and J. B. Stutsman, ex-president, of the Nebraska Winter Quarters Company, and as the new secretary and the new president of the Florence Land Company.<sup>2</sup>

In this manner, the Nebraska Winter Quarters Company transferred its holdings to the Florence Land Company. Much had been accomplished, but many challenges remained.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

### III. THE FLORENCE LAND COMPANY

Under the Articles of Incorporation of the Florence Land Company which were approved March 15, 1855, by the First Territorial Legislature, James C. Mitchell, A. B. Malcolm, B. R. Pegram, J. B. Stutsman, A. J. Smith, and their associates, successors, heirs and assigns were the incorporators. Capital stock consisted of \$64,000 divided into \$100.00 shares. The Articles adhered strictly to form and provided for annual election of officers on the first Saturday in April. The board of directors were required to hold meetings in Florence, on the first Saturday of January, April, July, and October, though other meetings might be held at any time. Stockholders were to meet annually on the first Saturday in April, and the Articles stipulated that one person could not cast more than one-fifth of the total vote.<sup>1</sup>

The first meeting of the new organization was held on April 7, 1855. C. Voorhis, Milton Rogers, J. B. Stutsman, A. B. Malcolm and James C. Mitchell were unanimously elected to the board of directors. Mitchell became secretary and B. R. Pegram treasurer of the company also by a unanimous vote. And fittingly, J. B. Stutsman was unanimously elected president by the board of directors.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Articles of Incorporation, Florence Land Company, 1855," Box 1, MSS205, NSHS.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes, NSHS.

At a board of directors meeting on April 14, 1855, arrangements were made to secure stock certificates. A four per cent assessment was levied against the capital stock, one per cent to be paid May 1, one per cent May 15, and one per cent June 1, and on June 15. Mitchell was to notify stockholders of the assessment. He was also directed to contract for building a hotel.<sup>1</sup>

When the stockholders met again on May 25, 1855, by-laws of the new company were adopted. These bylaws authorized the board of directors to make assessments on capital stock for debts and expenses, all shares of stock with unpaid assessments were to be forfeited to the company unless paid by April 1, and future assessments had to be paid in fifteen days or stock could be forfeited at the discretion of the board of directors. The treasurer was obliged to give notice of assessment in three days, the board was empowered to sell lots and other property, and the secretary was to be notified of stock transfers and register them or they would not be recognized.<sup>2</sup>

Other business transacted included instructing Stutsman and Mitchell to make a settlement with D. B. Hawley. Mitchell was to arrange for having the charter and bylaws published in pamphlet form and copies sent to each stockholder. Finally, the treasurer was directed to collect, "by suit if necessary all debts due the company."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

At the August meeting a number of items were considered. A five per cent assessment on the capital stock was levied, payable before September 1. Secretary Mitchell was directed to select and advertise for sale on October 1, one hundred lots. The advertisements were to appear in the Nebraskian, Bugler, Chronotype, St. Louis Republican, Chicago Times, and the Davenport papers.<sup>1</sup>

In accordance with these directions the advertisement which appeared in newspapers throughout the area proclaimed "Great Sale of Lots in FLORENCE Nebraska Territory." It announced that one hundred lots would be offered for sale at 11:00 A.M., on October 1, at Florence, and the sale would continue "from day to day" until all the lots were sold. One-half of the payment had to be in cash at the time of the sale and the balance in four months with approved security. Florence, it continued, was "the surveyed route of the Mississippi & Missouri Railroad." The site was described as one of the most beautiful in Nebraska, "being located on a beautiful bench some sixty feet above high water mark, with a gently rising hill in the background." They were now constructing "Flouring Mills, and a Saw Mill, which will be completed and in operation by the fifteenth of next month."<sup>2</sup>

Another paragraph of the advertisements stressed the eight thousand acres of hard-wood timber north of the town.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. <sup>2</sup>Council Bluffs Chronotype, August 22, 1855.

There was also "fine large growth Cottonwood" in the vicinity and several limestone quarries, two of which were being worked. There was also gravel, sand, marl, and clay. "Brick making . . . [was] being carried on quite extensively."<sup>1</sup>

On the South & West, adjoining the TownSite, there . . . [was] over four hundred acres of Prairie Broke and Fenced, & the most of it under cultivation. The RIVER at this point . . . [was] only about 750 feet wide, perfectly clear of snags, sand-bars, or any other obstructions with Rock Bound shores, and ROCK BOTTOM!! all the way across, at a depth (in an ordinary stage of the River) of from two to ten feet--in low water the rock . . . [was] bare a considerable distance from the shores, rendering it<sub>2</sub> but a small affair to build a BRIDGE at this point. . . .

The next few paragraphs of the extensive advertisement explained the location of the new town in relation to the Platte and Elk Horn Rivers, said the town had the "best" ferry crossing on the Missouri, and had "good, permanent steamboat landings on both shores, the best perhaps, on the Missouri River." "STONE COAL" was discovered north of Florence which was expected to yield large deposits.<sup>3</sup>

Summing up all the advantages of the town and adding that there was "an easy grade up Mill Creek," "there [was] scarcely a doubt but that this will be the crossing of the Great Pacific Railroad, should it cross north of the Platte River." In conclusion the proprietors praised their "new & commodious hotel." "P. C. Chapman and his estimable lady were prepared to entertain . . . [guests] comfortably, & make their stay in Florence pass off pleasantly. The advertisement

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

was signed by James C. Mitchell, Secretary of the Florence Land Company.<sup>1</sup>

Evidently the sale was not too successful, for the treasurer reported in October that there was \$240.94 on hand. Further, the assessments previously levied had not all been paid for Mitchell was directed to give delinquent stockholders a three-day notice of assessments due and, if not paid by November 15, stock was to be forfeited. In addition, still another two per cent assessment payable by December 1, was made. Stockholders were to be notified to pay the money to Mitchell.<sup>2</sup>

In April of 1856, after a long lapse between stockholders meetings, new officers of the Florence Land Company were elected. H. M. Pomeroy was the new treasurer while Mitchell retained the office of secretary. The fact that accounts were still delinquent--this time notice was to be given within ten days--and the long period between meetings seemed to indicate a declining interest in the Company. Still another two and one-half per cent assessment was made which was due June 1. Stock was to be forfeited if the payment was not paid on time.<sup>3</sup>

When the board met on April 5, after the stockholders meeting, A. B. Malcolm, P. C. Chapman, and James Mitchell were the only ones present. The minutes indicated that Thomas Officer had acquired one thirty-second part of all land

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

claimed by the Florence Land Company. The copy of this transfer was witnessed by G. M. Dodge, possibly the same man who became the prominent railroad engineer. No price was indicated on this sale, but similar plots had been selling for from \$400.00 to \$500.00.<sup>1</sup>

After another long lapse the stockholders met again on November 10. At this time a new spirit seemed to prevail. Cook, Sargent & Parker acquired eighty shares of stock from H. Downey. James M. Parker, Thomas H. Benton, Jr., and William Young Brown "were appointed a committee to audit the reports of the treasurer and secretary" and report at the next meeting. On November 25, Parker, Mitchell, and Brown were "appointed a committee to examine the map & select such lots as . . . [they] deem[ed] proper to reserve & arrange the remainder for division." Parker represented his firm regularly from that point on.<sup>2</sup>

The stockholders also "sanctioned" the purchase of a printing press, "materials, fixtures, &c" for \$1500.00 by Mitchell. He proposed to operate the press at his own expense until it was sold to another operator. He was to pay for the ink and paper, but had use of the brick building belonging to the Company free of charge.<sup>3</sup>

On December 16, 1856, the lot committee's report and division proposal was accepted as recommended. The P. C. Chapman account was credited with \$223.79 for loss sustained

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



in his operation of the ferryboat from September 16, to December 3, 1856. The secretary was allowed \$2500.00 for the twenty shares presented to the Mormon, John Taylor, for the benefit of the Company, and William Young Brown moved that Mitchell be allowed \$900.00 for his services as secretary from April 1, 1856, to January 1, 1857. Stutsman, Parker, Officer, and Mitchell were appointed a committee "to confer with . . . D. B. Hawley relative to dividing the lands held in connection with him with power to make such division as . . . would be mutually agreed upon." The board of directors were instructed to dispose of reserved lots "as they may deem most beneficial to the interests of the Company," while Malcolm and Parker were to examine the financial status of the Company and report at their earliest convenience.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, at an afternoon meeting the same day the following financial statement was presented:

|   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| Amt of Cash in the hands of the Sec. as per Statement | \$4897.11                |
| Amt of Cash in the hands of Cook Sargent & Parker     | 687.48                   |
| Amt of Notes in the hands of Cook Sargent & Parker    | 2826.67                  |
| Amt of Notes &c in the hands of the sec.              | <u>4248.56</u>           |
|   | \$12,659.82 <sup>2</sup> |

The secretary was instructed to publish a statement of financial affairs, while Stutsman, Parker, and Mitchell were then made a committee to control and manage the funds of the company and make such disposition thereof "as they may deem most

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

beneficial to the stockholders." Mitchell, similarly, was authorized and instructed "to make such disposition of the Lots remaining in the hands of the Company as he . . .

[might] deem for the best interest of the stockholders."<sup>1</sup>

At a meeting on January 10, 1857, the board of directors instructed the president and secretary to make out and

sign a deed of gift to the public of the Streets Alleys Squares & Levees in the City of Florence as marked & designated on the new Lithograph Plat of said City & to cause the same together with said Plat to be recorded in the office of the Register of Deeds in Douglas County, Nebraska Territory.<sup>2</sup>

The plat was surveyed by J. H. Wagner and drawn by William Miller.<sup>3</sup>

When the Company elected new officers at the April meeting, Mitchell received 324 votes for secretary, Parker 410 for treasurer, and Malcolm 409 for director. It was clear that Mitchell's popularity was declining. The board of directors elected P. C. Chapman, president.<sup>4</sup>

Several of the Company's projects required action over a period of months. A committee appointed in April to "select suitable grounds for a cemetery," was still dallying with the project in June when they were instructed to select two acres for a "public burying" and report at the next meeting. A committee appointed early in April to study "the subject of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Deed Record Book "C", p. 461, Douglas County Court House.

<sup>4</sup>Minutes.

taxes," humorously reported later in the month "in favor of paying the same, which said report was on motion adopted."<sup>1</sup>

The Company's most expensive project was undertaken in April when it was "resolved to erect a hotel in the city of Florence this season to cost twenty thousand dollars." Naturally another committee was appointed to select a "suitable place" and get a "plan with specifications" to be presented at the next meeting. When they met again the hotel committee reported that they could not agree on a site or a plan so a vote determined that the majority preferred Block Number 234 which was declared the site. Notice was to be given to builders to prepare "plans & Specifications" to be presented to stockholders at the next meeting. Characteristically optimistic, the secretary was to make arrangements to get title to Block Number 234.<sup>2</sup>

In May the stockholders adopted a plan for a hotel building submitted by Forgy & Driver with the proviso that the building would not exceed \$30,000.00 in cost and the plans were subject to minor alterations by the building committee. The committee planned to advertise for bids to be opened at the next meeting. Apparently there was a problem with the hotel bids, for the board of directors were instructed in June "to cause a plan and specifications to be gotten up for a hotel building to cost not to exceed \$30,000.00 and as near as practicable on the plan gotten up by Messrs. Forgy &

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Driver . . . & let the contract for erecting the same at their earliest convenience."<sup>1</sup>

When they met later in June they again accepted the Forgy & Driver plan. Bids were to be opened at 2:00 P.M. the following Thursday and the contract let to the "lowest & best bidder." In conjunction with the building, the firm of Spring and Hunter was allowed \$32.00 as a drafting fee.<sup>2</sup>

Hotel bids were opened at the board of directors meeting on July 2. Charles Cunningham bid \$30,500.00, Forgy & Driver bid \$30,500.00, and Hopson and Harrison bid \$29,900.00. The contract was awarded to Hopson and Harrison provided that they furnished security. On August 19, however, after all their efforts, the hotel building was postponed "until further action of the Company." A committee was appointed at that time to dispose of land "in such parcels as they . . . might deem proper and at a price not less than . . . might be placed on them by the secretary."<sup>3</sup>

While the plans for the hotel had been progressing, other business had not been neglected. Mitchell was authorized to sell the hotel and stable belonging to the Company for a "sum not less than ten thousand dollars, half cash & the balance within a year to be secured by deed of trust on the property." Disposition of the hotel was not concluded until February of 1858 when the "Willet House" was rented to one F. Kenedy. The house, stable, and ten acres of land

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

belonging to the Company was rented to Kenedy for one year from June 1, at \$600.00 per year, and the lease was not transferable except by written consent of the Company. The president was instructed to make the following improvements:

A Portch in front on State Street the whole width of the front, with floor and railing overhead and a portch on Main Street whole length of Dining Room & Kitchen with roof & a light balustrade, east wing to be raised to correspond with the West, Lots fenced with good board fence & the whole house & stable to be put in good order.

He was also to obtain possession of Willet House and the stable "in the expedition of the present occupants term"<sup>1</sup>

The Company had been re-examining their financial status since June, and in July decided to borrow \$10,000.00 "to be used for the benefit of the Company." William Young Brown and George Sinclair were authorized to do the borrowing. A minor dispute arose evidently, because Brown offered to resign from the committee on September 5. The problem was quickly resolved and he and Sinclair were "unanimously requested to continue their services until all the lands are entered." Brown was also to take charge of pre-emption cases at "Washington City" in which the Company had an interest.<sup>2</sup>

While other meetings were planned there was no record of any meeting until February 3, 1858. It was then that the Willet House had been rented. Other business included authorizing a bonus of one dollar per share to be paid to James Mitchell

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

as a bonus for publishing the Daily Florence Courier during the year 1858.<sup>1</sup> Mitchell had provided printing for the Company free of charge. John A. Hall was appointed superintendent of the timber lands belonging to the Company and was instructed to use due diligence in preventing the cutting of timber on the lands for any other purpose than to be used in Florence and its immediate vicinity. Reasonable compensation was to be paid to Hall.<sup>2</sup>

For the first time Mitchell was not in attendance at a meeting when the stockholders met on April 3, 1858. When officers were elected, Mitchell tied with two others for last place of eight persons receiving votes and so was not elected. George Sinclair was elected secretary in his stead and James M. Parker became treasurer. At the board of directors meeting the same day, A. B. Malcolm was elected president. Mitchell, who had long been the driving force within the Company, was obviously out of favor. The new secretary was directed to contact Mitchell and inform him that the new board of directors was organized and that they were "ready to have a settlement with him and receive any recommendations he might wish to make in regard to the business of the Company." Mitchell indicated he had no comments or settlement to make with the directors "untill after a settlement had been made by the Company with him."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hereinafter cited in text and in footnotes as Courier.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Mitchell attended the May 6, meeting--the last he attended for many months. At that time he offered a resolution stating that he had requested and was "desirous of having his interest in the lands, Lots, monies & other property belonging to the Company petitioned off & set apart to him so as to enable him to retire from the Company. . . ." A committee was appointed to negotiate a settlement with him.<sup>1</sup>

At this meeting the directors felt it necessary to secure the services of an attorney to handle a claim against Butter and Brewster, and Brown presented a bill for five shares of stock and other expenses "incurred while entering the land last fall," of \$993.30. He was given a Company note for \$90.00.<sup>2</sup>

An incomplete record of some special order bills paid by the Company, starting in August, 1855, revealed some of the expenditures involved in preparing an area for settlement. R. W. Steele was paid \$30.00 on account, for building a bridge across Mill Creek. I. B. Hawley received \$20.00 on account, for building houses, Gopase & Stogdon \$220.00 for breaking prairie, Isaac Cuppy \$28.00 for boarding ditches, and Thomas David \$116.00 for lumber he furnished to Steele. In September, Isaac Cuppy was paid \$154.35, John Gopase \$22.50, Henry Runnels \$50.00, and Stogdon & Gopase \$14.00 for breaking prairie. Cuppy also received \$29.00 for boarding ditches and John Killen

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

\$67.98 for lumber. Adam Bigler (Biglen) was paid \$20.00 for "putting up a house body," Forgy & Howard \$50.00 for work on the bridge, Nelson Amsburg \$50.00 and then another \$60.00 for making shingles, and John Hogan \$50.00 for making a ditch.<sup>1</sup>

In October of 1855, R. W. Steel was paid \$34.69, the balance of his bill for building the bridge, Henry Runnels again broke prairie, this time for \$99.85, Willian Loony made ditches for \$50.00 and C. Voorhis, treasurer for the steam ferryboat, Nebraska, was paid \$687.85 for "borrowed money." The record ended in February of 1856 when \$36.50 was paid to Howard & Forgy for work done on a public house. Henry Runnels was paid \$23.00 for hauling brick and \$29.00 for teaming, and Folsom received \$55.00, E. Johnson \$46.60, and Sherman & Strickland \$20.00 for printing.<sup>2</sup>

In another attempt to get capital, James Parker at the August 31, 1855, meeting was authorized to sell eighty-six shares of Company stock at a price not less than \$100.00 per share. He was also authorized to borrow at a rate not to exceed twenty per cent, for a period not to exceed two years, "an additional amount which with the proceeds of the sale of said shares of stock shall not exceed Eighteen Thousand (\$18,000.00) dollars." He was "empowered to pledge or mortgage all the real estate and other property . . . and . . . to facilitate the general objects of this trust he . . . [was]

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<sup>1</sup>Florence Land Company Stock and Order Register, 1855-1860, Box 1, MSS205, NSHS. These entries are in the last part of the Register.



authorized to visit the principal eastern cities of our country."<sup>1</sup>

The directors were also authorized to take for a balance of \$100.00, plus interest, on a note of Pomeroy & Smith, Pomeroy's interest in the Dudley & Pomeroy claim and "that portion of his own claim both laying adjoining the town site so far as the realty in said claim now rests in the Company." They also determined to settle the previously mentioned Butter and Brewster claim against whom they held a real estate mortgage. In September the authorization for the loan was increased to \$20,000.00.<sup>2</sup>

Another meeting was not held until January 11, 1859, at which time the directors instructed the secretary to notify all stockholders that at the next annual meeting on the first Saturday in April, ". . . [it would] be necessary to make a heavy assessment in order to liquidate the outstanding indebtedness of the Company."<sup>3</sup>

The April annual meeting was postponed three different times due to lack of a quorum. "Weather and bad roads" were the recorded explanation for the lack of attendance. On April 19, the stockholders elected William Young Brown, secretary, and James M. Parker, treasurer.<sup>4</sup>

The last meeting of the board of directors of the Florence Land Company at which much business was transacted was on June 9, 1859, and the business was mainly concerned

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

with the presentation of bills. Young was allowed \$250.00 attorney fees for services on claims in Washington, D.C., and Omaha. Sinclair reduced claims for services from \$200.00 to \$186.27, and Sinclair and Veeder (Veeden) lowered interest charges on one debt for money advanced from five per cent to three per cent per month. James Parker presented a bill for money advanced for \$1302.50 which was allowed as was E. P. Brewster's claim for \$207.00 for attorney's fees.<sup>1</sup>

James C. Mitchell was present when the Company met for the last time on April 7, 1860, and was elected to the board of directors. Parker received all of the votes cast for secretary, treasurer, and director. The last board of director's meeting was also held on April 7, and the last minutes record that A. B. Malcolm was again elected president.<sup>2</sup>

Though the Florence Land Company held no more official meetings, their activity as a Company had not ceased. On October 6, 1859, Ebenezer Cook, George P. Sargent, and James M. Parker, Plaintiffs, doing business under the name of Cook, Sargent & Parker, had sued the Florence Land Company for \$2000.00, plus interest at five per cent per month from October 15, 1857, upon a promissory note.<sup>3</sup> Eventually an execution notice was levied against 250 individual lots plus all the lots contained in two blocks, and 150 out-lots, plus

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>App. Doc. "B", No. 565, in the District Court of Douglas County, Nebraska.

all the out-lots in six other blocks; in addition, against 120-220 acres, "more or less," in the county. This land was to be sold at public auction on December 27, 1960, from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. at the Pioneer Block in Omaha, Douglas County. The notice was signed by John C. Hileman, Sheriff, on November 21, 1860.<sup>1</sup>

At the sale, Parker made the highest bid for the property and received a Sheriff's deed for it.<sup>2</sup> He had previously acquired other land from the Florence Land Company in the same manner on July 20, 1860.<sup>3</sup> In effect, then, James M. Parker became the owner of most of the remaining lands of the Florence Land Company.

Though the Florence Land Company met an untimely end, they had established a community which still exists today. Before their demise they had seen a burgeoning frontier community develop before their eyes.

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<sup>1</sup>Record Book of C. S. & P., Box 2, MSS205, NSHS. The book has the newspaper notice inserted.

<sup>2</sup>Deed Record Book "N", p. 372, Douglas County Court House.

<sup>3</sup>Deed Record Book "N", p. 478, Douglas County Court House.

#### IV. THE CITY OF FLORENCE

The village of Florence was incorporated by act of the Territorial Legislature on March 15, 1855. This provided a stimulus to the growth of the frontier community and for the next few years it developed rapidly. The city charter precisely defined its organization in thirty-one sections.<sup>1</sup>

The city was to be governed by a council consisting of a mayor and four aldermen. Any legal voter of the Territory who had been a city resident for ten days preceding an election was eligible to vote and to hold any elective office. Electors were to meet the first Monday in September, 1855, to select three judges and two clerks who were to preside at an election for officers. The first election was to be held the first Monday in October. At that time a mayor, four aldermen, recorder, treasurer, assessor and marshal were to be elected to serve until the next election in April of 1856.<sup>2</sup>

Other sections made provision for officials taking the oath of office and detailed the duties of each office. Meetings of the council were to be public "except on particular occasions when a majority shall deem that the public

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<sup>1</sup>"The Original Charter, Ordinances and By-Laws of the City of Florence, Nebraska," Compiled and Published by the Authority of the Mayor and City Council (Blair, Neb: Courier Publishing Co., 1890), pp. 3-8.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

good requires secrecy for a time. . . ." Fire companies were to be established and sentences and fines proscribed for violations of city ordinances. Provision was made for licensing certain types of businesses, and the council was authorized "to levy and collect taxes not exceeding one-half of one per cent, on all taxable property within the city, according to the laws of the Territory."<sup>1</sup>

Florence developed rapidly in the years 1856 and 1857 due to the resourcefulness and aggressiveness of James C. Mitchell and his Company. By 1858, it was a thriving little town serviced by a number of businesses. The Courier published by Mitchell and edited by Richard H. See, contained many advertisements of Florence business concerns soliciting patronage.<sup>2</sup>

That the town was building rapidly was attested to by the availability of construction material and labor. Hopson & Harrison carpenters and builders, promised service with "promptness and despatch," at their shop on the corner of Fifth and Willit.<sup>3</sup> Philander Hopson and Henry A. Harrison offered to provide plans and specifications on short notice, while Forgy & Driver, builders and architects, were prepared to serve with "neatness and despatch," and "on as reasonable terms as can be purchased anywhere."<sup>4</sup> They also had on hand

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Courier, January 13, 1858.

<sup>3</sup>See illustration on Page 37 for current street names.

<sup>4</sup>Courier, January 13, 1858.

STATE OF NEBRASKA, ss.  
County of Douglas.

ORDINANCE NO. 9887.

An Ordinance amending and changing the names of certain streets in the City of Omaha, formerly in Florence which was annexed under the provisions of Ordinance No. 2778, and repealing any and all other ordinances in conflict herewith.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF OMAHA:

Section 1. That the names of the following streets as now existing in the City of Omaha, formerly in Florence which was annexed under the provisions of Ordinance No. 2778, and the same are hereby changed and named as follows:

| Name of street as now existing. | Changed to.           |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Everport Street                 | McKinley Street       |
| Chelle Street                   | Hunt Street           |
| Johnson Street                  | Howell Street         |
| Johnson Street                  | Tucker Street         |
| Johnson Street                  | Morman Street         |
| Johnson Street                  | Grebe Street          |
| Johnson Street                  | Young Street          |
| Johnson Street                  | Reynolds Street       |
| Johnson Street                  | King Street           |
| Washington Street               | Center Avenue         |
| Johnson Street                  | Peter Street          |
| Johnson Street                  | Weber Street          |
| Johnson Street                  | Paul Street           |
| Johnson Street                  | Twenty-third Street   |
| Johnson Street                  | Twenty-fourth Street  |
| Johnson Street                  | Twenty-fifth Street   |
| Johnson Street                  | Twenty-sixth Street   |
| Johnson Street                  | Twenty-seventh Street |
| Johnson Street                  | Twenty-eighth Street  |
| Johnson Street                  | Twenty-ninth Street   |
| Johnson Street                  | Thirtieth Street      |
| Johnson Street                  | Thirty-first Street   |
| Johnson Street                  | Thirty-second Street  |
| Johnson Street                  | Thirty-third Street   |
| Johnson Street                  | Thirty-fourth Street  |
| Johnson Street                  | Thirty-fifth Street   |
| Johnson Street                  | Thirty-sixth Street   |
| Johnson Street                  | Thirty-seventh Street |
| Johnson Street                  | Thirty-eighth Street  |
| Johnson Street                  | Thirty-ninth Street   |
| Johnson Street                  | Fortieth Street       |
| Johnson Street                  | Forty-first Street    |

Section 2. That this ordinance shall not be deemed as affecting proceedings relating to public improvements either pending or completed on any of the above mentioned streets.

Section 3. That all other ordinances or resolutions in conflict with the provisions of this ordinance be, and the same are hereby repealed.

Section 4. That this ordinance shall take effect on the first day after fifteen days after its passage.

WITNESSED July 18th, 1917.  
JAMES A. DAHLMAN,  
Mayor and President of City Council.  
T. J. O'CONNOR,  
City Clerk.

Mary Craft being duly sworn, on oath says she is advertising clerk of the Omaha Evening World-Herald, a daily newspaper published in the City of Omaha, County of Douglas, consecutively for more than ten years past, and having had during all of said period and having now more than 3,000 actual bona fide subscribers in the City of Omaha.

That the printed notices hereto attached were published in said newspaper Tue. Evl July 24th 1917.

The said Newspaper was, during that time, in general circulation in the County of Douglas, and State of Nebraska.

(Signed) Mary Craft  
this 25th day of July 1917  
Notary Public.

all kinds of lumber "during the season." Another lumber dealer offered 8,000 feet of clear flooring for \$70.00; 14,000 feet of clear pine siding dressed at \$55.00; 2,000 feet clear boards dressed at \$75.00; 10,000 pine shingles at \$9.00, and 50,000 lath at \$9.50 in his advertisement dated July, 1857.<sup>1</sup>

Two mills also sought patronage. The Fort Calhoun sawmill had recently (December 1856) improved their machinery and informed the public that it would fill orders fast and on reasonable terms. They also kept sawed lumber on hand for sale. Another mill, Russells Steam Mill "in the timber three miles above Florence," was in full operation by December of 1856, and cut from three to five thousand feet per day. The proprietors would supply either soft or hardwood lumber "of the best quality."<sup>2</sup>

Other stores provided goods or services related to construction. A shop on the corner of Bluff and Clay Streets was available for saw filing while M. D. Rapp painted houses and signs and also did glazing and paper hanging. Horace May and Nahum Harwood, civil engineers and land surveyors, formed the firm May & Harwood and operated out of Florence, N.T. and Crescent, Iowa. An architect, carpenter or house finisher, S. D. Kasserman, was located on the corner of Clay and Fourth Street. He would design or build homes of good material and low prices "in any shape or style desired."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Courier

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Other home construction supplies included lightning rods which could be purchased from J. F. Scott who was located at the Florence Hotel. R. D. Amy & Co., manufacturers and dealers in stoves, tin, sheet iron, and copperware, offered the citizens of Florence and "Northern Nebraska generally the most complete assortment of Stoves and Tin Ware to be found in the Territory." They emphasized the qualities of the Charter Oak Cooking Stove which they guaranteed "to do more work, with less fuel, than any other stove . . . [then] in use." They also did roofing, guttering and jobbing.<sup>1</sup>

Provisions for travelers were available and J. F. Pugsley, the proprietor of the Davenport House located on State Street near the Steamboat landing indicated he was trying to make it the best hotel in Nebraska. He professed to provide excellent food and the newly furnished rooms offered a lovely view of the river. Also available to travelers at the ferry landing was the Crystal Spring House which was termed a "refreshment Saloon." In addition to the bar, James Bradshaw provided oysters, sardines, pigs feet, tripe, pies, and other edibles for weary travelers.<sup>2</sup>

Competitors at the Willit (Willet) House at the corner of Main & State Street, Thomas McGavran and Josiah Gaston, were a bit reserved in their appeal, stating that "travelers and others will be accomodated with all the convenience and attention that can be procured in newly settled countries."

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



Their stable, however, was one of the best in the territory, employing a "No. 1 Hostler" and stated "every effort will be made to keep the stable well supplied with provender."<sup>1</sup>

Transportation both by ferry and on land appeared to be very good. The Platte River Ferry Company had a low-rate ferry in operation at the mouth of the Platte River with "experienced and careful men in attendance at all times." A steam ferryboat, the Nebraska No. 2, captained by James Bradshaw was then operating continuously from "sun rise until dark" between Florence and the Iowa shore. The Nebraska had been thoroughly reconditioned and refitted and was operated by a well-trained crew. Since the river was only approximately 700 feet wide at this point, the crossing took only a few minutes. According to James C. Mitchell & Co., the roads to and from the ferry and the landings on both sides were excellent. "Charges moderate--Terms cash," their advertisement concluded.<sup>2</sup>

A new stage line had become active in April of 1857. Because H. D. Johnson already had a contract with "Messrs. J. B. and W. Bennett" to carry the United States mail from the Platte River near La Platte, to Dakotah, he arranged to carry passengers, also. Because of this association with the Bennetts, transportation was opened from Minnesota to Kansas, "though the fairest portion of Nebraska." Johnson felt it

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

was the "nearest, cheapest, and best route from Omaha and Council Bluffs to Dakotah and Sioux City." Every Thursday and Sunday morning the stage left Omaha, via Bellevue, to the Platte River, "thence by Bennett's line to Nebraska City," and returned the same day. Monday and Friday mornings the route went from Omaha, via Saratoga, Florence, Fort Calhoun, De Soto, Cuming City, Tekamah, Decatur, Blackbird, Omadi, Dakotah, to Logan, and returned immediately.<sup>1</sup>

The Florence & Omaha Omnibus Line had a line of hacks which made two trips daily to Omaha City which connected with Harl's Omnibus Line to Council Bluffs. The morning line left Florence from "1-2 post" at 7:00 and returned to Florence at 11:00 the same morning. In the afternoon the line left from the same point at 1:00 and returned to Florence at 4:00 the same day. On Saturdays McCarthy & Shoebridge provided transportation to Fort Calhoun.<sup>2</sup>

Clothing stores also thrived. A well supplied stock of custom-made boots and shoes were available at Timothy Donoven's Boot & Shoe Store located on Main Street opposite Baugh's Dry Goods Store. Donoven also did repairing. Thomas Cutty started a tailoring business in the spring of 1857. Confident of the approval of his patrons he advertised, "Give me a call, all ye who would be well clothed." His shop was on the corner of Fifth and Calhoun Streets, fronting on Market Square.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

"A nimble sixpence is better than a slow shilling," was the slogan of Heath & Graeter who had purchased the stock of W. J. Baugh's dry goods store. Though they appeared to emphasize cash payment rather than their merchandise, they would sell dry goods, queensware, boots and shoes, hardware, groceries, clothing, "Yankee notions," etc.<sup>1</sup>

Miscellaneous personal services were readily available. A. J. Arnold ran a watch, clock, jewelry shop and repair service, and had, in the summer of 1857, just received a new assignment of merchandise. He was located at Steere & Leslie's old stand, on Fifth Street, below State. E. P. Brewster was agent for the Lombard Insurance Co. and commissioner of deeds for Iowa and New York. Dr. A. B. Malcolm was a physician and surgeon with an office adjoining the Courier office on State Street, and another physician and surgeon, G. S. Sperry had an office in Florence in Steele's Building. An auctioneer, B. V. Springer, sought business in Florence and the surrounding area.<sup>2</sup>

On the cultural side, Howe & Co. announced to the "Dancing Community," that they furnished music for private parties or balls on the usual "reasonable terms." S. W. Turner "respectfully informed" the citizens of Florence that he had opened a "select school" and asked for their patronage.<sup>3</sup>

Various other types of business sought to entice

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

the buying public to their shops. A confectioner and dealer in "fruits, nuts, candies, cigars, tobacco, books, notions, toys and everything in the line of fancy notions" had just received a complete assortment of his line on June 11, 1857. In addition he had for sale a few hundred pounds of lard. The Florence City Drug Store offered similar items as well as drugs and various types of liquors. Dye & Arnold were primarily grocers and dealers in country produce. Mitchell, as secretary of the Florence Land Company, advertised that he was located in the office under the printing office.<sup>1</sup>

A book seller and stationer was even available in the summer of 1857. Louis Pinshoff offered a large variety of writing inks, mucilage and sealing wax, in addition to a complete stock of various kinds of paper. In the line of books he could provide "the principal standard works, American and English," a large collection of novels, school books in all fields, and Bibles of all sizes. He also kept "wall paper and borders constantly on hand." In conclusion, he would take orders for the new Rochelle Hackberry roots which bore fruit "the size of a walnut" and propagated rapidly.<sup>2</sup>

Other miscellaneous services included a Western Lithographic Establishment whose staff "were eastern men and had all the latest improvements." A contrasting establishment was operated by William H. Robertson a blacksmith

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

and machinist who offered to "put up" and repair machinery of all kinds.<sup>1</sup>

There were innumerable land agents and attorneys who had placed advertisements, and two banks. In keeping with the tenor of a frontier town located near vast unsettled lands, there were at least eleven companies who dealt in land sales. Cook, Sargent & Parker bought, sold and located land and land warrants. George Sinclair & Co. went further, offering to enter lands, loan money, and pay taxes in Nebraska, Iowa, and Kansas. H. M. Pomeroy stressed his services to pre-emptors and B. Kroeger said he would pay "particular attention to locating land warrants." The other advertisements offered similar services.<sup>2</sup>

The Bank of Florence with George B. Sargent, President and James M. Parker, Cashier, named four other offices of Cook and Sargent as references. The Exchange Bank of Florence, headed by George Sinclair, President, and H. Veeder, Cashier, also offered references as appeared to be the custom.<sup>3</sup>

A variety of personal advertisements added color and interest to the Courier. A partnership dissolution, a lost cameo, an estate settlement, and a warning not to purchase two promissory notes all fitted into this category. "Snag Ahead" headed the advertisement put in by A. J. Smith to notify his debtors to settle before the 20th of September,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

1857, or their accounts would be placed for collection. "This is no joke, I mean exactly what I say," he added.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the advertisements of Florence businessmen, other towns also sought patronage from the citizens of the bustling frontier community. The Crescent City, Iowa, lumber mill, an Omaha attorney and real estate man, a St. Joseph, Missouri, wholesale grocer with an extensive stock of groceries and liquor, and Cleveland & Columbus, N.T., land agents and real estate brokers sought business. Council Bluffs, Iowa, more accessible, had many advertisements. Bankers, attorneys, surgeons, dentists, and drug and dry goods stores all placed advertisements in the Florence paper.<sup>2</sup> One can fairly surmise that the citizens of the frontier town of Florence in 1856-1858 had a rather surprising selection of goods and services.

On the other hand Florence merchants advertised in the newspapers of surrounding settlements. The Crescent City Oracle in February of 1857 contained almost a full column of Florence businesses most of whom had advertised in the Courier, too. The Florence Store operated by Alexander C. Pyper deserved some notice. Because of the wide variety of stock it offered it must have been the center of much activity. He not only was a dealer "in staple and fancy dry goods of every variety," but also groceries, liquor, clothing, boots and shoes, a variety of hardware, and "a thousand and one things

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

too numerous to mention." Their motto was "Fair dealings and small profit." Another firm of general land agents also advertised that they were located at the Willet House in Florence.<sup>1</sup>

Florence had other produce available that was free for the taking but was probably picked and sold at the various stores. Wild fruit grew profusely throughout the eastern end of the Territory. "Plumbs, grapes, gooseberries, strawberries, raspberries, currants, cherries, haws and hackberries, besides many other minor varieties were found in almost every locality and exceedingly fine and large."<sup>2</sup>

Other than the advertisements there was not much content in the Courier. The brief national news datelined Washington, included discussion of a "Com Paulding" and "Gen Walker" incident and also related that a bill would be introduced the following Tuesday or Wednesday "for the immediate admission of Kansas as a State under the Lecompton Constitution."<sup>3</sup>

Internationally the coup d'etat in Mexico whereby Comonfort proclaimed himself dictator "but promised to convoke a Congress in three months to frame a new Constitution and elect a rule by the people" was the big item. There was a brief comment on the English and French money market and a

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<sup>1</sup>Crescent City Oracle, February 20, 1857, Box 1, MSS205, NSHS.

<sup>2</sup>Omaha Arrow, July 28, 1854. <sup>3</sup>Courier. <sup>4</sup>Ibid.

notice that the Niagra had docked at New York on the second of January. Two human interest articles national in scope was the extent of the news in the issue.<sup>1</sup>

When the Fourth Session of the Nebraska Territorial Legislature fled to Florence and met there from January 9, until the session officially ended January 16, 1858,<sup>2</sup> the Courier printed some of the proceedings. The Council met at an afternoon session on January 11, and at a morning session on January 12, and the House met January 11, at 2:00 in the afternoon, and at 7:00 that evening, and at a morning session on January 12. Many bills were passed at sessions of both houses and the afternoon session of the house included C.B. 70, to amend an act to incorporate the Florence Land Company.<sup>3</sup> None of the legislation enacted at Florence was ever put into effect because the governor, the Hon. William A. Richardson, simply returned the bill unsigned to the legislature when the members returned to Omaha, and nothing more was done.<sup>4</sup>

In an editorial headed "The Washington County Delegation," James Mitchell expressed his surprise at the response

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<sup>1</sup>Courier.

<sup>2</sup>J. Sterling Morton, ed., Illustrated History of Nebraska; a History of Nebraska From the Earliest Explorations of the Trans-Mississippi Region (Lincoln: Jacob North & Company, 1905-06), I, 326-27. According to Morton the removal was precipitated by an argument over the title to the new capitol. Although it had actually been resolved, "the breakup was the outcome of years of greed, violence, and sectional folly."

<sup>3</sup>Courier

<sup>4</sup>Morton, I, 333.



of the Washington County delegation to the removal, because they had always appeared to favor Omaha "in feeling and prejudice." Previously Washington County was strongly opposed to the removal of the capital, "but since the riotous proceedings whereby their Representatives have been driven out of Omaha . . . a complete change has been worked all over the county."<sup>1</sup>

Florence, which had originally been a part of Washington County, became a part of Douglas County when Sarpy County was created by an act on February 7, 1857. The northern boundary of Douglas, originally one mile north of the city of Omaha, was moved northward to its present position.<sup>2</sup>

Mitchell, incidentally, had been considered a traitor to Florence by some when he voted for Omaha as the new capital at the first session of the Territorial Legislature. He was present as the councilman from Washington County. Though he regarded it as a compromise vote, the fact that he was appointed the sole commissioner to select the site of the capitol in Omaha, shortly after the vote was taken, put him in a compromising situation.<sup>3</sup>

While the business and political activities of Florence

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<sup>1</sup>Courier.

<sup>2</sup>Harrison Johnson, Johnson's History of Nebraska (Omaha: Henry Gibson Herald Printing House, 1880), p. 274, Arthur C. Wakeley, Omaha: The Gate City and Douglas County Nebraska; a Record of Settlement, Organization, Progress and Achievement (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1917) I, 65.

<sup>3</sup>Morton, I, 216-19.

were developing, other facets of the community were organizing, too. Several denominations established churches in Florence in the 1850's. Isaac F. Collins organized the Methodist Church in Florence and he was given Lot No. 1, in Block 180, on Bluff Street. A church building was completed August 5, 1857. The pastor, the Reverend Isaac F. Collins, had been doing missionary work in the area prior to that time. This Methodist church was Florence's first school building and fifty-six youngsters were enrolled. When a Baptist pastor, the Reverend George W. Barnes arrived in 1857, he remarked, "The only house of worship was one put up by the Methodists, a plain, neat, spineless building."<sup>1</sup>

Pastor Barnes known as the "Pioneer Preacher,"<sup>2</sup> was the missionary pastor at Florence and also at Cuming City, Omaha, and Bellevue. He was present at the first Baptist baptism performed in the Territory at Cuming City in Washington County in the winter of 1857, but did not officiate as he had not been ordained. Several persons were baptized and ice two feet thick had been cut away.<sup>3</sup> Another pastor, the Reverend Reuben Gaylord, arrived in the Territory in August, and immediately began to preach in the towns around Omaha,

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<sup>1</sup>Clyde F. Wright, Buck-Eye-Prairie and Three-Rivers Country Folk; Genealogical Review, Chronological Recordings and Events of Early Pioneer Life in the Middle West, III (Omaha: Aroha Publishing Co., 1956), 120.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Morton, II, 434.

including Florence. Florence had a representative at the organizational meeting of the First Nebraska Baptist Association when it was organized on May 18, 1858.<sup>1</sup>

The Presbyterian Church of Florence was organized October 12, 1857, by the Presbytery of Omaha. It remained under that name for fifty years and became the First Presbyterian Church of Florence, Nebraska, in 1897.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the founding of the church, missionary service from Bellevue had been provided. The Reverend Eben Blachly, a Presbyterian missionary, moved to Florence and served fifty members of the Presbyterian faith. Services were held in the homes of members or in any available building. The official church was served by many pastors, many of whom were seminary students, for some time. The Reverend A. S. Bilingsley, served in 1857, the Reverend G. P. Bergen in 1858, and the Reverend Simon Peck came in 1860. Pastor Peck lived in Florence for eighteen years and served other communities in the area, also.<sup>3</sup> Other denominations were established in Florence in later years, but no others were active in the 1850's.

Surrounding towns appeared to look with favor upon the community of Florence. In July of 1858 Florence was

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., II, 481.

<sup>2</sup>Original Articles of Incorporation of the Presbyterian Church of Florence, Nebraska, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>"History of the Florence Presbyterian Church, 1856-1956," compiled from church records, according to the Reverend William Mulford, the present pastor.

described as "one of the most picturesque and convenient sites in the entire Territory, . . . in full view in the distance, from Omaha, Council Bluffs, Crescent City and several other minor towns." The population was given as nearly three thousand which was described as "unparalleled growth" for even a frontier town. It was considered the general outfitting point for Utah.<sup>1</sup>

Another article extolling the attributes of Florence described it as a "delightful townsite" and "directly opposite our own pleasant town. . . ." Whereas a year earlier there were not six buildings finished they now had 200 "either finished or in progress." Included in these were "three steam mills, two hotels, one large banking house, four stores, one printing office besides grocery stores, mechanical shops, post office, law offices, etc.," A weekly newspaper was already published there and the "Florence Bank in wholesome operation."<sup>2</sup>

The article enthusiastically mentioned the bridge charter which James Mitchell and others had received just the month before. The "certainty" that the Davenport and eventually the Pacific railroad would cross at Florence had "inspired thousands to invest . . . in lots, claims and buildings." The extravagant praise concluded with, "Considering her facilities,

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<sup>1</sup>Leslie's Magazine, July 3, 1858, Box 1, MSS205, NSHS.

<sup>2</sup>Crescent City Oracle, February 20, 1857.

advantages and prospects, we consider Florence most decidedly THE CITY OF NEBRASKA, and in a short period of time this opinion will be practically demonstrated."<sup>1</sup> Even Davenport, Iowa gave the new town enthusiastic praise in its newspaper.<sup>2</sup>

The first post office in the area was called the Winter Quarters post office and was established March 24, 1854. Andrew J. Hanscom was postmaster. George Howe became postmaster on August 31, 1854, and the name of the post office was changed to Florence on March 14, 1855. Henry M. Pomeroy became postmaster on June 21, 1856, Elias P. Brewster on July 31, 1856, Andrew J. Critchfield on January 8, 1859, and Samuel W. Turner on June 28, 1861.<sup>3</sup>

The Daily Florence Courier, which carried the advertisements previously mentioned, was first issued in December, 1856. Recognizing that they had lost the territorial capital their slogan became, "We would rather be in the right place on 'Rock Bottom' than have the capital of the territory." But, of course, they did not get the railroad crossing or the bridge either.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Gazette (Davenport, Iowa), October 23, 1854, cited by Wright, III, 136.

<sup>3</sup>Wright, III, 134, citing Post Office Department Records in the National Archives.

<sup>4</sup>Morton, II, 356. The Nebraska Palladium (Bellevue), November 29, 1854, mentioned a paper called Rock Bottom at Florence, Nebraska, W. C. Ames, editor and proprietor. The Rock Bottom claimed "to belong to a locality good enough of itself, to make it THE CITY OF NEBRASKA without the capital or its influence."

On July 16, 1857, there was an election to decide whether Douglas County would "take \$200,000 stock in the M. & M. R. R.<sup>1</sup> expended on the west end of the route terminating a t Council Bluffs." The city of Omaha polled 1156 votes, proving according to the writer that their population must have been at least 3000 "including Saratoga which had nearly 100 voters" at that time. The vote was favorable by a large majority, but "Florence voted largely against it." In fact, according to the writer, "they would burn their own town if they could spite Omaha."<sup>2</sup>

Luther North, early Nebraska scout, lived in Florence for a short time. J. E. North, his brother, clerked in a store in Florence in 1857 and built a home there, where his mother and Luther joined him. Luther wrote, "I went to school that winter and the next." The winter of 1856-1857 had been characterized by blizzards and bitter cold. Snow in some ravines was twenty to thirty feet deep. Mrs. North, Luther's mother, had boarded several woodchoppers "and all the water she used for cooking and washing was from snow that she melted in a wash boiler on the stove."<sup>3</sup>

River traffic was vital to Florence in its early

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<sup>1</sup>Mississippi & Missouri Railroad.

<sup>2</sup>Erastus F. Beadle, To Nebraska in '57, a Diary of Erastus F. Beadle (New York: The New York Public Library, 1923), p. 65.

<sup>3</sup>Donald Danker, ed., Man of the Plains, Recollections of Luther North 1856-1883, The Pioneer Heritage Series, IV (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), pp. 3-5.

days. People and supplies crossed the Missouri from Iowa to Nebraska Territory at Florence, and many people landed there from points lower down on the river. It was important then when the Omaha Times reported on November 28, 1858, that navigation was closed and that ice was gorged a few miles "this side of Florence." Florence would then be limited to land transportation for perhaps months. The article also noted that steamer arrivals since March 24, of that year, numbered ninety-six which was considered an unusually large number.<sup>1</sup>

Omaha residents evidently had frequent contact with their neighbor to the north. One Omaha resident on one occasion rode to Florence to contract for coal.<sup>2</sup> Another time, after a trip to Council Bluffs, he saw the steamer Silver Heels come "up with colors flying and a band of music which was animating in the extreme." The steamer had taken an Omaha group on board for a dance and rode up to Florence by moonlight "there finishing the dance and returning home" the next morning.<sup>3</sup>

Another festive occasion was a cotillion party at the Willet House in Florence on February 22, 1864. There were two managers from Omaha and two from Florence, H. Chapman and P. Redman. The invitations "respectfully requested" the

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<sup>1</sup>Omaha Times, November 28, 1858, cited by framed display at the Florence Bank by Florence Historical Foundation.

<sup>2</sup>Beadle, pp. 22 and 26.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 38

the recipient to attend. The tickets, including supper, were \$2.00.<sup>1</sup>

Another center of entertainment for picnics, speeches, and various other types of entertainment was the public square. The Florence Land Company deeded the park to the city for \$5.00. They stipulated that it was to be called "Public Square" and that it was to be used and occupied only as a public square "forever." It was to be "distinctly understood that there . . . [should] never be any Building or Buildings erected on said square."<sup>2</sup> At the same time, April 26, 1856, the Florence Land Company deeded North and South Market Squares to the city. They were "to be used and occupied as Market Squares and for no other purpose."<sup>3</sup>

A typical grim example of frontier justice occurred in 1858 when two Iowa men stole horses near Florence. They were arrested and confined to an Omaha jail. A short time later they were siezed by a mob and taken two miles north of Florence. Because only one rope was available, they were hanged, back to back, from the same rope. Though the sheriff was fined for dereliction of duty, the men tried for the crime received a change of venue and were acquitted.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Original invitation in frame at Florence Bank, Florence Historical Foundation.

<sup>2</sup>Deed Record Book No. "J", p. 352, Register of Deeds, Douglas County, Nebraska. Microfilm.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 354.

<sup>4</sup>Wakeley, II, 85.



The last major act involving the city of Florence in the period from 1854-1860, occurred on April 2, 1860, when the "United States, By the President, James Buchanan, By J. B. Leonard, Sec'y, J. N. Granger, Recorder of the General Land Office" transferred to "Levi Harsh, Mayor," approximately 320 acres of land. Harsh, as mayor of Florence, had purchased the land in trust "for the several use and benefit of the occupants thereof, according to their respective interests, under the Town site act of Congress, approved May 23, 1844." The act was called "An Act for the relief of the citizens of towns upon the lands of the United States under certain circumstances."<sup>1</sup>

And so, Florence had developed rapidly in every area during the last few years of the 1850's. As is often true, several individuals and institutions were particularly distinguished during that period.

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<sup>1</sup>Land Office Records, Patent, Book 86, p. 239.

## V. JAMES COMLY MITCHELL

James Comly Mitchell the organizer and leader of the Nebraska Winter Quarters Company and its successor, the Florence Land Company, the Ferry Company, the Mill Company, and the Florence Bridge Company, was born in Panghorn, Pennsylvania in 1819.<sup>1</sup> He became a sailor, then captain of a ship owned by the firm Grinnel Minturn.<sup>2</sup> He married a widow with one daughter, Eliza Krosnick (Krosnic) Vandenberg, in England in 1836. The three came west in 1838 by covered wagon to Galen, Illinois, then to Bellevue, Iowa, where he was Indian Commissioner. In 1850 they moved to Kanesville<sup>3</sup> where he saw the possibilities for development in Nebraska Territory when it was opened for settlement. Though only 5'4",<sup>4</sup> or perhaps because of it, he was a very dogmatic and aggressive personality.

In 1854 Mitchell and his wife built a "twelve-room southern style" home on Bluff Street just west of the public

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<sup>1</sup>Wright, III, 165.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., and letter from Mrs. E. C. (Florence) Kamp, of Houston, Texas, Mrs. Mitchell's great-granddaughter, to Clyde F. Wright on September 9, 1954. Hereinafter cited as Kamp, etc. Her correspondence to Wright is at the Florence Historical Foundation.

<sup>3</sup>Kamp, September 18, 1954. Bellevue, Iowa, dates from the 1830's and is in Jackson County on the Mississippi River.

<sup>4</sup>Omaha World-Herald Magazine Section, December 12, 1954. Hereinafter cited as World-Herald.

square. According to Mrs. Hannah Beals of Fort Calhoun who was a niece of Mitchell, the lumber was brought by boat from St. Louis, but the brick was made in Florence. Mrs. Beals visited the house often when she was seven and eight years old, and later said:

It was the largest house in Florence, built on the slope of a hill so you could walk out of the back parlor on to a platform, level with the servants' quarters in the other houses at the back.

They kept four servants and the north building was a kitchen and washhouse with a bathroom and cook's quarters upstairs. That was the only bathroom in town and the big metal tub was filled from a large cistern.

The south house was where the gardener and other servants lived. There was a large barn that had a floor and people used to come miles to see it; barns had dirt floors in those days.<sup>1</sup>

Mitchell kept an English coach and Mrs. Beals as a child would watch the coachman polish the silver on it. The Mitchells travelled to St. Louis to purchase furnishings for the house. Most of the furniture was mahogany. "One wardrobe with mirrors in the door cost a thousand dollars," she recalled. A silver service with a three-foot urn, a grand piano of rose-wood, and a carpet with roses on it for the parlor were other purchases. A wood support left in the chimney caught fire when the new fireplace was lighted caused some smoke damage. James Mitchell gave a large dance at the Taylor Hotel for the neighbors in appreciation for the help given him.<sup>2</sup> There was

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<sup>1</sup>Mrs. Charles H. Mullin, ed., Founders and Patriots of Nebraska (Omaha: The Citizen Printing Co., 1935), p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 78. Mrs. Kamp wrote on September 9, 1954, "Why! To this day I have at least two chairs that was in the Mitchell home in Florence. And other lovely things--silver, china & the silver has the name of Mitchell on it."

also a fireplace in the master bedroom upstairs.<sup>1</sup>

Mitchell planted cedars along the front of his property and an apple orchard in the twenty acres at the back. Mrs. Beals used to carry water to water the cedars, along with some of the servants.<sup>2</sup> According to one source, Mitchell reserved the western half of the block on which his home was built as the site for what he hoped would be the future capitol building of Nebraska.<sup>3</sup> Though the site would have had a marvelous view, the grade was a steep and dangerous one in bad weather. Porches around the house resembled a ship's deck<sup>4</sup> and one of the trees was planted so close to the porch that the trunk eventually grew through the floor.<sup>5</sup>

A grand-niece, Miss C. C. Beals, daughter of Mrs. Hannah Beals, said the Mitchells also shipped fruit trees, shrubs, and ornamental trees from St. Louis, and remembered her mother telling what a dry summer it was and how they carried water. Miss Beals discussed visiting Mrs. Mitchell once when she was very small. She recalled being impressed with the house and furniture and how pleased Mrs. Mitchell, whom she remembered as short and dumpy, was to see them.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>World-Herald, December 12, 1954.

<sup>2</sup>Mullin, p. 78.      <sup>3</sup>World-Herald, December 12, 1954.

<sup>4</sup>Mullin, p. 77, and picture in Wright, III, 217, sent through Mrs. Kamp in October, 1954, and said to have been taken in 1854.

<sup>5</sup>World-Herald, December 12, 1954.

<sup>6</sup>Letter from Miss C. C. Beals to C. F. Wright from Fort Calhoun, August 8, 1959, Florence Historical Foundation.

Mrs. Mitchell's daughter, Hannah Krosnick Vandenberg, had married Nathaniel Kilbourne who later changed his name to Kilborn.<sup>1</sup> One of their children was Florence Vandenberg Kilborn for whom Florence was named. The Mitchells had an oil portrait of her made when she was eight years old and hung it on the wall of their lavish home. Florence died in 1864 at the age of 15, in Bellevue, Iowa, of pulmonary consumption.<sup>2</sup>

As was previously mentioned, Mitchell was a member of the legislative council when the first legislature met in Omaha, early in 1855. The vote he cast to make Omaha the capital had long-lasting repercussions, for his great-granddaughter was concerned about the aspersions cast upon his character nearly a century later.<sup>3</sup> As the lone capitol commissioner he selected the site on which Central High School now stands for the second territorial capitol building.<sup>4</sup>

There are many glimpses of James Mitchell's dogmatic and, therefore, offensive personality. One of them is contained in a newspaper article dated April, 1857, headed "Florence Election," and addressed to the editor. It pertained to an election held "in the super-muddy city of Florence," on April 6, 1857, for city officers, and was in direct

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<sup>1</sup>Kamp, September 18, 1954.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Mrs. C. W. Erwin, great, great-granddaughter of Mrs. Mitchell for her mother Mrs. Kamp, October 12, 1954, to C. F. Wright, Florence Historical Foundation.

<sup>3</sup>Kamp, August 29, 1954. <sup>4</sup>World-Herald, December 12, 1954.

response to an article in the Courier which referred disparagingly to an "insignificant rule or ruin clique." The Courier, incidentally, was described as "being in the service of a particular but declining interest."<sup>1</sup>

Apparently, Mitchell had pushed through the nomination for the incumbent, Dr. Levi Harsh, whom the writer considered ineffective in his office. Harsh was in the East and had indicated he did not want to serve again but Mitchell chose a school meeting the Saturday prior to the election as the time to push forward Harsh's candidacy. Or, as the writer expressed it, "the great mogul of rock bottom had willed that Harsh should be mayor for 1857."<sup>2</sup>

Mitchell appeared on the scene early Monday morning when ballots were being distributed and he learned that another candidate had been proposed. According to "Goggle" the signature of the writer, Mitchell did not recognize "liberty of action and suffrage" in Florence. "Every vituperative term . . . from tip-top slang to brother billingsgate" was applied to one passing ballots by Mitchell and then to the group who had dared support a second nomination. "Goggle" said the gathering generally regarded Mitchell's performance as approaching lunacy and reacted by deciding to vote for the second ticket.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Newspaper clipping, April, 1857, Box 1, MSS205, NSHS.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

As the election proceeded those supporting the opponent were openly encouraged by the judges and clerks of the election to support Levi Harsh. The ballots were illegally taken from the polling place at meal time both at noon and in the evening and were not returned to the polling place to be counted. Harsh won approximately 150 votes to fifty for his opponent, J. M. Parker, who, though opposed to Harsh, was a reluctant candidate.<sup>1</sup> Though Parker's stock was rising with the Florence Land Company at this time, Mitchell did not leave the Company until one year later.

Another incident involving Mitchell also left a strong impression. One contemporary wrote, "On February 20, 1857, a mass meeting was held in the Pioneer Block in Omaha to which delegations from the claim clubs at Bellevue, Elkhorn City, Florence, and Papillion were admitted by acclamation." James Mitchell was described as being very abusive of "new people who were coming into the territory to break down local institutions."<sup>2</sup>

A closely related incident involved a group of Florence people led by Mitchell, "who albeit small in stature was a valiant and terrible man." A dispute arose regarding claims between Florence residents and a resident of Gopher Town, a section of Omaha. The Florence group apparently was threatening the other party because they were "driven off with guns."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Wakeley, I, pp. 82-83.

<sup>3</sup>Frank J. Burkley, The Faded Frontier (Omaha: Burkley Envelope and Printing Co., 1935), pp. 326-28, citing Daily Nebraskian, 1857.

A more pleasant incident involving Mitchell occurred in 1859. An Omaha family was subsisting by selling surplus vegetables from their garden plot while the father had gone to Pike's Peak seeking gold. When their situation was particularly bad the mother planned a trip to Florence to collect a debt owed to her husband. They rented a horse and buggy and made the trip to Florence, and found Mitchell, the debtor. Mitchell paid \$10.00 on account and he had "always had a high place in the family esteem ever since," and the writer felt it was the most important event of the year enabling the family to live in "comparative opulence for a while."<sup>1</sup>

Another writer recalled that James Mitchell was challenged for the right to be seated as councilman from Washington County in the Territorial Legislature on the ground that he was a citizen of Iowa. Others were challenged, also, and the challenges were all referred to committee and were never acted upon "probably for the reason that a careful investigation would show that they were all more or less true."<sup>2</sup> It may have been true of the others, but Mitchell was at least building in Florence at the time if he had not already moved into his new home.

Some, of course, had to admire the drive Mitchell obviously possessed. A neighboring city paper, the Crescent

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 106-07.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 97-98.



City Oracle, after an extravagant description of Florence, said:

[The] Hon. J. C. Mitchell, the lucky founder of this town is a gentleman of the utmost liberality, enterprise, intelligence and integrity, and to his wise management may be attributed the magic rapidity of its growth. We understand that lots are still given to those who improve them by building. Success to Florence and its founder and builder.

In the 1850's James Comly Mitchell made a list of property belonging to him at that time. It was very extensive:

#### City of Florence

One Block in the Center of the City containing 4 acres highly improved with Dwelling house, barn & other out-houses which cost over \$16,000.

13 Houses & Lots improvements costing over \$15,000.

250 Vacant Lots a large proportion of them the best in the city.

15 Out-Lots containing about 90 acres.

An excellent water Privilege, with all the Lands overflowed by the Dam & Back water, & 2 acres of ground in the heart of the city.

One half of the Ferry Privilege, with steam Ferry Boat & about 25 acres of Land, at the Ferry Landing.

4000 acres of Land lying between Florence & Omaha & between Florence & Fort Calhoun.

26 Lots in the City of Desoto.

22 Lots in Cuming City.

#### State of Iowa

320 acres of Land near Magnolia in Harrison County.

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<sup>1</sup>Crescent City Oracle, February 20, 1857.

40 Acres of land adjoining Crescent City.

About 60 acres of Land on the Missouri River at the Ferry Landing opposite Florence.

3 of the best Lots in Bellevue Jackson County with buildings on one of them which cost over \$4,000.<sup>1</sup>

Mitchell's holdings were vast, yet when Florence failed to develop as he had so optimistically anticipated they had not appreciated as he had expected either. He died August 6, 1860, and was buried in a mausoleum his wife had had constructed in their back yard. The mausoleum "was brick, painted white like the house."<sup>2</sup> He had had a fine relationship with his wife and she mourned him deeply.<sup>3</sup> Several years later he was buried in the Mormon cemetery a short distance away on the top of the hill in back of their home.<sup>4</sup>

There was at least one suit pending against Mitchell when he died. He and two co-defendants were sued for \$1400.00 due on a promissory note. He died before the suit was resolved and an execution was levied against the property of Ansell Briggs, one of the co-defendants.<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Mitchell died November 3, 1884, and was buried in Prospect Hill Cemetery.<sup>6</sup> Mrs. E. C. Kamp, Mrs. Mitchell's great grand-daughter, recalled

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<sup>1</sup>List of property belonging to James C. Mitchell, Box 1, MSS205, NSHS.

<sup>2</sup>Kamp, August 29, 1954.

<sup>3</sup>Mullin, pp. 77-78.

<sup>4</sup>Kamp, August 29, 1954.

<sup>5</sup>App. Doc. "B", No. 347, in the District Court of Douglas County, Nebraska.

<sup>6</sup>World-Herald, December 12, 1954.

living in the house for four years while her grandmother, Hannah Kilborn, "cleared up and sold all the property at Florence."<sup>1</sup>

James Mitchell evidently left no heirs to remember him, but his wife's descendants are extremely proud of him<sup>2</sup> and he is an excellent example of the pioneer qualities of ingenuity, foresightedness, aggressiveness, and fortitude which helped develop the American Mid-West.

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<sup>1</sup>Kamp, August 29, 1954.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

## VI. THE BRIDGE, THE MILL, THE BANK, AND THE MORMONS

There were several other major projects besides the land companies that played either a major and/or long-lasting role in the development of Florence. The most short-lived of all was the aborted attempt to build a bridge across the Missouri at the ferry landing. The advertisements praising Florence carried in the newspapers of other cities stressed the importance of the town as a potential crossing for the railroad, and as a particularly fine site for a bridge.

Accordingly, James Mitchell and others organized a Florence Bridge Company. The Courier of February 5, 1857, carried the following notice signed by James C. Mitchell.

### Florence Bridge Company

The subscription books of this company have been opened, the stock all subscribed, and a permanent organization effected. A thorough survey has been made by competent engineers, the bridge located and a number of men are already engaged fulfilling a contract for excavating a large amount of earth preparatory to commencing the abutment on this side of the river. Contracts for the mason work and superstructure will be let early in the spring, the whole of this magnificent enterprise pushed through to completion the first day of January 1859, at farthest.<sup>1</sup>

The Florence Bridge Company ledger recorded: "In accordance

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<sup>1</sup>Newspaper clipping dated May 9, 1937, citing Courier of February 5, 1857, "Florence Bridge Company" Folder, Box 2, MSS205, NSHS.

with notice given as provided for in the Act passed by the Legislature of the Territory of Nebraska incorporating the Florence Bridge Company, this Book was opened for Subscription to Stock in said Company, this 20-day of Jan., 1857."

| <u>Subscribers Names</u> | <u>Amt Subscribed</u> |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| James C. Mitchell        | \$25,000              |
| P. C. Chapman            | 10,000                |
| R. S. Bryant             | 10,000                |
| A. B. Malcolm            | 10,000                |
| James G. Chapman         | 5,000                 |
| E. P. Brewster           | 5,000                 |
| A. F. Heath              | 10,000                |
| Henry C. Riordan         | 10,000                |
| Charles Home             | 2,000                 |
| R. W. Steele             | 15,000                |
| Samuel Forgy             | 2,000                 |
| D. B. Hawley             | 12,000                |
| W. L. Baugh              | 10,000                |
| Alling & Chipman         | 10,000                |
| J. F. Pugsly             | 5,000                 |
| Wm. Conner               | 10,000                |
| John H. Brackin          | 5,000                 |
| J. B. Stutsman           | 10,000                |
| A. C. Smith              | 10,000                |
| Cook, Sargent & Parker   | 24,000                |
|                          | <u>\$200,000</u> 1    |

A ten per cent assessment was made at once for expenses incurred in soliciting Congressional approval and James M. Parker was sent to Washington for that purpose. He was not successful, and the project was abandoned.<sup>2</sup>

Another structure of particular importance today because it may date from Mormon times is the old mill.

<sup>1</sup>Florence Bridge Company Ledger, Box 2, MSS205, NSHA.

<sup>2</sup>Mullin, p. 79, citing Omaha World-Herald, May 2, 1935.

An early advertisement for Florence said,

There are two fine streams running through the town on both of which are excellent mill privileges. The Mormons during their sojourn here had a good mill with 2 run of burs and a saw, on one of the streams the frame is still standing.

It has long been presumed that Alexander Hunter, who arrived in Florence in 1856, utilized this abandoned Mormon mill site. (It is evident from material already presented in this paper that mills were in operation before 1856 so he may have taken over the operation of an established mill at that site.) In any event, Hunter acquired the property in 1856 and according to his obituary, "built and operated a saw mill in which he also included a corn meal mill."<sup>2</sup>

Another pioneer, Jacob Weber, left Bloomington, Illinois, after a patron in his bakery mentioned the opportunities in Florence. He and his wife, Emelia, arrived in Florence in June, 1857. They immediately started a bakery and bought one-third of a lot for \$200.00. A three-room cottonwood cottage the couple constructed cost \$600.00.<sup>3</sup>

When the panic of 1857 hit the Mid-West Weber found work in Hunter's mill and was paid in cattle as the mill owner also bought logs and sold lumber with cattle as the medium of

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<sup>1</sup>Omaha Arrow, September 29, 1854.

<sup>2</sup>The Superior Express, May 12, 1921, cited by James Potter in a report on the Florence Mill made for Marvin Kivett.

<sup>3</sup>The Omaha Sunday Bee, May 19, 1907.

exchange. Grains and other necessities were used in the same way. "During this time the people lived without coffee, sugar, and similar luxuries," Weber said. He roasted rye, barley, and wheat, and used it for a coffee substitute and said it was months after it was again possible to purchase these items before the people could cultivate their taste for coffee.<sup>1</sup>

"Just east of the mill was a large tabernacle built of trees and thatched with green boughs in which services were held each evening at sundown," Weber told an interviewer. The tabernacle was also used to hold special services to ask a blessing for emigrants going west.<sup>2</sup>

Weber also recalled when the Legislature met in Florence in an empty store and sat on boxes and kegs. Apparently the whole town turned out as spectators, but it was short-lived entertainment.<sup>3</sup>

James Durant of the Union Pacific Railroad was brought to Florence by James M. Parker, according to Weber, to examine the Florence crossing as a potential bridge site. Durant, Parker, Weber, and a man named Day joined to visit the site. Weber claimed high water flooding at the time damaged Florence's chance to secure the bridge.<sup>4</sup>

The 1860 Industrial Census, Douglas County, Nebraska, listed Hunter and Co. as a water powered sawmill with six persons employed. The capital investment was \$3,000.00 and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.      <sup>2</sup>Ibid.      <sup>3</sup>Ibid.      <sup>4</sup>Ibid. Day may be presumed to be Peter A. Dey, a prominent Union Pacific official of the period.

it produced 65,000 board feet of lumber per year.<sup>1</sup>

An Act of the Council and House of Representatives of Territorial Nebraska approved allowing "Eliza K. Mitchell and Alexander Hunter . . . to constantly keep a mill dam across Mill Creek, on Block 125, in the City of Florence, Douglas County, N.T." Their heirs and assigns received the "perpetual right" to keep a dam "on said Mill Creek, . . . to the height of twenty-six feet above low water mark . . . in order to establish all such mills or machinery for the manufacture of the various kinds of grain into flour, meal, etc., and also for the manufacture of lumber. . . ." The Act prohibited anyone else to build a dam below their point on Mill Creek, and was approved January 7, 1861.<sup>2</sup>

Jacob Weber left the mill around 1860, and started for Pike's Peak but only got as far as Fort Kearny. He returned to Florence, farmed for a while, and in the mid-sixties purchased the mill in a partnership with George Hugg (Hegge).<sup>3</sup>

Another Florence institution still recognized in recent years was the Bank of Florence. The records of proceedings of the Bank of Florence record that it was organized April 30, 1856, "under and by virtue of an Act of the

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<sup>1</sup>1860 Population Census, Douglas County, Nebraska Territory, cited by Potter.

<sup>2</sup>"Original Charter of Florence," p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Florence Fontenelle, March 30, 1923. The Florence Mill, moved from its original site, is now an historical landmark.



Legislature of the Territory of Nebraska approved January 18, 1856, entitled "An Act to Charter the Bank of Florence." Under the Act, H. D. Downey, Allan Tomlin, Nathaniel Kilborn, James C. Mitchell, G. M. Dodge, Levi Harsh, and Ebenezer Cook were appointed commissioners and any five of them could carry into effect the establishment of the bank to be called the Bank of Florence in the city of Florence. Kilborn transferred his authority to John P. Cook on April 26, 1856, and Tomlin transferred his authority to George B. Sargent on April 28, 1856.<sup>1</sup>

With the approval of the commissioners, books of subscription were opened on April 30, 1856, and subscribed as follows: Cook & Sargent, Davenport, 500 shares; Cook, Sargent and Downey, Iowa City, 200 shares; Cook, Sargent and Parker, Rock Island, 150 shares, Cook, Sargent and Cook of "Fort Des Moines," 150 shares. In all there were 1000 shares at \$100.00 each.<sup>2</sup> The capital stock could be increased at the will of the stockholders to any amount up to \$500,000.00. The bank was authorized to issue bank notes, deal in exchange, and "of engaging in other legitimate banking business." Both

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<sup>1</sup>C. S. & P. Bank of Florence Ledger, Box 2, MSS205, NSHS.

<sup>2</sup>Ted N. Weissbuch, "Florence Money; a Case Study in Wildcat Banking." (September, 1962) Numismatic Scrapbook. A mimeographed copy of the article is in possession of the Florence Historical Foundation.

the president and the cashier were required to sign all notes, and "stockholders were made, 'each and individually liable for the full and final redemption of such issue, payable at their Banking House in gold and silver.'" Officers were George B. Sargent, president, John P. Cook, vice-president, and James M. Parker, cashier.<sup>1</sup>

Newspapers of the time carried advertisements stating that the banking firms holding stock in the bank would redeem the Bank of Florence notes at the Florence bank in coin and at the other three Iowa cities at the current rate of exchange.<sup>2</sup> An inquiry was made in a letter to the editor of the Davenport Democrat concerning the new bank in which the correspondent evidently stated that Cook & Sargent had bought the charter of the Bank of Florence. The response, signed "Cook & Sargent," stated that the charter was owned by some citizens of Florence who had sent a committee to Davenport, Iowa, to offer the charter to their firm. The stock, they stressed, was owned by the three Iowa firms of Cook & Sargent who were "personally responsible for their issues." The respondent claimed the issue would be redeemed in "Saint Louis and Chicago as currency at current rate of exchange," and that Cook & Sargent would redeem it at their offices at current rates, also.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Davenport Democrat, No. 230, Box 2, MSS205, NSHS.

The editors of the Democrat took the occasion to express their confidence in the "well established character, personal solidity and personal integrity" of Cook & Sargent, and wrote that the capital stock of the bank was \$100,000.00 but the real estate owned by the shareholders was worth "over \$600,000.00. They concluded the bank was "sound, stanch [sic] and reliable, and [recommended] its issues to the favor of the public."<sup>1</sup>

Cook & Sargent had stated in their response that they had "in progress of erection at Florence a substantial banking house." J. M. Parker was apparently responsible for the construction of the new bank<sup>2</sup> and Fred Heath supervised construction at the site. Heath wrote to Parker on July 28, 1856, the day after he arrived in Florence and said, "Arrived yesterday and found the Bank of Florence, minus the building--it exists only in name--However there is a trench dug out for the foundation of the vault--except that all the work is yet to be done x x x" He reported that bricks were worth \$100.00, pine lumber \$60.00 to \$75.00, and cottonwood, \$30.00. Heath said that on the bluff in back of the business at "State and First Street I think we can see some 30 or 40 miles of the winding muddy Missouri River."<sup>3</sup>

On August 2, Heath reported that they had started on the foundation and would have had it up that week but there

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Extracts from letter from Fred Heath to J. M. Parker copied by Mrs. Josephine Brisbin, daughter of Parker and in possession of the Florence Historical Foundation. Duplicated.

was a scarcity of rock. "The nearest point we can get them at present is Omaha City--and only one hack a day at that." The brick kiln was to be fired that day and Heath said that the winch would be ready as soon as the foundation was ready. "We are going to put on full head of steam when we get to laying the brick," he said and concluded, "the wind mill is raised and all ready."<sup>1</sup>

On September 4, he wrote that the brick work would be done that day and the rest would be done shortly. He requested that Parker write in his next letter the width of the shelf in the vault. "Florence is rapidly improving. 4 mo. ago there were only 3 or 4 houses--now there are 50 and some 25 about being erected," Heath wrote.<sup>2</sup>

One notation gave very precise instructions concerning the vault. Since it was to be in the corner, the end and back walls were to be eight inches thick and the two inner walls around the vault were to be four inches. Great concern was expressed about the air chamber which was to be an open space between the inner and outer brick walls which was "to communicate with a flue in the wall of the building to be carried to the top like a flue for fire." An arch of brick over iron bars was to be built over the vault with two feet of masonry on top "to secure from effects of fire." The instruction ended, "See that the vault is level and the front door plumb."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>MS specifications in collection of the Florence Historical Foundation. Duplicated.

Sheet steel  $\frac{1}{2}$ " thick was shipped in "great slabs from Pennsylvania mills and steam shipped up from St. Louis," and used along with 200 hand-riveted bolts to construct the vault. The thinnest armor was nineteen inches thick.<sup>1</sup> On November 17, 1856, P. Hawley was paid \$963.54 for vault expense, Lippincott was paid \$220.00 for a burglar safe, and wallpaper expenses were listed as \$20.30.<sup>2</sup> Memorandums noting the bricks used in the construction include one for 18,500, and others for 16,000, 10,000 and 13,000. Other expenses incurred in building the bank included charges for lime, hauling brick, hauling rock, laths, quarrying rock, blacksmiths, lumber hauling, labor, lightning rods, and hauling water, all dated in 1856, when the building was completed.<sup>3</sup>

The Florence bank notes played a part "in the overstimulation of business and encouragement of the over-speculation which resulted in the panic which began in 1857." By early 1858, the Florence bank notes were being heavily discounted, and in August of that year a mob in Davenport at a mass meeting demanded that Cook & Sargent redeem the Florence bank notes. "At first notes in small lots were redeemed for the laboring classes, but later, all holders were invited to present them for redemption." In September of 1858, \$200,000

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<sup>1</sup>Omaha Bee News, July 20, 1930, "Financial Record of C. S. & P.," Box 2, MSS205, NSHS.

<sup>2</sup>Journal of C. S. & P., November 17, 1856, Box 2, MSS205, NSHS.

<sup>3</sup>"Financial Record of C. S. & P."

was redeemed and burned. No signed specimens of the notes exist today.<sup>1</sup>

The last entry in the balance book of C. S. & P. was recorded in December, 1861.<sup>2</sup> Their journal recorded the last entries in 1867.<sup>3</sup> One source stated that the bank failed in 1859;<sup>4</sup> another says the bank was closed from 1864 until 1904.<sup>5</sup> In any event, the Bank of Florence typified the fate of many banks of that period, and its failure contributed to the demise of Florence as a viable community.

Though the Mormons had departed from Winter Quarters in 1848, they had a strong influence in the area until the mid-sixties. On April 7, 1856, the Florence Land Company deeded to Brigham Young as Trustee of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Lots 1, 2, 3, and 4, in Block 12, and a substantial area of land bordering Mill Creek.<sup>6</sup>

Florence in the 1850's had become a departure point for the Mormons on their way to Salt Lake City, and their presence in the area frightened at least one reader who wrote

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<sup>1</sup>Weissbuch, "Florence Money."

<sup>2</sup>C. S. & P. Balance Book, Box 2, MSS205, NSHS.

<sup>3</sup>Journal of C. S. & P.

<sup>4</sup>Bank of Florence State Historical Marker. The Bank of Florence has been restored.

<sup>5</sup>Omaha Bee News, July 20, 1930.

<sup>6</sup>Deed Record Book No. "B", pp. 240-41, Register of Deeds, Douglas County, Nebraska. Microfilm.

to the Omaha Times in April of 1858 and warned:

It is well known that near Florence, but six miles distant from us, the Saints have a village on the north bank of Mill Creek, where are their warehouses, hotel and other fixtures requisite for fitting up a small army without risk of detection. There, too, are their powder magazines.

For verity of the statements herein contained as to the movements of this sect, let those who wish inquire of the merchants who sell ammunition here, at Florence and at Crescent City . . . then let the storehouses of the Saints near Florence be searched, place scouts on the plains and there examine wagons and packs.<sup>1</sup>

Though some Omaha residents appeared to be fearful of the Mormons, the people of Florence must have been grateful for the business the Mormons brought to their flagging town. James Mitchell testified in a contest for the seat of delegate in Congress that there were "not less than 2,000 population, nor more than 200 of Mormons and their sympathizers" actually in Florence at the time of the election of 1857.<sup>2</sup>

On May 5, 1860, the Nebraskian exaggeratedly reported that "Joe Smith," a Mormon leader, and 3000 of his followers had purchased land in Douglas County with headquarters near Florence. These reports no doubt originated from the arrival of so many Mormons by steamer in Florence. On May 19, the paper reported the arrival of 600 Mormons on the boat Hesperian who were bound for Salt Lake City. In July of 1861, the Omaha brought 500 Mormons and the West Wind 600 more. Many

<sup>1</sup>Omaha Times, April, 1858, cited by Wakeley, I, 54-55.

<sup>2</sup>Congressional Globe, 2nd Session, 35th Congress, Part 1, p. 919.

of the emigrants were of English, Scots, or Danish descent.<sup>1</sup>

There was a precise record kept by the Mormons of wagon train departures from Florence and the surrounding area. No Mormon trains departed from Florence in 1854 or 1855, but three trains consisting of 170 wagons and 820 people departed from there in 1856. In 1857 one train of twenty-eight wagons and eighty-six people were recorded as having left from Florence, but there were none in 1858. Five trains, 255 wagons, 1441 people, and sixty handcarts left in 1859; ten trains, 301 wagons, 2091 people, and sixty-five handcarts in 1860; fourteen trains, 635 wagons, and 3283 people in 1861; and, thirteen trains, 647 wagons, and 5031 people in 1862. The following year, 1863, the last train to depart from Florence left on August 14. Captained by Samuel White it consisted of forty wagons and 300 people, making the total for that year twelve trains, 584 wagons, and 3625 people. The total number of Mormon Pioneer companies to leave from Kanessville, Winter Quarters, Florence, or nearby areas in the period from 1847-1863 was 116 companies, 6815 wagons, and 47,000 people.<sup>2</sup>

With the departure of the last Mormon trains an era in the life of Florence came to a close. The town, founded on the old Mormon site grew rapidly for a time and approached

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<sup>1</sup>Morton, II, 134.

<sup>2</sup>Olson, "The Mormons." Olson does not list the figures for Iowa City departures where the ill-fated handcart expedition of 1856 made up.



3000 population. By 1860 approximately 1156 persons were listed as Florence residents and, significantly, there was a total of 118 unoccupied buildings. Most of them were houses; some were offices and storehouses. Many of the occupations listed by the residents were farmers, construction workers or laborers.<sup>1</sup> Most of the latter were probably holdovers from the bustling days of the late fifties, but by 1870 many more had departed. The 1870 census listed 395 residents.<sup>2</sup>

Contributing to Florence's aborted growth was the loss of the capital, which they had briefly cherished, the loss of the railroad crossing, the failure to construct the bridge, and the collapse of the bank. The hopes of the eager Florence speculators had been dashed by circumstances beyond their control. The Mormon migration had helped her thrive for a few years, but Florence settled back into a long period of inactivity and declining and then very slowly growing population. It was nearly a century later that it really began to expand and the residents got their treasured bridge, but by that time they had long lost their identity and had become a suburb of Omaha, Nebraska.

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<sup>1</sup>United States Census for 1860, Florence Precinct in the County of Douglas, Nebraska Territory, pp. 58-89.

<sup>2</sup>Mimeographed Monograph, Box 1, MSS205, NSHS.

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## OMAHA CITY HALL

Drawer of Florence, Nebraska records.