**Omaha History Timeline**

**Pre-1854**

**To Highlight: Early Explorers, Native Indians, Trading Posts, Winter Quarters for the Mormons**

**Pre-19th century**

Bands from the Pawnee, Otoe, and Sioux nations alternatively occupy the land now comprising Omaha as a hunting area.

**Early 19th century**

The Omaha nation uses the land now comprising Omaha as a hunting area.

**c. 1775** Omahas, numbering 3000-4000, built a village called “Ton won tonga”, or “Big Village” near present-day Homer, Nebraska. This was the village of Black Bird, the most famous of the early Omaha chiefs. Under Black Bird, the Omahas were a powerful military force and wielded enormous influence. Their location along the Missouri River gave them a key position as a “gatekeeper” for the French fur traders. “Omaha” means “those going against the wind or current,” or “Upriver People.” It sometimes is interpreted as “above all others on a stream.”

**c. 1777** Fur trapping for the white man’s trade bec ame economically important to the Omaha nation. French traders became trade partners.

**1800** Spain returned the Louisiana Territory to France. The land later known as “Nebraska” was part of the Louisiana Territory. The Omahas fell victim to a smallpox epidemic that decimated the tribe and destroyed its power in northeastern Nebraska. Two-thirds of the tribe perished, including Black Bird, their powerful, self-appointed chief.

**1802** A second smallpox epidemic severely reduced the population of the Omaha tribe.

**1803** The United States purchased the Louisiana Territory from France for $15 million under the terms of the Treaty of Paris. The 830,000 square miles of territory doubled the size of the United States for three cents an acre. Under this treaty, Nebraska became the property of the United States for the first time.

**1804**

Lewis and Clark and members of the Corps of Discovery camped at Camp White Catfish near present-day Bellevue for five nights beginning July 22. On July 27, William Clark and Reuben Fields came ashore on the west bank of the Missouri River to investigate mysterious earthen mounds close to where 8th and Douglas Streets are today. The mounds may have been of natural origin or the remains of an Otoe Indian village. It has never been determined with any certainty what the mounds were. That night they camped in an area that is Eppley Airfield today. Mosquitoes, heat, and humidity provided a major source of discomfort for the men and their dog, Seaman, during their stay. Lewis and Clark held their first official meeting with the Indians at Council Bluff near the present site of Fort Atkinson/Fort Calhoun on August 3. Their council with the Otoe and Missouria Indians was friendly and successful. After the Council, the Corps of Discovery continued its journey up the Missouri River.

York, a slave of William Clark on the Lewis and Clark expedition, became the first recorded Black person in the area that became Omaha.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition found the “Big Village” of the Omahas near present-day Homer, Nebraska. It was empty because the Indians were on a buffalo hunt. Their number when Lewis and Clark arrived was about 900 to 1500 people, “counting three to five persons per adult male.” The expedition visited the grave of Omaha Chief Black Bird near present-day Decatur, Nebraska on August 11.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition gave a boost to the fur trade and led to the establishment of commercial fur companies. The activities of these companies dominated the history of the region for the next 40 years.

**1808**

Manuel Lisa, a Spaniard-turned-United States citizen, founded an early fur trading company in the region. It was located midway between Fort Atkinson and Ponca Creek.

**c. 1810** The famous chief, Big Elk (Ong-pa-ton-ga), took over the principal leadership of the Omahas around this time. The Omahas met many American fur-trading and exploring expeditions during the early 1800s at the Big Village until wars with the Sauk and Fox drove them away.

**1812** Manuel Lisa built a substantial local fur trading post, also known as Fort Lisa, less than a mile north of Douglas County. From here, Lisa frustrated British-Canadian plans to control parts of the West during the War of 1812. The loyalty of middle Missouri River Indians to Lisa partially checkmated the British.

President James Madison signed a bill that created the Territory of Missouri which included the present state of Nebraska.

**1815**

A treaty of “friendship and peace” was signed between the United States and the Omahas. The Omahas relinquished no land.

**1819** The Western Engineer, the first steamboat to ascend into the waters of the middle Missouri, carried Major Stephen Long and Colonel Henry Atkinson’s 1,100 troops on their way to the mountains. The steamboat’s boilers became clogged with silt, and its engine was no match for the Missouri. The troops spent a miserable winter at Cantonment Missouri (Camp Missouri) in Washington County, immediately north of Douglas County and Omaha until they moved to higher ground to establish Fort Atkinson, which opened in 1820. The Fort would be the first military installation west of the Missouri River and was established to protect early fur trade, river traffic, and Indian relations along the Missouri and its tributaries. Life on the fort relied on agriculture and the care of livestock. Some tribes lived in small camps nearby. It was an active fort until 1827.

The Omaha people moved to the Elkhorn River where they lived until 1834.

**1822-1823**

Joshua Pilcher was a senior partner in the Missouri Fur Company and decided to replace the Lisa Post further south about 8 miles above the Platte on the banks of the Missouri River, located within the boundaries of present-day Bellevue/Fontenelle Forest. According to a letter written by Pilcher, “Initial construction occurred before the onset of winter in the later months of 1822. The post was occupied by the spring of 1823 and Pilcher hired Lucien Fontenelle as manager. The trading post became an important connection between the major fur trade center in St. Louis and the fur trappers who lived in the Rocky Mountains.

Peter Sarpy came to the Bellevue area around 1823 as an employee of the American Fur Company. He would later establish a new post on the east side of the river called Trader’s Point. There he established a ferry system to transport people and goods back and forth across the river.

**1824** Jean Pierre Cabanne's Trading Post was established for the American Fur Company owned by John Jacob Astor. The post, is two-and-one-half miles south of Fort Lisa at the mouth of Ponca Creek. This became the most celebrated post in the region, and Cabanne remained there until 1833.

**1825** T.B. Roye (or Royce) established a stockade and a trading post on the Omaha plateau on or near the block later formed by Dodge Street and Capitol Avenue, Ninth and Tenth Streets. Jesuit missionary Father Pierre-Jean De Smet referred to him as a noted trader who was probably “the first white man who built the first cabin on the beautiful plateau where now stands the flourishing City of Omaha.

**1828** Lucien Fontenelle became the owner of the Bellevue trading post when the Missouri Fur Company disbanded.

**1832** Lucien Fontenelle sold his Bellevue trading post to the Office of Indian Affairs. Fontenelle moved a short distance south where he built a new home and trading post which he operated until he died in 1840.

Headquarters of the Indian Agency for the Omaha, Pawnee, Otoe, and Missouria opened on the site of the old Pilcher-Fontenelle trading post at Bellevue. They operated as such for about seven years. Major John Dougherty was the agent until he resigned in 1839.

**1833** The steamer Yellowstone made its second trip up the Missouri River. On board were naturalist Prince Alexander Philip Maximilian von Wied, and Swiss-born artist Karl Bodmer. The German prince wrote detailed diaries of his two-year tour of North America, and Bodmer produced hundreds of paintings and drawings. Together they left an incredible record of the land and the people. Bodmer’s work is on display at the Joslyn Art Museum.

**1840** Peter Sarpy, fur trapper and trader, took over Lucien Fontenelle’s trading post at Bellevue upon the death of Fontenelle. In 1841 Peter Sarpy completed construction of a new building to house the Bellevue Indian Agency for $1,249.20. The new structure was in use for about 15 years after which the four tribes it served were housed on reservations. The reservation for the Omaha tribe was established in present-day Thurston County. The Otoe and Missouria tribes were located in present-day Gage County, and the Pawnee settled on their reservation in Nance County.

**1846**

Chief Big Elk and the Omaha Indians permitted approximately 4,000 Mormons to establish Winter Quarters in 1846-47 at present-day Florence on their way from Nauvoo to Utah. 359 die and are buried in what is now called the Mormon Pioneer Cemetery. It was a severe winter, and many more lives would have been lost had it not been for the food and other assistance from the Indians. The area became the first white settlement in the Nebraska Territory.

**1842**

Lt. John C. Frémont, having explored the Platte River country with 27 trappers (mostly French) and frontiersmen, including scout Kit Carson, sold his mules and government wagons at auction in Bellevue. On this mapping trip, Frémont used the Otoe word Nebrathka to designate the Platte River. Platte is from the French word for “flat”, the translation of Ne-brath-ka meaning “land of flat waters”. The word was applied to the Kansas-Nebraska Territory Act of 1853, which passed Congress in 1854.

**1844**

The Omahas abandoned Ton won tonga for the last time and relocated their village on Papillion Creek eight miles west of Bellevue. They numbered about 1,300 at this time. Their

settlement there near the Indian Agency continued for the next ten years.

For the first time, the name “Nebraska” was used in an official capacity by William Wilkins, then U.S. Secretary of War.

**1846**

Mormons, led by Brigham Young, arrived at the Missouri River in June, and by September they established Winter Quarters on the site of present-day Florence. Approximately 4,000 Mormons spent the winter of 1846-1847 here based on an agreement with Big Elk and the Omaha Indians. Winter Quarters was the site of the first white settlement within the current limits of Douglas County. The Florence Mill was built and survives today.

The Reverend Edmund McKinney and S.M. Irvin arrived in Bellevue to establish a permanent mission for the tribes of eastern Nebraska. They were sent to the Bellevue area by the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. Construction of the Otoe and Omaha Mission House was begun the following year and was completed in 1848. It served as a boarding school for local Indian children for seven years before tribes relocated to reservations after Nebraska was declared a territory.

**1847**

Even though the Mormons raised a crop and shared the produce of their fields and gardens with the Indians as they had agreed to do, the activity destroyed so much timber land that the game was driven away, and the Omaha chiefs complained to their agent, John Miller. The Mormons were then ordered to vacate Omaha country. Subsequently, thousands of them left the Winter Quarters and the Missouri Valley lands of the Omaha and Pottawatomi tribes for a new home in the Great Salt Lake Valley. Those who did not go west with the main body recrossed the Missouri and settled in the Pottawatomi country in the bluffs and south to Kanesville and Glenwood. Winter Quarters was abandoned.

**1849**

Rumors of gold in California had been confirmed and the established Mormon Train became a popular route for thousands of hopeful miners.

**1853**

William D. Brown established the Lone Tree ferry boat landing. The site was a few miles south of the old Winter Quarters on the Omaha side of the Missouri River (near the foot of First and Davenport Streets, just north of the Interstate 480 Bridge that now links Omaha and Council Bluffs). The Missouri River today is some two blocks east of the landing site. Its channel has been changed since 1853, either by nature’s floods or by the actions of the Army Corp of Engineers. Brown owned and operated the Lone Tree Ferry, a flat boat propelled by manpower.

William D Brown’s vision was to find a town across from Kanesville (Council Bluffs). Brown and two associates, Thomas and William Allen, rowed across the Missouri and took credit for staking the first claim in what was to become Omaha. He convinced 12 Kanesville businessmen that the Omaha plateau was an ideal spot for a city. This group founded the Council Bluffs and Nebraska Ferry Company, and the ferry company was chartered by the State of Iowa in July.

The owners of the Council Bluffs and Nebraska Ferry Company named the new town “Omaha City.” Omaha is ‘borrowed’ from the Siouan (Omaha and Ponca) languages of the Omaha people of Nebraska and the Ponca people of Oklahoma and Nebraska who spoke the same tongue with minimal differences. It means “those going against the wind or current.”

On November 15, 1853, Alfred D. Jones staked his claim in the Nebraska Territory, which he claimed entitled him to the honor of being called the pioneer squatter and first settler. Claim was named Park Wild, the area today is Seventh Avenue between Pierce and Pine. When Omaha Indians asked him, through their agent Mr. Hefler, to leave he established a Post Office. He applied for the establishment of a post office through J.D. Test of Council Bluffs and on May 6, 1854, was named the first Postmaster.

Kanesville, Iowa was renamed Council Bluffs.

The first railroad surveying party to reach Council Bluffs arrived. About this time, survey parties representing Chicago railroad lines and headed by Grenville Dodge, one of the country’s first railroad engineers, started detailed studies of a route through Nebraska. A.D. Jones, Thomas and William Allen rowed across the Missouri in a leaky raft to stake the first claims in what would become Omaha.

Big Elk, the last full-blooded Chief of the Omaha Tribe, died. A famous and influential leader, Big Elk is buried at Bellevue Cemetery, 13th Avenue and Lord Boulevard.

Hadley D. Johnson of Council Bluffs was chosen as a delegate to Congress in an informal election held at Sarpy’s trading post in Bellevue. Johnson went to Congress with specific instructions to work for the establishment of a new territory west of the Missouri River.

James Comley Mitchell had the Winter Quarters area surveyed with the intention of buildi a town on the site of the former Mormon settlement. The new town was laid out in the fall, and resettlement began almost immediately.

**1854–99**

**Highlights: Building Omaha’s Infrastructure, Major Employers -Railroad and Stockyards, Immigrants, Education, Trans-Mississippi Exposition, Transportation Center**

**Omaha’s Economics – 1854-1899**

1854 – Omaha’s central location plays role in economic success.

1857 – National Drepesss Called Panic of 1857. Six of eight of Omaha’s banks close. Omaha’s printed money becomes worthless.

1858-1880 – Omaha becomes an outfitting steamboat and freighting center for prospectors and settlers.

1872- Union Pacific Bridge guarantees Omaha’s future in transportation.

1883- Stockyard Co. created insuring Omaha’s growth in Agri-business

1880-92- General prosperity in the United States. Omaha has tremendous growth, becoming a commercial transportation and distribution center. Real Estate boom.

1893- National Depression called Panic of ’93 stops Omaha’s expansion.

1894-1900- Period of recession but Omaha’s civic leaders acquire 1994 State Fair, create Ak-Sar-Ben and the Trans-Mississippi exhibition to keep Omaha in good economic condition.

1898- Trans-Mississippi Exposition

**1854**

Under new pressures created by passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, most of the land in eastern Nebraska (about 4,000,000 acres) was ceded by the Omaha Indians to become part of the public domain for 18.5 cent an acre. The first signature on the treaty was that of Chief White Horse, also known as Logan Fontenelle (Shangaska). Other Omaha Chief signers were Yellow Smoke (So-Da-Nah-Ze), Little Chief (Ah-He-Gin-Gah), Village Maker (Tah-Wah-Gah-Ha), Joseph LaFlesche (Iron Eye – Esta-Ma-Za), Standing Hawk (Gra-Tah-Nah-Je), and Noise (Wah-No-Ke-Ga). The Omahas reserved about 300,000 acres for themselves on a reservation that is a portion of their ancestral lands in present-day Thurston County, Nebraska. On April 17, 1854, the treaty was signed by President Franklin Pierce.

The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act granted territorial status to Kansas and Nebraska. The Territorial Legislature subsequently created Omaha City and Douglas County. The land west of the Missouri River was opened to settlement. President Franklin Pierce signed the Kansas-Nebraska bill into law on May 30 and appointed Francis Burt of South Carolina as the Territorial Governor.

Douglas and Dodge Streets in Omaha are named for two United States senators who were prominent in passage of the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act – Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois and Augustus Caesar (A.C.) Dodge of Iowa.

The Council Bluffs and Nebraska Ferry Company hired Council Bluffs surveyor Alfred D. Jones to survey Omaha City. The original town plat consisted of 320 blocks, each 264 feet square. All the streets were made 100 feet in width, except for Capitol Avenue and 21st Street, which were 120 feet wide. The boundaries of the town were the Missouri River to the east, 23rd Street to the west, Nicholas Street to the north, and William Street to the south. He completed the survey for the new town on July 4, 1854.

Several families from Council Bluffs celebrated the founding of “Omaha City” at a 4th of July picnic. Men and women boarded their wagons and crossed the river aboard William Brown’s ferry to gather on the high point of the plateau, now known as Capitol Hill (site of Central High School at 20th and Dodge Streets).

Omaha City, the first permanent settlement of white people in what is now Douglas County, was designated the Territorial Capitol on December 24. Originally, Douglas County included Bellevue.

In 1854 the population of Nebraska Territory was 2,732 residents. Douglas County, including “Omaha City”, had 645 residents.

The Omaha Township Claim Association was founded. Its rules provided for the protection of all holdings up to 320 acres, with the understanding that no member could own more than 80 acres of timber.

Thomas Allen for the Council Bluffs and Nebraska Ferry Company built the first house in Omaha at 12th and Jackson Streets. William P. “Billy” (later known as “Uncle Billy”) and Rachel Snowden became the first Omaha settlers when they moved into the one-room log cabin. They soon operated it as a hotel named the Saint Nicholas where for a few pennies a night you were given the privilege of rolling up your blanket next to your neighbor on the dirt floor. The cabin was located near the edge of the high plateau selected for “Omaha City” and early residents often carved caves on its south bank, known as Mole Hill, to live for a day or two while their cabins were being built. The site of the original log cabin is now the Fairmont Creamery building.

By the Fall of 1854, Omaha was comprised of 20 houses and two large “shacks” which serve as combined hotels, saloons and stores. A steam sawmill, a few stores and boarding houses and a two-story brick building as the potential “State House” were constructed within months of the founding date. The two-story structure, the only brick building in Omaha, was built on Ninth Street between Farnam and Douglas Streets by the Council Bluffs and Nebraska Ferry Company, as a meeting house for “public purposes.”

The first non-Native American born in Omaha was Margaret Ferry who was born in October 1854 the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Ferry. However, prior to her birth, William Nebraska Reeves was born in the area called Park Wilde but it was not yet part of Omaha City.

Alfred D. Jones was appointed the first postmaster of Omaha by President Franklin Pierce. He picked up the mail in Council Bluffs and using his hat as a pouch, distributed mail around the city. The first post office was the home of the postmaster, William Wyman located at 12th and Harney Street. A note that Jones Street was not named for him, but Iowa Junior Senator George Wallace Jones.

Francis Burt, the first Territorial Governor of Nebraska, reached Bellevue on October 7. In poor health at the time, he nevertheless took the oath of office on the 16th and died of pneumonia two days later. Territorial Secretary Thomas B. Cuming, who came from Iowa, assumed the duties of Acting Governor on October 19. The next appointee was Mark Izard. Today the streets, all in a row, Burt, Cuming, Izard remain. The next governor, W.A. Richardson, did not have a street named after him.

The Omaha Arrow, printed in the office of the Council Bluffs Bugle, appeared in Omaha. Joseph E. Johnson and John W. Pattison were editors. The Arrow was an enthusiastic advocate for the advancement of interests in Omaha. 12 issues were published.

The first sermon in Omaha was preached by Rev. Peter Cooper, a Methodist Episcopal minister from Council Bluffs, at the St. Nicholas Hotel (and home of Uncle Bill and Rachel Snowden), 12th and Jackson Streets, on August 13. His audience totaled 25 people.

The Florence Land Company was organized, and the town was resurveyed. The new survey laid out 270 blocks. The town was named “Florence” by J.C. Mitchell, a town founder, in honor of Florence Kilbourn, Mrs. Mitchell’s grandchild by a previous marriage.

Dr. George L. Miller was the first doctor to be located in Omaha. He did not practice long because the pioneers were young and healthy. In 1856 Dr. A Chappell came to Omaha and took over Dr. Miller’s practice. He was one of the incorporators of the Nebraska Medical Society in 1857.

Milton Tootle and James Jackson opened one of the first mercantile houses, Tootle and Jackson at 10th and Farnam Streets. Stock consisted of staple merchandise, dry goods, boots, shoes, and crockery. In 1887 Thomas Kilpatrick purchased Tootle and Jackson for $250,000 and it became the Kilpatrick-Koch Dry Goods Company. Annual sales averaged over $1 million. Trade extended to Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Idaho, Utah and Colorado.

**1855**

The first Territorial Legislature convened in Omaha in January and was comprised of 26 members in the House of Representatives and 13 members in the Council. The Territorial State House was located on 9th Street between Farnam and Douglas.

Acting Governor Thomas B. Cuming signed the bill locating the territorial seat of government in Omaha on February 22, 1855. His duties were assumed by Mark Izard of Arkansas who arrived in Omaha as the new Territorial Governor.

The first Governor’s ball held in Omaha honored Governor Izard. A primitive supper was served consisting of coffee with brown sugar and no milk, dried apple pie and sandwiches made of bread and bacon. The party was held at the one-story City Hotel where supper was passed around since there were no tables. Guests danced to the music of one fiddler. It promised to be a “skittish” evening since the dance floor was slippery from ice that formed after the floor had been watered down for cleaning.

The Territorial Supreme Court was organized in Omaha, but no business was transacted.

Once Omaha was named the territorial capital in January, lots in town were gobbled up by speculators as well as serious homesteaders.

A special census showed the population of Nebraska Territory was 4,491 white inhabitants. Of that number, Douglas County had 1,028 residents with about 200 in Omaha, 200 in Bellevue, and about 300-400 in Florence. The other 400 residents were scattered throughout the countryside.

Julia Adelaide Goodwill opened Omaha’s first private school on July 1, 1855, at the State House when the legislature was not in session. She enrolled 40 students of various ages.

John Logan and Caroline M. Mosier were the first couple to be married in Omaha.

Omaha’s first Catholic Mass was celebrated on or about May 15th in the court room of the old State House on Ninth Street between Farnam and Douglas. This was the first church service celebrated in Nebraska according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Western Exchange Fire and Marine Insurance Company, the first financial institution in Nebraska, opened for business in Omaha.

F.A. Schneider founded Johnson Hardware, one of Omaha’s oldest businesses. Its axe head symbol still hangs outside its door today at 1201 Pacific Street. During its earliest years, it outfitted wagon trains, the U.S. Cavalry at Fort Omaha, the Western Stage Coach Company and supplied hardware to install the Western Telegraph lines across the country.

The first session of the District Court was held in Bellevue, then part of Douglas County. The Territorial Legislature incorporated the village of Bellevue the same year.

The town of Florence was incorporated.

N. P. Dodge Company, founded in 1855, is the oldest family-owned business in the state and the Middle West. The first Nathan Phillipps Dodge, barely in his teens, crossed the Missouri River in 1854 in the Florence area to join his elder brother Grenville Dodge and homesteaded on the Elkhorn River in Nebraska Territory, near today’s West Dodge Road. The two brothers lived in and surveyed land in both Iowa and Nebraska and selected sites for Eastern investors. N.P. Dodge later became the first president of Council Bluffs Savings Bank and Grenville became a well-respected Civil War general and would be the chief engineer in laying the Union Pacific’s Transcontinental Railroad.

A party of Sioux killed Logan Fontenelle, famous Omaha Chief, in present day Boone County. His body was returned to Bellevue for burial near his home in what is now Fontenelle Forest.

The Omaha Indians relocated to a reservation on the bank of the Missouri River about twelve miles from the present town of Walthill in Thurston County.

The first recorded murder in the area took place in Bellevue.

The First Methodist Church was established in Omaha on South 13th Street.

Herman Kountze builds a four-story, French Second Empire, home on South 10th Street near present-day Forest Avenue. It was one of the largest structures in Omaha at the time and was named Forest Hill. South 10th Street, due to the proximity of downtown using horses and buggies would become Omaha’s first Gold Coast area. Other notable Omahans would build their homes on South 10th.

Milton Roger founded a hardware house on the north side of Farnam between 9th and 10th Streets. The first stock consisted of tinware and stoves.

Sally Bayne is acknowledged to be the first free Black settler in Omaha, arriving sometime in 1855. Beyond that, her life story is unknown. Maybe she is the person mentioned in an Omaha Star article in 1975, with information furnished by the Great Plains Black History Museum: "The first Black to live in Omaha was the servant of territorial governor Mark W. Izard. They both appeared at the governor's inaugural ball held in late February 1955."

**1856**

Bird B. Chapman, second Congressional delegate from Nebraska started the The Nebraskian, the first newspaper printed in Omaha, which was a major source for news about Omaha and the Nebraska Territory. It was published until 1865 when The Herald started publishing.

The Council Bluffs & Nebraska Ferry company donates a lot on Eighth Street between Harney and Howard Streets, for a Catholic Church. The church is named St. Mary’s. Irish immigrant, Father James Cavenaugh, was the first officiant.

The First Congregational Church was incorporated.

The Trinity Episcopal congregation was organized by a group of local leaders whose last names were Cuming, Woolworth, Hanscom, Bemis and Poppleton to name a few of the founding members.

The Mormon handcart brigade began with Mormon men, women, and sometimes children pulling or pushing heavy carts of trail provisions and personal belongings from Florence, Nebraska on the first leg of their long journey to Salt Lake City, Utah. Handcarts, two-wheeled carts pulled by emigrants instead of draft animals, were a faster, easier, and cheaper means of bringing European converts to Salt Lake City. From 1856 to 1860, nearly 3000 Mormons, with 653 carts and 50 supply wagons, traveling in ten different companies, made the trek over the Mormon Pioneer Trail to Salt Lake City. While not the first to use handcarts, the Mormons were the only group to use them extensively. Each handcart held about 500 pounds of goods.

The Florence Town Company was organized, and Florence was chartered as a city. Efforts to secure the terminus of the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad and the territorial seat of government failed. Much of the town’s business activity hinged on the fact that Florence was the starting point for Mormons continuing their migration to Salt Lake City.

The Bank of Florence was built at 8502 N. 30th Street. The Florence Historical Foundation owns the building in 2024. It includes the original bank vault shipped by steamboat from Western Pennsylvania. In pre-Civil War days, it printed its own money.

The first regular election for county officers in Douglas County was held.

The Government Survey of public lands in Douglas County was completed.

The first Douglas County Court House located on Farnam near 16th Street opened and stayed in service until 1885.

Edward and John A. Creighton arrived in Omaha. Edward amassed a fortune in cattle raising, freighting, banking, real estate, and the telegraph. Youngest brother John followed suit, adding the areas of mining and retailing. At the time of their deaths in 1874 and 1907 respectively, each man died the wealthiest person in Nebraska.

E.L. Eaton opened the first photography studio in Omaha on May 1st.

The first Odd Fellows Lodge in Douglas County was organized in Omaha. It was the second lodge of that order in Nebraska.

The Reverend Joseph Barker, Sr. and family arrived in Omaha from Ohio to seek their fortune in real estate.

In January, suffragette Amelia Jenks Bloomer of Council Bluffs spoke to the Nebraska Territorial Legislation in Omaha City on women’s rights. She was the first woman to address the Nebraska Territorial Legislature.

The town of Saratoga was founded within the boundaries of present-day North Omaha. Located between Locust and Fort Streets, Carter Lake and 36th Streets. Sulfur springs that were located here were believed to have curative powers. Taylor G. Goodwill of New York was involved in the organization of Saratoga and its name probably comes from the famous mineral springs in his home state. Saratogo’s decline began with the Panic of 1857. Became the site of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition. By the turn of the century Omaha had absorbed Saratoga.

Moses F. Shinn platted Prospect Hill Cemetery.

James W. Woolworth arrived in Omaha at age 27 to become Omaha’s first city attorney as well as the first chancellor of the new Episcopalian diocese.

East Omaha is informally annexed to Omaha.

Erastus Beadle, noted later for being the publisher of dime novels, settled on a farm in southwest Omaha. A brook laden with rocks ran through his farm. After a few episodes with mosquitoes, he became disappointed, sold the farm and returned to New York. The farm was in the area of a present golf course and shopping center named Rock Brook.

Morning Star Clothing House was started by Vincent Burkley, a native of Germany, on Farnam Street. It was the first clothing store in Omaha. A tailoring department was included in the story. The store failed in 1857.

Meyer Hellman, a native of Germany, established the M. Hellman and Company clothing store in 1856 on the northwest corner of 13th and Farnam Streets. He continued the retail clothing traded until he died in 1892. At the time it was the oldest clothing establishment west of the Missouri river.

Bill Lee, who arrived in 1856, opened Omaha's first barber shop in the Douglas House at 1301 Harney St. He was the first Black businessman to advertise in the Omaha Weekly Nebraskian newspaper. He had a part in shaming a pair of horse thieves in October that year. Not the brightest duo, they twice attempted to sell stolen horses to the Pawnees near Elkhorn. Frontier justice prevailed and the men were escorted to the ferry to Iowa, their heads left half-shaven by Lee and with the welts from 39 or 49 lashes. Stealing horses was a serious crime in the 1850s and half-shaven heads signified the mark of a horse thief.

Phillip King arrived in 1856. "He was well known and highly esteemed by all old residents, and 25 years ago was well known to every newspaper man in the city. King was the man who turned the hand press that printed the first edition of the Omaha Republican," the Bee wrote in 1888. He was said to have $25,000 in real estate holdings, a goodly amount for the time, at the time of his death.

Also in town in 1856, were six Blacks who worked at the new Hamilton House hotel at 14th and Douglas Streets. They had been the servants of manager H.M. Judson at his home in New York state.

**1857**

Omaha suffered from the “hard times of 1857”, but growth was revived after the discovery of gold in 1858. The find wasnear Pike’s Peak, at the time in Nebraska Territory, which extended west to the Rocky Mountains.

Omaha City was granted a charter of incorporation by the legislature that was signed into law by Governor Izard. Date of incorporation was February 2, and the city was officially organized and established on March 5 by the elected mayor and council. The word “City” was dropped from Omaha’s name. The charter provided for a mayor-council form of government.

Omaha held its first city election on March 2, 1857. Jesse Lowe was elected Omaha’s first mayor. He served until 1858. The first meeting of the Omaha City Council was held on March 5, 1857. The first ordinance was from A.D. Jones to establish wards and ward boundaries. It divided Omaha into three wards, with the council composed of three members from each ward. Key issues at the time were fire protection and animal regulation.

The United States Land Office opened. Jesse Lowe made the first entry for land for a tract of 320 acres within the city limits of 1857.

Fifty steamboats ran regularly between Omaha and other points. Principal steamboat agents were John R. Porter and H.P. Duel. They were in the business until 1867.

Two to seven steamers arrived and departed a week. Each arrival was quite an important event. There would be a grand rush of nearly all the people in town to the landing place. Customary in those times that while a boat was unloading its freight, the citizens would have a grand dance on board. The first boat of the spring was considered a great event as it would bring fresh supplies of goods of every description to replenish the stocks of the merchants. By the 1870s there was such a demand for goods by locals and especially by those going west to homestead, seeking gold or other glittering opportunities, that merchants didn’t have time to transport their wares to their stores, and often sold them at the dock.

Omaha had a population of 1,500 residents, and lots sold for as much as $4,000. As the year ended though, the town was seriously affected by the financial panic sweeping the country. Banks and businesses closed, real estate values declined, and many of Omaha’s most industrious and talented citizens left town for opportunities elsewhere.

The Omaha City Council adopted a resolution to purchase a wagon, ladders and other equipment to form a fire company, but no action was taken. The national Panic of 1857 devastated city finances.

The Kountze Brothers Bank was founded on December 10 as a private bank by immigrant brothers Herman and Augustus Kountze. It was in a small frame building at 12th and Farnam. In 1863, it was reorganized under a national charter and adopted a new name, the First National Bank of Omaha, the oldest national bank west of the Missouri River.

The first Masonic Lodge in Douglas County and the third in Nebraska was organized in Omaha.

The United States Express Company opened the first express office in Omaha. J. Shepard was the agent.

Florence School began classes in the Land Office Building. Its first school bus was a horse-drawn wagon. A new Florence School was built at 36th and King Streets in 1890.

Sarpy County was cut off from Douglas by an act of the Nebraska Territorial Legislature. Sarpy County was named for Peter A. Sarpy, who had been in charge of the trading post in Bellevue. Bellevue was named the county seat for Sarpy County. Douglas County now had its permanent boundaries.

The Rev. George P. Bergen organized the Presbyterians living in Omaha. The first house of worship was located on the northwest corner of Dodge and 17th Streets.

The first local stagecoach started in 1857. Three times a week at 2 p.m. the stagecoach left downtown Council Bluffs and rode the ferry across the Missouri to Omaha. Later in the afternoon it would reverse its route.

Scriptown, located on the north between Nicholas and Locust Streets and on the west between 23rd and 30th Street annexed to the city. Lots in Scriptown were given to the members of the territorial legislature who voted for Omaha as the territorial capital.

The Times newspaper was founded by William W. Wyman with its first issue on June 11, 1857. It was a weekly Democratic paper.

**1858**

The legislature met in the second Territorial Capitol at 20th and Dodge for the first time in January. During the same month, however, members of both houses voted to adjourn to Florence after a fight over the issue of moving the territorial capital out of Omaha. A majority of 24 of 35 representatives and nine of thirteen council members met for 40 days and nights in Florence before returning home to the unfinished Capitol building on the hill where Central High School is today.

The first public sale of land took place in the Omaha area.

German Protestants with the help of pioneer Lutheran missionary Rev. Henry W. Huhns organize Evangelical Lutheran Church, the first Lutheran Church in Omaha. The church’s first meeting place was 13th and Douglas Streets. It later became the Kountze Memorial Lutheran Church.

The Herndon House Hotel was built and became Omaha’s social center. Manager James T. Allen became famous as its host. From 1870 to 1912, the Union Pacific Railroad used the building as its headquarters.

Douglas County’s first Court House was completed at a cost of $40,000. It stood between 15th and 16th Streets, from Douglas to Farnam, in an area once known as Washington Square.

The Douglas County Agricultural Society was organized and held its first fair at Saratoga, a little town halfway between Omaha and Florence, on land bounded by Laird and Boyd Streets, and 16th and 20th Streets. For 25 cents, fairgoers could view prize livestock and vegetables and watch horse racing. In the race featuring female equestrians, Miss Augusta Estabrook, daughter of General Experience Estabrook, won a side saddle and caught the eye of a local reporter, Colonel R.C. Clowry, who later became president of the Western Union Telegraph Company.

The body of Alonzo F. Salisbury was buried in Cedar Hills Cemetery at 32nd and Parker. His grave was the first in “Omaha’s Pioneer Cemetery”, renamed Prospect Hill by Byron Reed in 1865, where many other Omaha pioneers are buried. Names such as Hanscom, Hitchcock, Kountze, Lake, Metz, Millard, Poppleton and Redick are common. Today 15,000 burials are recorded including military burials from Omaha Barracks, later known as Fort Omaha. Veterans dating back to the War of 1812 are buried there, although most did not die in armed conflicts.

Rev. William Leech came to Omaha as a Baptist missionary. Services were held in the old state house.

The four-story brick hotel, the Herndon House, was completed at Ninth and Farnam Streets. It was the first hotel of any size in Omaha. In 1869 it became the Union Pacific Headquarters.

The Western Stage Company had a great rivalry with the steamboats to catch passengers needed to go where trains were not available. Passengers could travel from Chicago into Iowa by rail, then they could go by stage as far west as Fort Kearny. Each coach held nine to 14 passengers and was pulled with four or six horses which could cover 115 miles a day.

The Omaha Republican newspaper began on May 5. Edward F. Schneider and Harrison J. Brown were the founders. Intended to promote the interests of the Republican Party.

A one-story brick structure at 715 S. 12th Street, a former utility building in the late 1850s, is said to be the oldest building in downtown Omaha still standing. The oldest building in Omaha is the Florence Mill built in 1846 for the Mormon Winter Quarters. The Florence Bank building built in 1856 vies for the next record.

**1859**

The Territorial Capitol Building at 20th and Dodge was completed.

The Overland Stage Company established the first regular mail route between Fremont and Omaha.

The Omaha Public Schools System, the first public school system in Douglas County, was established on a permanent basis. Howard Kennedy was hired as superintendent at an annual salary of $1000. In November, he opened a school for all grades in the old Territorial Capitol building on Ninth Street between Douglas and Farnam with five teachers.

Omaha became the outfitting center for Colorado gold seekers headed for Pikes Peak. During the height of the Colorado gold rush, 268 steamboats arrived at Omaha between March and November.

The Illinois U.S. Representative Abraham Lincoln visited Council Bluffs. From a high bluff, he viewed the booming site of Omaha City. In 1863, as President, he selected the area to be the start of the railroad to the Pacific. A monument of his visit is on the bluffs overlooking Omaha. Upon completion of the transcontinental railroad, Council Bluffs claimed the starting point rightfully should be in Iowa, rather than Nebraska. Iowa won in both the state and nation’s Supreme Courts. The Union Pacific acknowledged the ruling by building the roundhouse in Council Bluffs but erecting the stately headquarters building in Omaha.

Frederick Krug and Rudolph Selzer established the first brewery in Omaha and Nebraska in a small frame building at 10th and Farnam. He produced 12 to 18 barrels of beer a week, most of which were sold to the Mormons in Florence. He delivers the kegs to surrounding saloons with a wheelbarrow.

Having worshipped for a few years in private homes, the Trinity Episcopal congregation built its first place for formal worship at 9th and Farnam Streets.

Douglas County Commissioners purchased 170 acres of land where the Field Club is today between 36th and 42nd Streets, Center Street to Pacific, for the purpose of establishing a county poor farm. Although the poor farm was located there, a long court battle ensued regarding the county’s obligation to pay for the property. The matter was settled by a ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court in November 1885, and the county made final payment for the land in July 1886.

Frederick F. and John Drexel started Drexel and Stone Company. Frederick sold the Drexel Farm in South Omaha, and it became the first Livestock Exchange location for the new stockyards. Frederick was a stone contractor, county commissioner and legislator. He built a stone home at 1248 S. 10th Street that the Christ Child Society later used. In 1884 Alfred Foll became a partner in their stone business followed by J. Harte. They did work on the Federal Building (now Residence Inn).

**1860**

Edward Creighton, a telegraph pioneer, completed the first telegraph line linking Omaha with St. Louis and the outside world. It was called the Missouri & Western Stebbins’ Line. Telegraph companies employed nearly 200 people, received more than 4,000 messages daily and upwards of 50,000 words of press report. In 1860 and message of 10 words from Omaha to New York cost $5.65.

Omaha’s population was 1,883. The population of Nebraska Territory was 29,000, and rural Douglas County had about 400 residents.

The 1860 census recorded 20 African Americans living in Omaha - nine men, six women and five children. The wealthiest family were the Watsons, Harry and Mary, and their two children. Harry's listed occupation was distiller. The value of their real estate was $3,000 and of their personal property was worth $1,000.

As many as 700 wagons of immigrants passed through Omaha daily on their way west.

The Omaha Daily Telegraph began publication.

Omaha patrons saw their first theatrical performance by Julia Dean Hayne at the Herndon House.

The Omaha Fire Department was established when the Pioneer Hook and Ladder Company, No. 1 was officially organized. A one-story, wood frame structure at 210 S. 12th Street between Douglas and Farnam became the city’s first fire station. Dr. Benjamin Stickles was named foreman (that would be captain today). On the northeast corner of 13th and Douglas there stood a church, very close to the fire station, so its bell was used to summon the volunteers. The bell today hangs in the tower of Kountze Memorial Lutheran church at 2650 Farnam Street.

The Omaha-based Nebraskian newspaper quotes the Chicago Times and Herald regarding a slave named "Eliza" who ran away from an Omaha businessman to Chicago and was arrested there under the Fugitive Slave Act. The 1860 Census lists 28,841 residents in the Nebraska Territory, 15 of which were slaves.

In the 1860s, Joanna O’Brien established the first school in Omaha connected with the Catholic Church. It was located south of St. Mary’s Church on Eighth Street. John Rush took charge of the school in 1866.

**1861**

About 400 men from Douglas County, mainly from Omaha and Plattsmouth, in Cass County, formed the First Regiment Nebraska Volunteers to fight for the Union in the Civil War. Their commander was Colonel John M. Thayer of Omaha.

A bill prohibiting slavery in Nebraska was passed by the legislature and vetoed by Governor Samuel Black. Subsequently, the veto was overridden by a vote of ten to three in the Council, and 33 to 3 in the House.

Due to the depression following the Panic of 1857 and the outbreak of the Civil War, the city was unable to support the public schools which were forced to close. Professor Samuel D. Beals opened a private school for all ages and grade levels in the old Territorial Capitol building in April and called it “Omaha High School”. The popularity of the school led to overcrowding which made it necessary to move the school to several locations. Beals closed his schools in 1867.

St. Mary’s Catholic Church built a small parochial school.

Edward Creighton and his crew completed the construction of some 500 miles of telegraph line “as the crow flies” from Julesburg, Colorado to Salt Lake City on October 17. Six days later, builders of the western segment of the line reached Salt Lake City to complete the construction of the nation’s first transcontinental telegraph line. Coast-to-coast telegraph service was put into place in October. Creighton had the assistance of his brother, John Andrew, in his efforts.

Alvin Saunders was appointed Territorial Governor of Nebraska, a post he held until 1867.

**1862**

President Abraham Lincoln signed the Pacific Railroad Act into law on July 1st. It created the Union Pacific Railroad Company and authorized it to build one “continuous railroad and telegraph” line across the continent “to the western boundary of Nevada Territory” with federal assistance. It authorized the President of the United States to fix an eastern terminus for the transcontinental railroad. The new law set September 1862, as the date for the formal organization of the Union Pacific Railroad Company.

President Lincoln signed the Homestead Act into law. It offered 160 acres of free land to any settler who lived on it and made improvements. The Homestead Act led to an increase in the number of pioneers who settled in Nebraska.

Emanuel Lutheran Church was dedicated at 13th and Douglas Streets. The congregation later became Kountze Memorial.

Ben Holladay’s Overland Stage and Express connected Omaha with Denver. Charged $125 for the five-day trip. Eventually, railroads absorbed the stage business, but the stage coach had provided a needed service for transporting both passengers and mail in the interim.

**1863**

President Abraham Lincoln issued an executive order on November 1 that fixed the eastern terminus of the transcontinental railroad on “the eastern bank of the Missouri River, opposite Omaha”, or Council Bluffs. A second executive order on March 7, 1864, was far more ambiguous and led to a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1876.

Thomas C. Durant, vice president of the Union Pacific Railroad, arbitrarily decided that Lincoln meant for the Union Pacific (UP) to begin construction of the transcontinental railroad from Omaha. To demonstrate his company’s determination and to impress investors, he organized a gala groundbreaking celebration in Omaha on December 2 at 6th and Davenport Streets. A crowd of a thousand people from Omaha and Council Bluffs attended the event. Even though UP built its headquarters and a large railcar manufacture and repair facility in Omaha, the mile-one marker for the transcontinental railroad still stands in a huge switching yard in Council Bluffs, Iowa where the roundhouse is located today.

In 1864 the Kountze brothers joined Edward Creighton to establish First National Bank of Omaha at 12th and Farnam Streets. Edward Creighton was president; Herman Kountze, vice president; Augustus Kountze, cashier; and H.W. Yates, assistant cashier. With a capital of $50,000, it succeeded the Kountze Brothers, one of only two banking houses in Omaha at the time. It was the first national bank to be chartered west of the Mississippi under the new National Banking Act of 1863, which introduced federally chartered banks and a national currency backed by government bonds.

Omaha’s first public school building was constructed on the southwest corner of Jefferson Square. It was moved to the corner of 15th and Cass Streets and used as a school until 1878. Then moved to the corner of 22nd and Burt and made into a stable.

Bishop Talbot of the Episcopal Church established Brownell Hall, a college-preparatory school for girls, near 24th Street and Grand Avenue in a town once known as Saratoga. It was the first established institution of higher learning for women in Nebraska.

Cyrus H. Taylor was hanged for the murder of his business partner Isaac N. Neff in the first legal execution of a civilian in Douglas County and Nebraska.

Frederick Krug moved his brewery to a plant at 11th and Jackson Streets and soon occupied the entire block. By the early 1890s, he moved to another plant at 24th and Vinton Streets when he was producing 1,000 barrels of beer each week.

The Storz Brewery is founded in Saratoga along North 16th Street.

**1864**

The men of the First Regiment Nebraska Volunteers returned home to Omaha amid fanfare, a parade, and a banquet at the Capitol. However, most re-enlisted, changed the unit name to the First Nebraska Veteran Volunteer Cavalry, and rode west when word came of a widespread Indian uprising.

Metz Brothers, including Frederick Sr., Frederick Jr., and Charles Metz, purchased a brewery on the corner of Sixth and Leavenworth Streets and started beer production. They steadily grow to produce 30,000 barrels by the 1890s.

The Sisters of Mercy first arrived in Omaha.

**1865**

Peter A. Sarpy, Indian trader and a noted character in early days, died at Plattsmouth, Nebraska.

The Young Men’s Christian Association of Omaha (YMCA) was organized and housed in a two-story building on 12th Street between Farnam and Douglas. Constructed at a cost of $2,600, it had a library and reading room on the first floor and an assembly hall on the second floor.

Dr. George L. Miller’s and Daniel W. Carpenter’s newspaper, the Omaha Daily Herald made its appearance. Offices were on the corner of 13th and Douglas Streets. In 1885 the newspaper consolidated with the Evening World started by Gilbert M. Hitchcock. Through this consolidation, the Omaha World-Herald was formed.

The first track for the Union Pacific Railroad was laid at the ferry landing on the banks of the Missouri River on July 10. By September 22, 10 miles of the road were completed and in use, with materials on hand for 100 additional miles. By the end of the year, track was completed to Fremont. Also in 1865, the railroad’s first locomotive, the “General Sherman”, arrived in Omaha by steamer traveling up the Missouri River from St. Louis. The locomotive was named for one of the major supporters of the railroad.

The first Black church was St. John AME (African Methodist Episcopal), organized as the Colored Methodist Church in a private residence at Ninth and Capitol Streets in 1865. St. John's first pastor was John Hubbard. His son, Phillip, later was pastor during the 1880s.

The Omaha City Council approved the construction of four wells and four cisterns located in the intersections of main streets 13th at Douglas and Harney, Farnam at 12th and 14th, to fight fires. They were used until 1881 when 250 fire hydrants replaced them.

The town of Elkhorn began when the Union Pacific Railroad established Elkhorn Station, a place for getting water, storing supplies, and housing employees. The town was platted the following year.

The Omahas sheltered the Winnebagos and sold them land that was part of their reservation in Nebraska (“Ni-bltha-ska: Land of Flat Waters”). The Winnebagos, who had been unfairly forced out of Minnesota during the Civil War, came to Nebraska from the Crow Creek reservation in South Dakota where they lived unsuccessfully next to their ancient enemies, the Sioux.

In April, Territorial Governor Alvin Saunders went to Washington D.C. to discuss with President Abraham Lincoln his reappointment for four years or Nebraska becoming a state. Upon agreement, the president signed the document appointing Governor Saunders and left for the Ford Theater. It was his last official act.

**1866**

The Department of the Platte of the United States Army was organized with headquarters in Omaha. A military supply depot called The Corral was built at 13th and Webster Streets. Many supplies were purchased from Omaha merchants and all quartermaster, commissary, and paymaster funds went through Omaha banks creating an economic boon for the city.

The First Nebraska Veteran Volunteer Cavalry was mustered out at Omaha after five years of service against the Confederate States and the Plains Indians.

The Omaha National Bank was organized by Ezra Millard, senior member of Millard, Caldwell and Co., a banking house. Ezra Millard was president, and Joseph N. Field was cashier, although he never actually filled the position. In January, 1867, J.H. Millard was appointed cashier. Located on the northwest corner of 14th and Douglas, Omaha National Bank opened with a paid up capital of $50,000.

Andrew J. Simpson received city authorization to purchase a used, hand-pumped fire engine called the Fire King from the city of Davenport, Iowa, for $695. A two-wheeled, hand-pulled hose reel accompanied the Fire King. The Fire King Engine Company, No. 1 was formed to man the apparatus. In August, Simpson became Omaha’s first fire chief over members of both the Pioneer Hook and Ladder Company, No. 1 and the Fire King Engine Company, No. 1.

The Omaha Police Department was organized with four men who were assigned to beats from 8 pm until sunrise. City Marshal “Uncle Billy” Snowden was expected to keep order single-handedly the rest of the time. From 1857 to 1866, United States Marshall B.P. Ranking was the only police officer to disperse mobs, confine prisoners, and give them a hearing.

The Omaha Medical Society was organized.

The first big fire in Omaha occurred on November 8 and resulted in $106,900 in property losses. Nearly everything on the south side of Farnam Street between 13th and 14th Streets was destroyed, including the grocery store of Alfred D. Jones. Arson was suspected.

James G. and Samuel D. Megeath bought the outfit and equipment of the McCoy Distillery in Council Bluffs at a government condemnation sale. Peter E. and Joseph D. Iler and Marsh Kennard were partners in the enterprise. The plant was moved to Omaha, and the business of making alcohol and whisky began.

Omaha’s first city directory was compiled and published by Charles Collins. It contained “a general resident and business directory of the citizens, and an appendix containing a great variety of historical data, statistics and facts”.

**1867**

By the proclamation of President Andrew Johnson, Nebraska became the 37th state of the Union on March 1. The State Government of Nebraska was inaugurated on March 27. The state capital was “stolen” away from Omaha to the nonexistent town of Lincoln. It was felt that it would be a fitting recognition of President Lincoln’s service to the country, to name the new seat of government in his honor, so the capital was moved and the city was named Lincoln. The old capitol building was soon torn down and a high school building was put in its place on Capitol Hill. It was completed in 1872 and known simply as Omaha High School.

Territorial Governor Alvin Saunders signed a bill locating the State Institute for the Deaf and Dumb in Omaha.

In June, Governor David Butler signed a bill passed by the legislature to move the capital from Omaha to Lincoln.

The first Omaha post of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) was organized as a patriotic society of the soldiers who served in the Union Army during the Civil War. Other posts were formed during the next two decades.

The first train on the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad arrived at the Missouri River opposite Omaha, our first direct rail link via Chicago to the East. The railroad used ferries to ship railroad cars across the Missouri River.

The Omaha Horse Railway Company was incorporated by an act of the legislature. Started by many of Omaha’s leading citizens – Ezra Millard, George W. Frost, Alfred Burley, David Butler, A.J. Hanscom, Joel T. Griffen, J.F. Coffman, J.W. Paddock, William Ruth, C.S. Chase, R.A. Bird, Augustus Kountze, George M. O’Brien, E.B. Chandler, John McCormick and O.R. Meridith. First line of rails – Ninth and Farnam to Cuming and 20th Street. Ten cents a ticket, 8 rides for 50 cents. Broke even in 1873. The railway was horse-powered. Four horses per car. Sometimes passengers would have to get out and help on the hills.

St. Philomena Cathedral at 9th and Harney was completed for $50,000. It was furnished with the first pipe organ ever brought to Omaha. The ladies of the parish donated the $4,000 organ. Mary Lucretia Creighton donated a handsome marble altar. The old St. Mary’s Church became a school.

The Trinity Episcopal congregation built a new church at 18th Street and Capitol Avenue and moved from its previous location at 9th and Farnam Streets. However, fire damaged the new structure the following year. Parishioners then built a chapel—a mission church—next to the cathedral which stood in the middle of Capitol Avenue. The chapel became known as “the Church in the Middle of the Street”.

The Academy of Music, Omaha’s first real theater, opened. The two-story, 750-seat theater was located in the center section of the new Caldwell Block on the south side of Douglas between 13th and 14th Streets. Property was later passed to John I. Redick who ran it as a variety theater. It was the headquarters of the Liquor Prohibition Party in 1899.

A three-stall, two-story fire station was built on the southwest corner of 16th and Farnam for $4,241.61. Both companies moved into the new Firemen’s Hall. Andrew J. Simpson continued as fire chief, or chief engineer, until June 1868.

The Central Block on Farnam between 13th and 14th Street, t he Caldwell Block on Douglas between 13th and 14th Street and the Creighton Block on Dodge between 12th and 13th Street were all completed.

In 1867 a telegraph repair man, William Thompson was the sole survivor of an Indian attack on a train at Plum Creek, Nebraska. He was brought to Omaha with is scalp in a water bucket hoping it could be restored on him. Since it could not, he gave it to the doctor. It is now a part of the Omaha Public Library’s special collections.

In 1867 Danish immigrant Hans Peter Sorensen, chose to build a house for his wife and family “way out in the country” at 23rd and Cass, on Capitol Hill. One day his wife came into her dining room to find an Omaha Indian sitting at her table drinking her soup. “Heap good!” he said as he left the house.

**1868**

In 1868, the Federal Government purchased land from Herman Kountze to establish a supply fort about five miles north of Omaha. It was known first as Sherman Barracks, honoring Lt. General William Tecumseh Sherman, then Omaha Barracks and later became Fort Omaha when it was selected as the headquarters for the Department of the Platte. Fort Omaha, located at 30th and Fort Streets appears as it did more than 150 years ago and today is the campus of Metropolitan Community College.

Omaha continued its role as an outfitter for the West as business and industry expanded. The railroads made the city’s future secure. Businesses including mills, bakeries, packing houses, smelters, and machine shops opened.

Official state records were moved from Omaha to Lincoln, the new capital of Nebraska.

The Omaha Gas Company was organized.

Construction began on the horse-drawn Omaha Street Railway. Council Bluffs’ street transportation is inaugurated with a mule car.

A financial compromise between Omaha and Council Bluffs was reached for construction of the Union Pacific Railroad Bridge over the Missouri River.

The first Bohemians or Czech immigrants settled in Omaha along South 13th Street. Most worked in South Omaha packing houses while three-fourths of them owned their own homes and a few rose in professional and business fields. They were one of the best organized nationalities in Omaha. For instance, the Sokol, a society that promoted gymnastic and cultural activities, is still well known today.

German Catholics build St. Mary Magdalene Church. It was dedicated on Christmas Day. Located on Douglas Street between 16th and 17th Streets, it became known as the “Little German Church” or the “Doll Church”. Until World War I, sermons were delivered in German.

General Ulysses S. Grant visited Omaha.

The first Knights of Pythias Lodge in Omaha was organized.

The first business that could properly be called a “department store” was begun by Ross and Cruikshank on the northeast corner of 14th and Farnam Streets. The inventory inside the small frame structure consisted mostly of dry goods and notions along with a department of household furnishings. Ross and Cruikshank eventually became Thomas Kilpatrick & Company in 1895. The new company emphasized a wholesale and retail trade in dry goods and women’s furnishings.

Florence Mill, one of the leading flour mills in Douglas County, began when George Hugg and Jacob Weber built a sawmill at Florence. They added a grist mill in 1874.

Nebraska's first high school graduates, all female, come from Brownell Hall in North Omaha.

**1869**

The first session of the legislature in Lincoln was convened. The Nebraska Legislature donated the old territorial capitol building at 20th and Dodge Streets to Omaha to be used as a high school. Upon closer inspection, the old capitol building on the hill was declared unsafe and torn down in 1870. Construction of the new “Omaha High School” was completed in 1871 at the same location. In its first year, the school used all but one of its 28 rooms for primary grades. Its first graduating class in 1876 consisted of nine girls and two boys.

The headquarters of the Union Pacific Railroad was located at the four-story Herndon House Hotel on the northeast corner of 9th and Farnam Streets.

The tracks of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroads were joined at Promontory Summit, Utah completing the transcontinental railroad. Thomas Durant drove the golden spike uniting the two railroads on May 10. The citizens of Omaha and the nation took note of the event with wild celebrations.

The Omaha Street Railway Company opened.

Omaha’s first gas works was constructed at a cost of $150,000. For the first time, street lights and some homes were lit by gas.

The Nebraska School for the Deaf and Dumb opened in Omaha.

The Omaha Medical College, the first school of medicine in Nebraska, was founded. Samuel Mercer was the prime mover in making it happen.

Between 1846 and 1869, more than 70,000 Mormons traveled west along the Mormon Trail to Salt Lake City. Omaha was a favorite stopping place not only because it was close to Winter Quarters, but also because the Missouri River was the last point on the trail at which to buy supplies and equipment for the remainder of the trek west. Omaha merchants such as Megeath & Co. did a brisk business that ran as high as $2,000 a day as outfitters for Mormon wagon trains. The company continued to do a forwarding and commission business with the Mormons by providing them with portable warehouses for the storage of their goods along the way as the track for the Union Pacific Railroad was being built. Megeath & Co. did business with the Mormons which amounted to $1,000,000 to $2,000,000 annually during this period.

The Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific and the Burlington and Missouri River Railroads reached Council Bluffs. The new railroads brought thousands of emigrant workers and settlers to Omaha. Many were enticed by railroad signboards offering land at $3 an acre with 10 years to pay. They stated that “This company has the fastest and finest equipped passenger trains between Chicago and Omaha with 3500 miles of track, it brought many advantages and opportunities to the door of the chief city of Nebraska.”

The Kansas City, St. Joseph and Council Bluffs Railroad opened a line in 1868 between Omaha and Kansas City. Until this line, the only choice for transportation of people and freight between St. Joseph and Omaha was steamboat which had many delays and dangers caused by wind and currant or stage coach which dealt with mud, snow and swamp problems.

Pacific School opens on Pacific St between 9th and 10th (915 Pacific St) from 1869 until razed in 1912. It was one of the first brick schoolhouses erected in Omaha.

Prominent Jews organized a philanthropy, the Hebrew Benevolent Society, to help Russian immigrants who began to descend on Omaha. Among donors were Edward Rosewater, a Bohemian, who founded the Omaha Bee, and J.L. Brandeis, a German, who started the Brandeis Department store.

**1870**

Omaha’s population was 16,083, an increase due largely to the completion of the transcontinental railroad and selection of Omaha as the bridge site. Nebraska’s population was 122,993 and that of rural Douglas County was 3,899. Council Bluffs had 10,020 residents.

Omaha was made a Port of Entry by an act of Congress, and S.A. Orchard was appointed the first Surveyor of Customs.

The Omaha Smelting Company was organized. Located at 10th and Dodge, it covered 25 acres of ground. Handled silver, lead and copper ore from western mining regions. E.W. Nash was president. It was the largest smelter in the world.

For the first time, a partially paid fire department was created. The fire chief, assistant chief, engineers, drivers and stokers became paid employees while other members remained as volunteers in service to the city. A new Gamewell Fire Alarm system was installed that used telegraph technology to report fires. The Gamewell system was used in Omaha for 85 years until it was replaced in 1955.

St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital was founded on September 25, at 12th and Mason Streets by the Sisters of Mercy. This hospital was a plain wood-frame building with two wards and 10 rooms. In 1978 the hospital moved to its facility at 30th and California Streets.

John I. Redick built an Opera House at the northwest corner of Farnam and 16th Streets. The public did not accept this as a place of entertainment so it passed into the hands of J.M. Pattee who rented it to the city for chamber and city offices.

There were about 100 gas operated streets lamps in Omaha.

**1871**

David Cook opened the first meat-packing establishment in Omaha. Another early meat-packing plant was established by Giesselman and Potter.

The name of the post office was changed from “Omaha City” to “Omaha”.

On June 19, 1871, H.H. Geralde started the Omaha Bee. Six weeks later, Geralde was Editor and Chief and Edward Rosewater was the publisher and proprietor. The Bee was regarded as one of the most enterprising and independent newspapers in the west.

Mark Hansen started the Danske Pioneer a weekly Scandinavian newspaper.

Edward Rosewater founded the Pokrok Zapadu, a weekly newspaper printed in the Bohemian language. John Rosicky was the editor and owner.

Ezra Millard purchased land from E.A. Perley that adjoined Dr. Harvey Link’s farm about ten miles southwest of Omaha, platted it, and offered lots for sale in the new town of Millard. The ground also straddled the Union Pacific tracks. At the time, the only building in the town was the farmhouse of Henry Kelsey. By this time also, Ezra Millard was a successful banker, cable-railway investor, hotel builder, civic leader and mayor of Omaha from 1869-1871.

John Nelson Hayes Patrick builds a Queen Anne style home on 800 acres of land located west of 48th Street and extending from Dodge to on the south to Hamilton on the north. With 33 rooms, it was one of the largest mansions to reside in the city and was home to lavish parties for as many as 500 people. It was the ending point of the Metro Street Railway Company’s Dundee Line and helped establish Happy Hollow and Dundee as leading neighborhoods. In 1907 it became Happy Hollow Country Club and in 1927 was sold to Brownell Hall School when Happy Hollow moved west. It was later torn down and replaced by the current school.

The first Jewish settlers, mostly merchants and businessmen, arrived in Omaha in 1856. In January 1871, 11 Jewish men founded the Congregation of Temple Israel, the first in Nebraska.

**1872**

James E. Boyd opened a meatpacking plant and became a leading packer along with David Cook and J. Phipps Roe.

The Union Pacific Railroad Bridge across the Missouri River was completed and opened to traffic. Passengers and freight could finally ride the rails from coast to coast. It was the first bridge across the Missouri River between Omaha and Council Bluffs.

The first United States Courthouse and Post Office was built in Omaha.

A new four-story, red brick structure took the place of the old territorial capitol building at 20th and Dodge Streets and was the new location for Omaha High School. Built for $225,000 on an impressive ten-acre campus, its 150-foot bell tower dominated the horizon. John H. Kellom was the first principal.

The Omaha Public Library was opened.

An earthquake was recorded in Omaha for the first time.

Andrew J. Hanscom and James G. Megeath donated 73 acres of land for Hanscom Park, the city’s first park that was named for Hanscom. With a pavilion, greenhouse, bandstand, two lakes, a cascade waterfall, flower bed fountains, and two and one-half miles of roads, It became a showpiece for other parks to follow.

Grand Duke Alexis, brother of the Czar of Russia, arrived in Omaha as a guest of General Philip Sheridan. At a social event were Colonel George Custer, “Buffalo Bill” Cody, Mayor Smith Caldwell, Governor William James and others. The Grand Duke visited Omaha on his way to the plains for a buffalo hunt.

Den Danske Pioneer (The Danish Pioneer) newspaper was founded in 1872 by Mark Hansen. Originally, 75 percent of its subscribers were Danish-American farmers. Sophus Frederik Neble served as Editor from 1887 to 1931. Sophus Neble was a journeyman printer who had immigrated to the United States in 1883 from Stubbekøbing, Denmark. In 1903, the staff of Den Danske Pioneer numbered 16 and the newspaper moved into newly built offices in Omaha at 3510 S. 24th Street. In 1958 the newspaper relocated to Elmwood Park, Illinois.

Edwin Overall (1835-1901), figured prominently in the early years. Born into slavery near St. Louis, he was an abolitionist who recruited Blacks in Chicago during the Civil War to enlist in the Union Army. In Omaha, he was a leader in ending the city's practice of a separate school for Black children in 1872. He already was the first Black man in a federal government position in the state when, in 1869, he was appointed a general delivery clerk in the U.S. Post Office. Aside from a few months working for a mining company near Plattsmouth, he was with the post office until just before his death. He unsuccessfully ran for the state legislature in 1890 and the Omaha city council in 1893.

**1873**

The era of street improvements began when a radical grade was established for St. Mary’s Avenue. Opposition developed, and a compromise was reached. Street improvements included the removal of large amounts of earth as hills were graded down and ravines filled.

The town of Millard began to grow when the Union Pacific Railroad constructed a section house and depot there. A mill, the Millard House Hotel, a new schoolhouse, and several businesses opened during the next few years.

One of the worst snowstorms in the history of the West occurred in April. Telegraph lines were torn down, railroad traffic was impeded, and there was heavy loss of life and property. Three persons perished in the open country just east of Council Bluffs.

The Grand Central Hotel opened at 14th and Farnam Streets as the most elegant hotel in Omaha. The interior included fireplaces, imported chandeliers and mirrors and an elevator. A large hotel, it was built to take the place of the Herndon House, now the UP headquarters.

The Nebraska State Fair was held on the site of the Douglas County Fair Grounds in north Omaha on land located between Boyd and Laird Streets, 16th and 20th Streets that eventually was developed into residential blocks.

**1874-75**

Omaha suffered from the economic depression and hard times because of the grasshopper plague that destroyed crops. For months, wagon caravans of disappointed settlers from the West passed through Omaha on their way East. Grasshoppers were a nuisance in Omaha as well.

**1874**

The first U.S. Post Office and Customs House was completed at 15th and Dodge at a cost of $300,000. The building also housed the federal courts and was the scene of the trial of Ponca Chief Standing Bear five years later.

Edward Creighton died at the age of 54 without having written a will. His widow, Mary Lucretia, died 14 months later. It was her will that contained a bequest of $100,000 to buy land for the purpose of establishing a nontuition Catholic college for boys that became Creighton University. John Andrew Creighton, executor of Mary Lucretia’s will, became co-founder of the new school.

Samuel D. Beals became superintendent of the Omaha Public Schools. He accomplished the task of grading the public schools from primary through high school levels and later taught at Omaha High School from 1880-1900.

Roman Catholic Bishop James O’Gorman died and was succeeded by the Rt. Reverend James O’Connor.

W.W. Marsh took control of the Omaha Railway Company and added lines on St. Mary Avenue, 16th Street, 18th Street, 24th Street, 30th Street, Cuming and Leavenworth Streets.

The Union Pacific Railroad built a railroad depot at 10th and Mason Streets. It was considered the second-largest railroad depot at the time.

Paxton-Viering Steel Company founded. Major supplier of structural steel. Still in business in 2024 it is known as PVS Structures.

**1875**

The Omaha Fire Department relied on water stored in cisterns for fighting fires between 1865 and 1881. Some were used as late as 1899, long after the city had a waterworks system. Each cistern had a capacity of 1,000 barrels, or 31,500 gallons of water, not enough to fight a really big fire.

McCormick, Barriger, and Davis built the first grain elevator in Omaha.

By now, the Douglas County Agricultural Society had merged into the Omaha Driving Park Association, a corporation that purchased and operated forty acres of racing grounds north of Omaha in an area bounded by 16th and 20th Streets, Laird to Boyd Streets. The site was the location of the Douglas County Fair since 1858. The Driving Park Association built a good race track and several buildings and fenced the grounds. County fairs, and later the Nebraska State Fair, were held on the racing grounds for several years.

Omaha citizens organized the Nebraska Humane Society. The Nebraska Humane Society is the 5th oldest in the United States.

The Nebraska State Bar Association was established. President Ulysses S. Grant, accompanied by Mrs. Julia Grant, some of the cabinet officers and others, visited Omaha in November.

King Kalakaua of the Hawaiian Islands stopped in Omaha for a visit. He visited again in 1881.

The Union Pacific Railroad Depot was completed and became affectionately known as the “Cow Shed”. The UP Dining Hall and Emigrant House was located to the east of the “Cow Shed”.

General George Crook was appointed Commander of the Department of the Platte. Crook had a reputation as the army’s most successful Plains Indian fighter.

The first African American Masonic Lodge was established, Rough Ashler Lodge, Missouri Jurisdiction of the Prince Hall Masons.

The Sarpy County seat moved from Bellevue to Papillion where it remains today.

**1876**

A meeting of the governors and scientists of the western states was held in Omaha to develop means of exterminating the grasshoppers which were a problem across the region.

The first graduating class of Omaha High School (now Central High School), the city’s first public high school, had eleven members, nine girls and two boys. In the class was African American Henry Clay Curry. He became a barber, as his father was. Three years later, Ida Overall (1860-1925) was the school's first Black female graduate. She became a school teacher.

Electrical engineers rigged lights up in the tower at Omaha High School to give Omaha its first demonstration of electric lights on July 4th, the nation’s centennial anniversary.

The U.S. Supreme Court handed down a decision that upheld the claim made by representatives of Council Bluffs that the western Iowa town was the official eastern terminus of the Union Pacific Railroad.

St. Wenceslaus, the Bohemian Catholic Church was organized at 1432 S. 12th Street.

German immigrant Gottlieb Storz and J.D. Iler took over operations at the Columbia Brewing in North Omaha along Sherman Avenue and form Omaha Brewing Association.

**1877**

The Saratoga Bend is "cut off" from the Missouri River by a flood, forming what was originally called Cutoff Lake. Vacation cabins on the east side of the lake eventually become the town of Carter Lake, Iowa

August 24, 1877 A tornado knocks out the two eastern spans of the Union Pacific Railroad Bridge over the Missouri River. Must be rebuilt.

Employees of the Smelting Works struck against a reduction in wages. The matter was resolved by arbitration later the same month.

Construction of Creighton College began on a seven-acre site northwest of Capitol Hill. The land was purchased from five individual parties at a total cost of $12,000.

The YMCA was reorganized and put on a more secure basis.

The Omaha City Council assigned a quarter-mill tax levy and raised it to a half mill the following year as a means of support for the Omaha Public Library.

The Baum Iron building at 1211 Harney Street was built in 1871. It first occupied by wholesale grocers, then a hardware company and in 1877 Baum Iron which grew to become the largest wholesaler of iron in the Midwest. The business now is Baum Hydraulics Corp.

**1878**

Creighton College opened a grade school on the outskirts of Omaha with 120 boys and six faculty members. By January, 1879, student enrollment peaked at 170. Eventually, the school began teaching college-level courses. Founders of Creighton College were Edward and Mary Lucretia (Wareham) Creighton and John and Sarah Emily (Wareham) Creighton. The building now serves as Creighton’s Administration Building.

A vigilance committee of 150 members was organized in Omaha “to suppress crime”.

Omaha got a new street numbering system.

The Grand Central at 14th and Farnam, Omaha’s finest hotel, was destroyed by fire. Built to replace the Herndon House, it was the pride of Omaha for five years. The hotel was closed for renovation when the fire started from a candle that was carelessly left burning by a worker. Tragically, five firefighters lost their lives in the inferno, the first to be killed in the line of duty in Omaha. The building was a complete loss with damage estimated at $300,000.

“Omaha Barracks” was renamed Fort Omaha when it became Headquarters for the Department of the Platte, a territory that stretched from the Missouri River into Montana and from Canada to Texas. General George Crook was the Department Commander. Quarters One (the General Crook House Museum today) was built for him at Fort Omaha for $7,716.

**1879**

The two-day trial of Ponca Chief Standing Bear, Standing Bear v. Crook, began in United States District Court in Omaha on May 1st and attracted widespread attention. Judge Elmer Dundy rendered his verdict on May 12th in favor of Standing Bear, saying for the first time, that a Native American is a human being with rights of citizenship under U.S. law.

Telephone service was introduced to Omahans when the Omaha Electric Company was organized. The first exchange was established shortly afterward. The first telephone directory was printed and included 121 listings.

General Ulysses S. Grant, former President, and his wife, Julia, stopped in Omaha on their return trip from a journey around the world.

An Omaha team played its first professional baseball game as part of the Northwestern League. Although this league lasted only one year, the Western League followed and provided young Omaha males the chance to play baseball for professional and semiprofessional teams.

Creighton College was incorporated as Creighton University although it remained a grade school until the late 1880s.

The Burlington Headquarters building was completed at 1004 Farnam St. at a cost of $50,000. One of the best examples of 19th century commercial architecture, It still stands today.

The Frenzer Block was completed on Dodge between 14th and 15th Streets. It became the African American center of business providing offices for Black professionals like Dr. J.H. Hutten and attorney Silas Robbison.

Lake School opens on the southwest corner of 19th and Lake Streets. It serves this location until 1888 when it moved to 2410 N. 19th St. Principal Emma Whitmore began in 1882. Students would plant trees on the school’s campus regularly. At graduation, the class would bury a box with all their names in it underneath a tree. The key to the box was fastened around a pigeon. The pigeon would fly away, carrying the key to an unknown place.

John A. Creighton, his cousin James, “Long Jim” Creighton and John A. McShane purchased the Omaha Nail Company and turned it into a thriving enterprise. The company employed 85 workers who produced 350 kegs of nails a day.

The Women’s Christian Temperance Union of Omaha was organized in June at the Methodist Church on Davenport Street. Within a few months, a large number of female members of other large influential churches enrolled as members.

Wholesale grocers William A. Paxton and Benjamin Gallagher formed a partnership. They were wholesalers in groceries and hardware and coffee roasters who created Butternut Coffee. In 1908 they

hired architect Thomas Kimball to design the Butternut Building at 901-909 Jones Street. It was well known with a large Butternut coffee can on its roof. It was destroyed by fire in 2004.

**1880**

In the decade of the 1880s, Omaha’s population shot from 30,518 to 140,452. 1/3 of the residents in 1880 were foreign-born.

A riot of 700 men at the Smelting Works resulted in Governor Nance’s ordering out the state militia to restore order. This was Omaha’s first major strike.

The Nebraska School of Medicine was established with 14 students, two of them women. The following year the school took the name and charter of the Omaha Medical College.

President Rutherford B. Hayes, accompanied by Mrs. Hayes, General W.T. Sherman and others, spent a few hours in Omaha, visiting Fort Omaha and other points of interest.

The grounds of the Omaha Driving Park Association were sold to a group of businessmen that included John D. Creighton, James E. Boyd and W.A. Paxton. The new owners spent $14,000-$15,000 to improve the grounds, and for several years after this, the Nebraska State Fair was held here.

The Synod of the Nebraska Presbytery approved Bellevue as the site of a new Presbyterian institution of higher learning. On October 16th, Bellevue College was organized, the Articles of Incorporation signed, and the Board of Trustees elected.

Roman Catholic Bishop James O’Connor purchased 12 acres known as Park Place at a location that later became 36th and Burt Streets. His goal was to establish a Catholic boarding school for girls. The site was purchased from Frederick B. Lowe for $2,533.34.

John Elk, a Winnebago Indian, filed suit in U.S. Court in Elk v. Wilkins. At issue was registrar Charles Wilkins’ refusal to allow Elk to register to vote even though Elk had renounced his ties to the Winnebago Tribe and had lived among whites in Omaha for more than a year. Elk sought $6,000 in damages. Attorneys Andrew J. Poppleton and John L. Webster argued that Elk was a U.S. citizen under the Fourteenth Amendment whose right to register and vote was protected by the Fifteenth Amendment. The court ruled against Elk. An appeal was taken to the U.S. Supreme Court.

George Joslyn opened an office of the Western Newspaper Union at 523 South 13th Street, which printed inserts for small-town weeklies. At the time of his death in 1916, Joslyn had created a virtual monopoly of “auxiliary printing” in the U.S., owning 31 plants in 25 states that serviced about 12,000 newspapers.

The City of Omaha awarded a contract to the City Waterworks Company for construction, maintenance and operation of a waterworks system for 25 years. It required the plant to be built and in operation within two years. A clause in the contract gave the city the right to purchase the system when the franchise expired.

In 1880 the town of Millard had three hotels, two stores, two saloons, two blacksmith shops, one mill, one elevator and nearly 300 residents.

**1881**

James E. Boyd builds Boyd’s Opera House at 15th and Farnam Streets at a cost of $90,000. With a seating capacity of 1,700, it expanded Omaha’s facilities for musical and dramatic theater.

The City Waterworks Company completed the construction of Omaha’s first waterworks and sewer system using direct pressure and gravity systems. A pumping station located close to the river and north of the Omaha Smelting Works had a capacity of 5,000,000 gallons. It delivered water to a storage reservoir on Walnut Hill, 305 feet above the low water mark of the Missouri River. The capacity of the reservoir was 10,000,000 gallons. The new system included 17 miles of pipes and went into operation in September.

Mother Margaret Dunne and the Religious of the Sacred Heart opened the Sacred Heart Convent and Academy at a temporary location in a rented house at 9th and Howard Streets in October. Enrollment at the new boarding school for girls was three. By Christmas, enrollment grew to 15 at the school that later became known as Duchesne College.

Following a renowned winter in the northern Plains that is recalled in the writings of O.E. Rolvaag and Laura Ingalls Wilder, the Missouri River rose 23 feet in one of Omaha’s greatest floods. The lower parts of the city were submerged, business suspended, and property damage was high. The “Great Flood of 1881” covered low ground five miles wide between Omaha and Council Bluffs. Lake Manawa was created because of this flood.

The Omaha Medical College was incorporated as the new Nebraska School of Medicine.

An amendment to the state constitution to give women the right to vote was passed by the legislature, but voters rejected it in the next general election in 1882 by almost a two-to-one margin.

The Nebraska State Farmers’ Alliance was organized.

Bohemian immigrant Jonas L. Brandeis, founder of the Brandeis Department Store chain, opened his first store called The Fair at 506 South 13th Street. The business prospered and was later operated as the Boston Store.

The first hydraulic elevator in Omaha was installed in a large brick office building at 1115-1117 Farnam Street, the first four-story business/office building in the city.

Former Fire Chief Joseph F. Sheeley (or Sheely) opened a packinghouse, the Sheeley Packing Company, at 24th and Bancroft. The area west of the railroad tracks, south of what is now Hanscom Park to Frederick Street became known as “Sheeleytown”. Served as an example of the impact of the packing industry in Omaha. The area was originally occupied by Irish immigrants and then Polish immigrants.

The Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railway entered Omaha and built a large depot on Webster and 15th Street with a roundhouse, water tank and coal sheds. The railway linked Omaha and Sioux City. Each year, 5,000 cars of livestock came into Omaha using this line. This was also Omaha’s major link with St. Paul and Minneapolis and the lumber regions of the Great Lakes.

**1882**

Omaha officially became the county seat of Douglas County. The second Douglas County Court House was completed at a cost of $200,000 on the south side of 18th and Farnam where the present day Court House resides. Grand opening to the public hailed its beauty but complained about the long flights of steps made necessary by the radical lowering of Farnam Street. It was replaced with the present courthouse in 1907.

State militia and Federal troops were called out to settle the railroad workers’ strike of workmen on the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad.

A Board of Public Works was created with James Creighton, a cousin of Edward and John, as chairman. Work to improve the streets was started. Omaha’s first asphalt pavement was laid on Douglas Street, from 14th to 16th Streets. Street improvements included drastic changes in the contours of the downtown bluffs. Ridges were graded down and ravines filled. Steam-powered shovels dug out the dirt under buildings that were jacked up and lowered to their new settings when the work was done. Three steam engines and about 40 dump cars ran on special train tracks to remove the dirt which was used to fill in low lying areas in Omaha and Council Bluffs. As an example, Harney, Farnam and Douglas Streets were lowered at least 40 feet. The street redesign project took nearly 40 years to complete and cost $4 million.

A rally in support of women’s suffrage was held in Omaha. A proposed state constitutional amendment for women’s suffrage sparked a bitter battle. The two daily newspapers, the Omaha Bee and the Omaha Herald, were opposed to the amendment. Suffragists Susan B. Anthony, Belvill Lockwood and Phoebe Cousins advocated for the measure and challenged the opponents to a joint debate. In September, Anthony debated Edward Rosewater of the Bee in front of a large crowd at Boyd’s Opera House. A few days later, Phoebe Cousins met Gilbert M. Hitchcock of the Herald in a debate before a large house at the same location. Voters defeated the proposed amendment at the general election in November.

Whistles were issued to Omaha police officers.

The first Paxton Hotel was built at 14th and Farnam Streets on the site once occupied by the Grand Central Hotel which was destroyed by fire four years earlier.

Wyoming cattle baron Alexander H. Swan, and two Omaha businessmen, Leverett M. Anderson and C.R. Schaller, purchased 1,875 acres of land southwest of Omaha this year and in 1883. Much of it was later platted as South Omaha with some of it to become the site of a livestock market center. Total price of the 1,875 acres was $312,972.73 or about $167 an acre.

The English actor/playwright Oscar Wilde appeared at the Boyd Theater speaking on the pursuit of happiness.

Sacred Heart Convent and Academy opened at Park Place on the corner of 36th and Burt Streets in November. Enrollment was 17 girls who were boarding school students. Bishop James O’Connor deeded the property at Park Place to the Religious of the Sacred Heart for $1.00 in September. The Society of the Sacred Heart bore the expense for construction of the new building that housed the nuns and their students.

The Nebraska Telephone Company was incorporated and took over the business previously established by the Omaha Electric Company, the first telephone service provider in Omaha.

Omaha Indians voiced opposition to a new federal law that ended official recognition of their tribal status and awarded lands to them in severalty to individual Indian families. Lands in the western part of the reservation were sold to white settlers, but the tribe received few of the proceeds from the sales. Although now subject to state law, Nebraska law failed to protect the Omahas. Attempts at self-government failed. Within four years, the tribe’s collective strength was significantly impaired, and its members were unable to manage their own affairs. Agents’ reports of the deteriorating conditions of the Omahas were ignored. Instead, the Omaha “experiment” became the model for the 1887 Dawes Act which allotted the lands of many other tribes in severalty with similar disastrous results as those experienced by the Omahas. The allotment policy contained in the Dawes Act accelerated the detribalization process for numerous tribes.

Danish-born baker P.F. Petersen arrives in Omaha. After many jobs, he opened a bakery at 24th and Cuming Streets which becomes Peter Pan bread company.

The Danish Brotherhood of America was created

**1883**

Omaha was connected by telephone with Lincoln and Plattsmouth. Telegraph operators all over the United States went on strike.

Wiilliam “Buffalo Bill” Cody’s Wild West Show made its first appearance on May 17 on the old fairgrounds in north Omaha to 8,000 spectators. The land was owned by the Omaha Driving Park Association. After its initial appearance in Omaha, the exhibition toured America and Europe and achieved world-wide fame. He returned in 1898 to perform at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition.

William A. Paxton helped organize the Union Stock Yards Company of Omaha (Limited) and the South Omaha Land Company. Other investors in the new stock yards company included Alexander H. Swan, John A. Creighton, Peter E. Iler, John A. McShane, Thomas Swobe and Frank Murphy.

The Northwestern Electric Light Company began business by establishing the city’s first power house in the Strang Building at 10th and Farnam. It was the first company in Nebraska to operate arc and incandescent lights. Northwestern also got a five-year street lighting contract in 1883. The Sperry Electric Light Company was organized the same year.

Bishop Clarkson Memorial Hospital was founded by Rev. Robert H. Clarkson, the first Episcopal bishop of the Diocese of Nebraska. Before his death on March 10, 1884, he saw a need for a children’s hospital. Miss Sarah Mattice, joined Bishop Clarkson and his wife Meliora and they opened Child’s Hospital at 1716 Dodge Street. Clarkson and his wife are buried in a tomb in the courtyard of the Trinity Episcopal Cathedral at 18th and Capitol.

A new Trinity Episcopal Cathedral replaced “the Church in the Middle of the Street” at 18th Street and Capitol Avenue. J.M Woolworth gave a gift of five bronze panels depicting scenes from the life of Christ. Twenty-eight clerestory windows were donated by other churches of the diocese.

The congregation of Kountze Memorial Lutheran Church built a new church at 16th and Harney Streets and occupied this site until it was sold in 1904.

The Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) was organized by Omaha women to provide practical assistance to women and children. The YWCA was first housed in three rented rooms in the old city hall building.

Temperance leader Francis Willard spoke in Omaha.

The Paxon Hotel was completed at 14th and Farnam Streets.

In 1880 Omaha had 118 miles of streets and only a quarter mile of these was paved. In 1883 street paving began. By the end of the year 80 miles of streets had paving, which consisted of asphaltum, Sioux Falls granite, Colorado Sandstone and wooden blocks. Omaha had the reputation of being the best paved city in the country.

When the streets were paved in the 1880s, Omaha carved cisterns beneath the intersections of downtown streets and filled them with water from the Missouri River in preparation for firefighters to hook into with their horse-drawn carriages.

Dr. Amelia Burroughs, a homeopath who moved to Omaha from Council Bluffs, became the city’s first woman doctor.

**1884**

The Stockyards received its first shipment of livestock—531 longhorns from Medicine Bow, Wyoming. In the beginning, the Union Stockyards operated as a feeding station for stock en route to eastern markets such as Chicago. The first livestock exchange building was in the former farmhouse of Fred Drexel. The stockyards spawned such sudden growth that South Omaha was called “The Magic City.”

South Omaha was founded, surveyed and the plat recorded on July 18. The tract was named South Omaha. The town developed in the vicinity of the stockyards on land originally owned by the South Omaha Land Company.

Temple Israel, the first synagogue in Omaha and Nebraska, was built and consecrated at 23rd and Harney Streets where it served the congregation until 1908.

The Omaha Club, the city’s oldest social club, was organized with a membership of 245. It became the prototype for several country clubs in later years.

Gottlieb Storz and J.D. Iler purchased the Baumann Brewery where Storz had been foreman and started beer production. The new Storz Brewing Company was located at 1819 Sherman Avenue, known today as North 16th Street.

The first transcontinental mail service became available in Omaha. Burlington “Fast Mail” began service between Chicago and Council Bluffs, linking to this service west from Omaha.

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the lower court ruling in Elk v. Wilkins in a seven-two decision. The court maintained that the Fourteenth Amendment did not grant citizenship to Indians. On that basis, the Fifteenth Amendment’s protection of the right of citizens to register and vote was denied. The ruling was a setback for Indian citizenship which ultimately was granted to all Native Americans in 1924.

The first residential electric service was provided in the knob hill area south of the Union and Burlington stations close to Brownell Hall. The rate was 23 cents per kilowatt hour.

The Christian Specht building was completed at 1110 Douglas St. Specht owned the Western Cornice Co. that produced metal cornices, which were in high demand during the construction boom of the 1880s. The three-story commercial building is the only known extant cast iron front building in Nebraska and is one of the very few that were ever built in the state.

The Zion Baptist Church was organized. It first met in member’s homes and later located at Lytle’s Hall, 1116 Harney Street. It continues today at 2215 Grant Street.

A second streetcar company in Omaha opens; The Cable Tramway Company of Omaha. Omaha businessmen Isaac Hascall, Casper E. Yost, Fred Drexel, Charles B. Rustin, and Samuel R. Johnson are the incorporators. On December 24, 1887, was the first run of the Cable Tramway Co. There were two routes, between Union Depot and Lake Street. They built a powerhouse at 20th and Harney Streets and were given the right to use cable, electricity or any power necessary. The cable had to be replaced every 90 days. The winters in Omaha were the downfall of the cable cars. Slush would cover the cable and freeze. The cars were unable to stop at some intersections and after a few years ceased to exist. In the 1880s electric-powered cars started taking the place of horse-powered cars.

In the 1860, 1870s and 1880s Omaha’s first ward decided the outcome of the elections. The First Ward was run by saloon keepers and gamblers. They would elect their politicians who would in return appoint officers who allowed for the corruption. In 1884, gambling and the influence of the First Ward started contracting as influential citizens attempted to stop the payoff of public servants. Mayor Champion S. Chase was impeached because of pay offs and pocketing of money during his administration.

**1885**

Gilbert Hitchcock founded the Omaha Evening World, a newspaper dedicated to presenting the news in an unbiased manner.

The Thompson-Houston Company was organized and soon was reorganized as the New Omaha Thompson-Houston Electric Light Company. Eventually, it provided power to the Northwestern Electric Light Company. The Sperry Electric Light Company was consolidated with the new Thompson-Houston Company in 1885.

Forest Lawn Cemetery was established.

The Knights of Labor organized its first assembly, Local Assembly No. 2845, at 1412 Farnam. Most of the 800 members were employees of the Union Pacific Railroad. Because it grew so quickly, other assemblies were organized soon afterwards.

The Douglas County Courthouse at 17th and Farnam Streets opened. The growth of the city and the increase in the volume of county business made it necessary to build this larger, more substantial building in less than 25 years.

The town of Millard was incorporated.

Receipts of livestock for the first full year of operations at the Union Stock Yards in South Omaha totaled 117,000 head of cattle, 153,000 hogs, 19,000 sheep, and 2,000 horses and mules. The Union Stock Yards Company spent $60,000 to build a packing plant that was leased to George H. Hammond & Co., the first big national packing house to locate at the Omaha stock yards. Fowler Brothers of Chicago was given a $200,000 bonus to locate in Omaha in a packing house built for them that was rent-free for five years.

The state legislature passed a civil rights statute guaranteeing equality to all citizens of Nebraska, but it was rarely enforced. Widespread discrimination against African Americans, Asians, Hispanics and Native Americans continued.

Dr. Samuel Mercer completed his Queen Anne home at the northeast corner of 40th and Cuming Streets. Dr. Mercer founded Omaha’s first hospital and medical college. He also established Nebraska’s first Medical Society. As a member of the street railway commission, he encouraged the streetcar to travel west on Cuming to develop the Bemis Park and Walnut Hill neighborhoods.

Construction began on the J.P. Cooke building at 1311 Howard Street. J.P. Cooke continues to operate in this historic building that in addition to businesses once housed “Omaha Atrium” in the basement, Omaha’s first municipal swimming pool. It was accessed by an exterior stairway. The building’s cast iron façade is considered a classic.

**1886**

South Omaha was incorporated as a village October 16 with around 1,500 people.

The Omaha Posten, the Midwest’s only large Swedish weekly newspaper, was founded.

John S. Prince, world bicycle champion, raced Albert Schock, former champion, fifty miles for $100 and a percentage of the gate at Omaha.

Calvary Baptist Church was organized on 24th Street, just north of Cuming.

Armour-Cudahy Packing Company completed a huge new packing house that had a capacity of 5,000 hogs per day. It was built on land given to Armour-Cudahy from the Union Stock Yards Company. The stock yards company also provided a $350,000 bonus to Armour-Cudahy for building at the Omaha yards. The same year, G.F. Swift of Chicago was awarded $200,000 and 11 acres of land upon which to build an immense new beef packing house that opened later in 1886.

John A. Creighton helped incorporate and became a director of the Stockyards National Bank.

The Omaha Illuminating Company was incorporated. For ten years, it leased all the rights and interests of the Northwestern Company and purchased its power from the Thompson-Houston Company. By 1901, the Thompson-Houston Company absorbed the interests of the Northwestern Company and its successor, the Omaha Illuminating Company. The South Omaha Electric Light, Heat and Power Company also became part of Thompson- Houston.

General George Crook was reassigned to Fort Omaha as Commander of the Department of the Platte where he served until 1888.

Herman Kountze donated to the trustees of Brownell Hall a new site on 10th Street near Worthington Street close to the location of Pine Elementary School today. In addition, he gave a generous donation to a fund for the construction of a new large four-story school building.

Omaha businessmen received word that a vein of coal had been struck at 4th and Prince Streets.

Gretna was founded on 80 acres of land purchased from the Lincoln Land Company for $560. Located ten miles west of Omaha, the town’s development was spurred by the Burlington Northern Railroad.

The Pioneer Block was built on Farnam between 11th and 12th Street. This was the first of several block-long businesses to appear in Omaha. The block played a significant role in community activities and was a political and social assembly point for the citizens of Omaha.

Joel Cornish, an eastern lawyer who moved to Omaha to set up practice in law and commercial interests, built a home at 1404 S. 10th Street. It is Omaha’s best and rarest example of French Second Empire and is one of the few remaining mansions in what was Omaha’s first wealthy area of the city. When it became an apartment in 1909 the third floor resident was Ten Eyck Fonda. When his grandchildren visited him, they had to be stopped from sliding down the circular banister. There were Henry and Hariett Fonda, the former later would become a noted actor.

Mary Newton became the first principal of Castellar Elementary (spelled Castelar today), and likely the first female principal of an Omaha Public School. Textbooks are now free for students.

The town of Elkhorn was incorporated.

The Grand Opera House, at 15th and Capital, had a formal opening on February 18 with an address by A.J. Poppleton. It was originally built as an exposition building by Omaha industrialists for conventions. It provided a large stage with a seating capacity of 2,486.

In 1866, Thomas Lipton became a pioneer in the packing industry in South Omaha. Being an Englishman, he found the hogs were too fat so two years later Lipton Packing became a part of Armour-Cudahy Packing Company. Lipton started another business in England, using tea from Ceylon, The Lipton Tea Company. His last visit to Omaha was 1928.

The Omaha belt line was completed. The track encircled Omaha from Webster and 15th Street to South Omaha. The commuter rail line was part of Omaha’s public transit system by transporting residents around the city. An 1890s booster booklet suggested a beltline trip to get the best impression of the extension of the city in all directions. By 1890 six daily trains afforded transportation to suburban residents along this line.

The United States National Bank started in 1886 at 12th and Farnam Streets. Charles W. Hamilton was president.

Omaha Standard Brick Company and Richard Smith began business. Brought the first brick-making machine to Omaha. At its boom, 52 brickyards were making 150 million bricks annually.

**1887**

President Grover Cleveland and his wife, accompanied by Mr. Cleveland’s private secretary and some of his Cabinet officers, spent a few hours in Omaha.

The Creche, the oldest organized charity in Omaha, was founded by Mrs. Thomas L. Kimball (mother of architect Thomas R. Kimball) a day nursery to care for the children of single, working mothers.

Dr. George L. Miller sold the Omaha Daily Herald to John A. McShane.

The Omaha Motor Railway was incorporated and led by Dr. Samuel D. Mercer. Mercer’s first line ran on 11th Street from Bancroft to Howard, west on Howard to 14th, north on 14th to Cass and eventually to Mercer’s mansion at 40th and Cuming.

An area now comprising much of North Omaha was annexed to Omaha.

Erastus A. Benson bought 900 acres from John A. Creighton (nephew of John D. and Edward Creighton and son of lesser-known brother Frank H.) and platted a village named after himself. In 1893 it was a suburb of Omaha and was connected to the city by a street railway. Built a town hall at Mayne (Maple) and Military and donated land for a one-room schoolhouse and St. James Orphanage. Charles Tietz started an amusement park at 52nd and Military.

East Omaha, an Omaha suburb, was founded by the CB&Q (Chicago, Burlington & Quincy) Railroad’s East Omaha Land Company with Richard C. Cushing as president. A total of $300,000 was spent to clear low-lying land of willows and to grade streets before lots were offered for sale.

The Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroad founded the town of Irvington when the railroad built a station there.

The town of Bennington was established twenty miles northwest of Omaha when the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad took over the Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroad. Named for a Revolutionary War battle, its streets were named after the participating generals.

By proclamation of the governor, South Omaha was designated a city of the second class when it met the requirement with a population of more than 5,000 persons.

The original South Omaha High School was located at 25th and L Streets. The school produced its first graduating class of five graduates in 1892.

The YWCA made plans to establish a home at 19th and Dodge Streets for young women working to support themselves. The following year, the Women’s Exchange was established at 1617 Farnam Street where “articles of home manufacture” were sold.

The congregation of Westminster Presbyterian Church was organized.

The City Marshall position was renamed the Chief of Police.

The Omaha Central Labor Union was chartered by the American Federation of Labor (AFL). It included all 21 local unions of different trades in Omaha, each of which was affiliated with the AFL.

William “Pa” Rourke started as a third baseman in the Omaha League and became a dominant figure in establishing organized baseball in Omaha.

The Nebraska Legislature passed an anti-miscegenation law that forbade marriage between whites and Japanese, Chinese and Negroes using the ¼ blood rule, i.e., a grandparent.

The Kirkendall Boot Company completed a building at 1109-1111 Harney Street. It was one of the largest buildings in Omaha’s warehouse district. Kirkendall was the largest producer of ride boots in the world. The King of England and the Emperor of Japan work boots from Kirkendall.

In 1887 the U.S. National Bank erected a six-story building at 12th and Farnam. Later the bank moved and the building was owned by Corey-McKenzie. In 1977 it was razed but the two arch entrances were saved. The two arches were cemented together and now stand as an entrance to Gene Leahy Mall on Farnam between 10th and 11th Streets. Note the two styles of pillars on the arches when you view it next time.

Bemis Bag Co. began in 1887. It manufactured burlap and cotton bags on 11th Street on the north end of the viaduct. The building still stands.

German immigrant Balthus Jetter establishes the South Omaha Brewing Co. at 30th and Y Streets producing Gold Top Bottled Beer for thirsty packing house workers.

**1888**

A sudden fierce blizzard on January 12th brought life to a standstill in Nebraska and Omaha/Douglas County. A howling wind whipped the snow for 12 to 18 hours into drifts that killed thousands of head of livestock across the state. Many persons died. In Omaha and Douglas County, winds of 42 miles per hour created enormous snowdrifts, and temperatures fell to 30 degrees below zero in a matter of hours. Omaha got 34 inches of snow. The severe weather conditions resulted in the deaths of two Omahans a few hundred feet from their homes. No human lives were lost in rural Douglas County, but livestock losses were high.

The Douglas Street Bridge connecting Omaha with Council Bluffs was dedicated and opened to traffic.

The first electric trolley cars of the Omaha Motor Railway Company began running.

Joseph LaFlesche, last great Chief of the Omaha Indians, died.

St. John Catholic Church on the Creighton campus was dedicated. Also at Creighton College, Father M.A. McGinnis, S.J., established the League of the Cross temperance society and invited “all Catholic students to stand up and swear off” drinking. Not mentioned was the fact that most Creighton students at the time were in grade school.

Fort Crook, an Army infantry post, was established in Sarpy County.

The parish of St. Cecilia was founded as well as St. Agnes Church in South Omaha.

The Coliseum was built at 20th and Lake Streets at a cost of $45,000 by a stock company that included Samuel E. Rogers, Julius Meyer, William Mardis, E.S. Flagg and John S. Prince. A frame structure, 200 x 300 feet, the Coliseum had a seating capacity of 8,000 with standing room only for about the same number. Designed as a concert and convention center, the building also was used for bicycle races and walking and running contests.

The Boston Store on the northwest corner of 16th and Douglas Streets opened at 114 South 16th Street. Jonas Brandeis built the department store in partnership with his three sons—Arthur, Hugo and Emil—who ran the store under the firm name of J.L. Brandeis & Sons.

The YMCA moved to the four upper floors of a new association building on the corner of Douglas and 16th Streets. Constructed for $90,000, the ground floor was rented for stores. Pierce C. Himebaugh was instrumental in securing the ground, constructing the building and in putting the YMCA on a firm footing during this period.

Robert and Elia Peattie moved to Omaha from Chicago when Robert was hired as managing editor of the Omaha Daily Herald. Elia began writing features for the Herald which became the Omaha World-Herald in 1889.

The Coliseum Company was built at the intersection of 20th and Lake Streets. It was designed for bicycle races, running races, walking contests, conventions and concerts. The Grand Merchants Exposition was held here in 1889 and the People’s Party Convention in 1892.

**1889**

The American Waterworks Company at the Minne Lusa pumping station went into operation on August 1. Made of limestone quarried from west-central Missouri and bedecked in red oak, the Florence facility as described in an April 1889 preview in The World-Herald boasted that “the citizens of Omaha will be astonishing their interior furnishings with the best water from the most perfect water works system between Chicago and the Rocky Mountains.” The previous pumping plant was moved six miles upriver to Florence where the water supply was free from contamination by sewage. The new station had increased capacity and was more useful than the previous pumping station. Built at a cost of $1,500,000, the plant processed river water and piped it into homes and businesses. By January, 1891, the city had 158 miles of water pipe and 1,344 fire hydrants.

The Omaha Daily Herald newspaper was purchased, and two papers merged under the name Omaha World-Herald with Gilbert Hitchcock as the chief owner.

The Omaha Bee Building was completed at 17th and Farnam Street next to the Omaha City Hall at a cost of a half million dollars. Edward Rosewater, founder and editor, startled Omaha when his newspaper building rose to the unheard-of height of seven stories. It became the largest newspaper building of that time and was a significant architectural work in Omaha.

Ferdinand L. Barnett founded The Progress, a Black newspaper, in North Omaha. It ran until 1906.

The Omaha Park Commission was organized with Dr. George Miller as its first president. Elmwood Park was acquired. It contained more than 200 acres, much of it donated by businessmen. It had a spring that became a favorite location for country excursions.

Under an act of the Legislature, Omaha’s railway companies Omaha Street Railway Company and the Omaha Motor Railway were consolidated. Electrification proceeded rapidly. By 1890 the horse lines are gone. Douglas Street Bridge was completed and connected Omaha and Council Bluffs by electric railway.

The New York Life Building, 1650 Farnam, was constructed at a cost of $750,000. At ten stories, it was Omaha’s tallest structure and the city’s first skyscraper. Later, it became known as the Omaha Building when Omaha National Bank purchased it.

The Omaha Livestock Exchange was organized.

South Omaha was designated a “City of the First Class” by proclamation of Governor Thayer. South Omaha’s population was more than 8,000, but less than 25,000 inhabitants. It was called the “Magic City” because of its phenomenal growth from farmland in 1880 to a booming stockyard and meatpacking town of 26,000 people in 1900.

October 4, 1889, Bemis Park Company Incorporated to develop land between 33rd and 38th Streets north of Cuming. Subdivision added, 11 ½ acres west of 38th Street owned by Dr. Samuel D. Mercer. Walnut Hill subdivision northwest of 40th and Cuming was platted by Dr. Mercer. Real estate lawyer Edgar Zabriskie builds one of the first homes in the Bemis Park Company’s platted new suburb. The Queen Anne home was at 3524 Hawthorne Avenue and had 14 rooms known for its gables, domed tower and elaborate gingerbread trim. It stands today.

Dietz United Methodist Church is completed at 1423 S. 10th Street. It is an example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style of architecture.

Lake School is the first public school in Nebraska to fly the U.S. flag on school grounds. Upon the admission of Alaska and Hawaii in 1959, Lake would also be the first Nebraska school to fly the new 50-star flag.

The Lininger Art Gallery was opened to the public in an addition to the Second Empire mansion of George W. Lininger at 18th and Howard. Lininger was an implement dealer, art collector, private gallery and civic leader in Omaha. Many of 300 art works Lininger collected from extensive trips to Europe became the foundation of the permanent collection at the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha.

On the last night of a tense six-day, 18 hour race in 1889, 30,000 spectators filled Omaha’s new cycling coliseum to cheer on local sensation Lillie Williams in a national women’s cycling competition. Williams was soon dubbed the Nebraska Cyclone.

**1890**

Census figures revealed Omaha’s population was about 102,430. Original census records for 1890 were destroyed by fire. The population of Douglas County was 158,008. Council Bluffs had a census count of 21,474.

Jessie Hale-Moss establishes the Negro Women’s Christian Association in Omaha. The organizations focus was on social activities, women’s voting rights and building community.

Mayor R.C. Cushing and representatives of the Masonic Grand Lodge laid the cornerstone of the new City Hall Building at 18th and Farnam.

James E. Boyd built a second theater at 17th and Harney in addition to the first Boyd’s Opera House at 15th and Farnam. During the same year, Boyd became the first Omaha resident to be elected Governor of Nebraska.

The Woodmen of the World Life Insurance Society was founded in Omaha.

The “Big Four” packing plants—Swift & Co., Geo. H. Hammond & Co., the Cudahy Packing Company and the Omaha Packing Company were the cornerstone of business in South Omaha, a city of 8,062 residents.

Omaha was the third-largest pork packing center in the country. Omaha’s first attempt to annex South Omaha failed by only 98 votes.

The first University of Nebraska football game was played in Omaha against a team from the YMCA. Nebraska won with a score of 10-0.

The Omaha Driving Park Association was reorganized, and a new tract of land was secured about a mile west of the city limits. Buildings were constructed and a new track one mile long and one hundred feet wide was built for racing and county and state fair purposes.

Omaha ministers protested the publication of newspapers on Sundays.

Roman Catholic Bishop James O’Connor died on May 27th and was succeeded by the Rt. Reverend Richard Scannell, who was installed as bishop on April 12, 1891. Bishop Scannell made the decision to build a new cathedral in Omaha and selected St. Cecilia as the cathedral parish.

Sacred Heart Parish was organized in the area that included Fort Omaha and Kountze Place. A small church and rectory were constructed on 26th Street between Sahler and Sprague. However, low ground that flooded during wet weather made the site unsuitable.

Kountze Place was land owned by Herman Kountze between Locust and Pratt, 16th to 24th Street. In 1890 Binney and Wirt held the majority of the homes in Kountze Place. Attracted the rising upper middle class. Stopped building there during the Depression of the 1890s. Kountze Place given a boost with the decision to hold the 1898 Trans Mississippi Expo there.

Plumbers Union Local #16 was chartered.

The Tangier Shrine Temple was dedicated in Omaha.

Dundee School opened in a six-room white frame structure near 50th and California Streets.

The town of Valley was incorporated. It became an important shipping point and business center for residents of the Platte and Elkhorn River valleys because of its location at the juncture of two divisions of the Union Pacific Railroad and the rich farming country that surrounds it.

In 1879, the Rev. Erik Alfred (E.A.) Fogelstrom came to Nebraska to serve the Swedish population in Omaha as pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church. After touring Europe and visiting Christian hospitals there, Fogelstrom thought consecrated deacons and deaconesses would be useful in new American Lutheranism. His belief was pioneering in the United States, and Omaha was the focus of his action. His vision included building a medical institution to serve the growing population of North Omaha. On October 8, 1887, Pastor Fogelstrom and others organized the Evangelical Lutheran Immanuel Association for Works for Charity. Originally buying 12 lots in the Monmouth Park neighborhood. The Immanuel Deaconess Home for the aged and infirm was opened in 1890 at 34th and Fowler. By 1891, the Immanuel Hospital was completed and the first four deaconesses began their work at the hospital. There was also an Immanuel Children’s Home built in 1901.

Garbage collection started.

The Board of Park Commissioners carefully thought and planned the Omaha Park and Boulevard system. Frederick Law Olmsted’s philosophies guided Omaha’s park design. Olmsted conceived the idea of a citywide parks system in which numerous small parks were located around the city so that every resident could walk to one. These parks were tied together by a series of boulevards. Only pleasure carriages would be allowed on these boulevards. H.W.S. Cleveland was hired to design Omaha’s park system.

Omaha-Posten, a newspaper organized by Swedish business and professionals first published. It was in circulation until 1954.

The National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) held its 1890 convention in Omaha at the home of Omaha’s wealthiest couple, George and Sarah Joslyn.

**1890-1894**

Omaha and Douglas County suffered from a world-wide economic depression. Crops and gardens were ruined by drought and heat.

**1891**

President Benjamin Harrison and party visited Omaha. According to the newspapers, the President addressed “a large and enthusiastic gathering from a speakers’ stand at the corner of Seventeenth and Farnam streets.” President Harrison’s son, Russell Harrison, married Mary Saunders, the daughter of U.S. Senator and former territorial governor of Nebraska Alvin Saunders at Trinity Cathedral in 1884. In 1888, President Harrison came to Omaha for the baptism of his granddaughter Marthena Saunders Harrison. Marthena is buried at Forest Lawn Cemetery along with her grandfather, Alvin Saunders.

The first Creighton College class of five male students graduated with AB (Bachelor of Arts) degrees.

The 10th Street viaduct opened.

"HE IS TOO VILE TO LIVE" screamed the paper's uppercase headline about George Smith, also known as Joe Coe, who was accused of assaulting a five-year-old white girl, Lizzie Yeates. Taking its counsel, thousands of Omaha residents grabbed the hotel waiter out of prison and hanged him from a streetcar cable at 17th and Harney streets in downtown Omaha.

A branch of the Civil War’s Union Veterans Corp. was organized in Omaha.

Nebraska Savings Bank was renamed Packers National Bank.

Well-known businessman and civic leader, Byron Reed, died and left to the city his coin, manuscript, and rare-book collections and a valuable piece of property on the southeast corner of 19th and Harney Streets. Reed requested the bequeathed land to be used to build a library. Architect Thomas Kimball was hired to design the library. It was his first major commission. Reed’s collection was housed in the library along with books and art. Today Reed’s collection is housed in The Durham museum.

Boyd’s Theater and Opera House opened at 17th and Harney. Its first play production was Alabama. Five stories tall and built and furnished for $250,000, its main auditorium provided seating for 2,000. The greatest entertainers of the day performed on its stage and included Sarah Bernhardt who appeared in La Tosca.

500 workers attack the ASARCO plant in downtown.

Nebraska Methodist Episcopal Hospital was organized on 20th Street between Harney and St. Mary’s Avenue. Each member of the association paying $10 a year was entitled to free treatment at the hospital.

1891 - Omaha's first car dealership was T. J. O'Brien's. Nebraska law required that an auto had to stop moving if it frightened a horse.

The American (1891-99) was a nativist newspaper published in Omaha, Nebraska. It was edited by John C. Thompson, and an organ for the American Protective Association, or A.P.A., a secret society noted for being anti-Catholic and, to a lesser extent, anti-immigrant.

Fred Krug erects a new ultra-modern brewery on a tract of land just west of 24th and Vinton. His new brewery has an annual capacity of 200,000 barrels of Krug Luxus and Cabinet beers.

**1892**

The American People’s or Populist Party convention was held at Omaha’s Coliseum at 20th and Lake Streets in July. Delegates and observers numbering 10,000 filled hotels. Some arrived by covered wagon from as far away as 1,000 miles. James B. Weaver of Iowa was nominated for the U.S. Presidency, and General Field of Virginia won the nomination for Vice-President. In spite of their enthusiasm, Grover Cleveland was elected to a second term in the fall. The platform adopted by the Populist Party was notable because it foretold of major national reforms accomplished by the next generation.

The General National Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met in Omaha.

The Tuesday Musical Club was organized.

The north wing of the Douglas County Hospital and Poor House collapsed.

By 1892, Omaha was home to 6,000 African Americans according to World-Herald columnist at the time Elia Peattie.

In 1892, John A. and Mary Lucretia Creighton donated four lots and $50,000 to establish the John A. Creighton Medical College along with a 200-bed hospital. The new hospital was built at 10th and Castelar Streets at a cost of $200,000, and was called the Creighton Memorial St. Joseph Hospital. The first medical school class included 36 students from six states including Kate Drake, the first female to attend a Jesuit University in the United States. The hospital was the primary resource for clinical instruction for the medical school.

Florence Boulevard was laid out.

The Child Saving Institute welcomes its first child.

Dr. Matthew O. Ricketts, a Republican from Omaha, became Nebraska’s first Black officeholder when he was elected to the Nebraska House of Representatives. He served from 1893 to 1897. Other African Americans that have served are John Adams, Jr., John Adams, Sr., Edward R. Danner, George Althouse and Ernie Chambers. Ricketts was born in Kentucky of slave parents and moved to Omaha in 1890, graduated with honors from Omaha Medical College and practiced medicine in Omaha for many years.

The town of Bennington was incorporated.

An exhibition organized by the Manufacturers’ and Consumers’ Association of Nebraska that featured goods manufactured in the state drew 50,000 visitors to the Coliseum from June 11th—22nd.

The Afro American Sentinel starts publishing. It folds in 1899. Cyrus Dick Bell editor.

**1893**

Boyd’s first opera house at 15th and Farnam was destroyed by fire.

The Commercial Club, a forerunner of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, was organized to improve the city’s economy.

The Omaha Women’s Club founded.

Mail carrier Edwin Overall became the first black candidate to run for the Omaha City Council. He finished 18th in a field of 23 candidates who ran for nine council seats.

Omahans formed the Thurston Rifles Unit. Named in honor of Senator John Thurston, it became part of the Nebraska National Guard and competed successfully in national drill and marching competitions.

William Jennings Bryan brought the idea of a multistate agricultural fair to Omaha leaders after he attended the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893. From this, plans were developed for Omaha to be the site of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition five years later.

The Nebraska Legislature passed a law that barred racial discrimination in public places by making such discrimination a misdemeanor with a $25 to $100 fine. Nebraska civil rights law was generally not enforced, but by the mid-1900s, it became significant in the civil rights movement in Omaha.

The East Omaha Bridge is opened.

The Omaha Brewing Association (later known as Storz) erects a new 150,000 barrel brewery on Sherman Avenue (now 16th Street). Their flagship brands are Triumph, Old Saxon and Blue Ribbon, the latter to commemorate the awards they have won at various international expositions. The building and smoke stack still stands.

Mail carrier Edwin Overall becomes the first Black to run for the Omaha City Council. He finishes 18th in a field of 23 candidates for nine council seats.

**1894**

The Omaha City Hall was completed at a cost of $550,000. It rivaled Omaha High School in Gothic splendor boasting a clock tower and decorative balcony. Castle-like appearance was extenuated with gargoyles and a copy of one of the Statue of Liberty on one of the peaks facing Farnam. The interior had a large courtyard with the city offices surrounding it. In 1966 the structure was demolished after being vacant for seven years.

The Omaha Woman’s Club was founded. It later assisted in the founding of the Visiting Nurse Association of Omaha.

The Omaha Public Library opened its doors in a new building at 19th and Harney Streets, a facility designed specifically for use as a library. This was the first time the public library operated in a building not previously used for another function. The library cost $112,000 to construct. At the time of its opening at the new building, the library had a collection of 46,000 volumes. It served as Omaha’s Main Library until 1977. The building remains standing.

William Jennings Bryan became the editor of the Omaha World-Herald and served in the post for two years before being nominated for the U.S. Presidency.

Fire destroyed the Exposition Building, the Fifteenth Street Theater and the First Baptist Church on Capitol Avenue between 14th and 15th Streets. Total property loss was valued at $125,000.

The City of Omaha founded Riverview Park which later became the site of the Henry Doorly Zoo.

The Boston Store, 114 South 16th Street, was destroyed by fire. A new larger store, four stories tall, was soon built on the same site. The same fire that destroyed the Boston Store also swept away the “Little German Church”. St. Mary Magdalene parishioners built and dedicated a new church on the site of the old one before the year was over. The parish remained in its Douglas Street location for eight more years.

Mrs. Amelia Jenks Bloomer of Council Bluffs died. She was a pioneer in the women’s suffrage movement and an advocate of the garment that bears her name.

The first skulls indicating the presence of primitive man in Nebraska were unearthed at Long’s Hill north of Omaha. The hill, conical in shape, rises 250 feet above the Missouri River.

Dundee was incorporated as a separate municipality by county commissioners in December 8. Scottish immigrant John Malcome Dow became its first mayor.

Kelly's Army, a group of 2,000 homeless men, storms Omaha's Union Rail Yards for supplies.

A general strike in the Omaha meatpacking industry lasted more than a month.

Following an anti-lynching lecture by Ida B. Wells in Omaha in 1894, John Albert Williams founded the Omaha Anti-Lynching League and served as its president—one of many activist roles he filled as he preached and wrote on behalf of African American issues.

**1895**

The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben (“Nebraska” spelled backwards), a nonprofit organization, was founded by Omaha businessmen. It was designed to promote patriotism, advertise Omaha as a good place to live and work, “and create a friendly feeling among neighbors”. The organization held its first parade and coronation ball in conjunction with the Nebraska State Fair, a week-long event for which the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben provided entertainment. Judge E.M. Bartlett and Meliora Woolworth, daughter of Omaha attorney, James M. Woolworth and Mrs. Woolworth, were crowned the first King and Queen of Ak-Sar-Ben.

The Omaha Fire Department hired its first black firefighters under Chief John Redell. A five-member all-black company formed and went into service as Hose Company No. 12 at 27th and Jones Streets, formerly Hose Company No. 5. Except for the occasional assignment of a white officer, the all-Black company remained segregated until desegregation took place in the fire department in 1957.

The lagoon system at Riverview Park is fed by two deep wells. Thousands of Japanese koi swim in the lagoon. Several species of primates, spider monkeys, gibbons and ring-tailed lemurs live on the islands during the warmer months.

A Polish Catholic church in South Omaha is fought over by the church and the parishioners, leading to a gun battle. The church is closed and demolished by the local diocese.

The Omaha Public Schools hire Lucinda “Lucy” Gamble, its first African American teacher. For six years she taught at Dodge School and then Cass School. Women at the time were paid less and expected to leave teaching when they married. She quit teaching when she married Rev. John Williams, pastor of St. Phillip’s Episcopal Church. After her husband died in 1933 she returned to teaching adult education classes for OPS and classes at the North Side YWCA.

**1896**

The first army companies arrived to occupy Fort Crook near Bellevue. The fort was organized in 1888 when Army General George Crook determined that Fort Omaha lacked space to adequately house and drill the men. Crook was commander of the Department of the Platte at the time the decision for an additional fort was made.

Fort Omaha was abandoned and a “For Sale” sign was posted. However, no sale was ever completed. Fort Omaha served as the command post for the U.S. Army’s Department of the Platte. A supply fort rather than a defensive fortress, it was the gathering point and dispersal center for troops ordered into action on the western frontier.

William Jennings Bryan, editor of the Omaha World-Herald, was nominated as the Democratic candidate for President of the United States but failed to win the election.

The United States Supreme Court ruled that “Carter Lake” belonged to Iowa.

Joel Cornish, Omaha banker and park commission member, conceived the idea of joining all the major Omaha parks by boulevards. This was accomplished with minimal interruptions in the street system.

Anna Millard organized the Visiting Nurse Association of Omaha with the assistance of the Omaha Woman’s Club and Clarkson Hospital nurses.

The first X-ray was taken in Omaha.

Sensational grave robberies at Mt. Hope Cemetery caused a stir in the Omaha community.

The Omaha City Council granted the City Waterworks Company an extension of its franchise to operate the waterworks system even though the original franchise was effective for 12 more years. The extension was granted over the mayor’s veto. This set off a fight for municipal ownership of the waterworks system that lasted for several years.

Robert and Elia Peattie moved back to Chicago where Elia took a job as literary critic for the Chicago Tribune. During her eight years as a journalist with first, the Omaha Daily Herald, and later the Omaha World-Herald, her byline was featured on more than 800 editorials, columns, features and fiction stories. Her writings about social issues and her portrayals of Omaha and the West earned her a national reputation.

After the Omaha Public Schools hire Lucinda Gamble to teach at Dodge Elementary in 1895, Eulalia Overall, another African-American teacher, would also be hired by OPS, shortly after Gamble. Upon Overall’s retirement in 1910, there would be no African-American teachers working in the district until 1939.

**1897**

The Omaha Savings Bank failed with liabilities of almost $1,000,000.

E.H. Harriman and other investors purchased the Union Pacific Railroad at a receivership auction after the original railroad company went bankrupt. The auction was held on the steps of the railroad’s freight house at 9th and Jackson Streets. Shortly afterwards, Harriman began a massive rebuilding process for UP that took several years to complete.

James Whitcomb Riley appeared at Boyd’s Opera House.

House-to-house mail delivery began.

The cornerstone for the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition and Indian Congress was laid in April and the project got underway a week later. Thomas Kimball, chief architect for the Trans-Miss Exposition, supervised the design of classical buildings around a central lagoon, which became the “Grand Court” and centerpiece for hundreds of activities. The Trans-Miss was located on 184 acres of land in North Omaha donated by the Kountze family.

Grace Lutheran Church was dedicated.

Overcrowding and inadequate ventilation became serious problems for teachers and students at Omaha High School. The school board took action during the 1897-1898 school year to construct a larger school at the same location. Some opposition developed. Nevertheless, construction began in 1900.

Benson was platted and incorporated as a village.

Armour & Co. established the country’s largest packing plant at the Omaha stockyards. During this time, South Omaha attracted large numbers of immigrants who came to take jobs at the stockyards and in the packing houses.

The state legislature acted to pass a bill saying no franchise for the Omaha waterworks system could be granted without a vote of the people. Nevertheless, the new city council granted the franchise to the City Waterworks Company. Eventually, the new franchise was struck down by the Nebraska Supreme Court.

Forest Lawn Cemetery gave 5 ½ acres of land to the city to form Potters Field, Omaha’s first charity gravesite. Burials were in Potters Field from 1887 to 1957.

The Park board began to purchase land to be used as boulevards to connect the city parks. Florence Boulevard, running north from 19th and Chicago to Ohio Street and then west to 20th Street and then north was the first boulevard acquired. Central Boulevard North (later Turner Boulevard) and Central Boulevard East (later Deer Park and Hanscom Boulevards) acquired. Later they acquired Lincoln Boulevard, running from the north end of Turner Boulevard to Bemis Park and Fontenelle Boulevard, near the northwest edge of the city at 46th Street

Den Danske Pioneer newspaper was published in Omaha, Nebraska from 1887-1959.

The Western Bohemian Fraternal Association is formed to offer health and death insurance to Czech immigrants.

In 1897, a 19-year-old practicing hobo named Carl Sandburg stopped in Omaha for two weeks and washed dishes at the Mercer Hotel (northwest corner of 12th and Howard Streets) to earn room and board. Later Sandburg would write the following tribute to Omaha: Omaha, the roughneck, feeds armies. Eats and swears from a dirty face. Omaha works to get the world a breakfast. Sandburg (January 6, 1878 – July 22, 1967) went on to win three Pulitzer Prizes: two for his poetry and one for his biography of Abraham Lincoln.

**1898**

President William McKinley declared the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition open at noon on June 1 via electrical current transmitted from the White House. The Exposition was held in north Omaha on a tract of land owned by the Kountze family and on the site of the old fairgrounds between Laird and Boyd Streets, and 16th to 20th Streets. The exposition lasted nearly five months and is the largest event Omaha has ever hosted. President McKinley visited Omaha and the Exposition on October 12, the day of the armistice that ended the Spanish-American War. The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben escorted the President from the new railway station to City Hall. On that day, 98,845 passed through the Exposition’s gates. Between the spring and fall of 1898, despite the Spanish-American War, over 2.6 million visitors were counted and an anticipated profit of $356,011.46 was reported. There was money enough to repay stockholders over 90% of their investments, an incredible achievement then or now.

The Exposition brought new economic life and light to Omaha. One of its major attractions was the electrical effects. It marked the beginning of the “Golden Age” for Nebraska farmers.

The Burlington Railroad completed construction of its terminal at 925 S. 10th Street by July 4 to welcome visitors traveling to Omaha for the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition and Indian Congress. It was designed by Thomas Kimball to resemble a Greek Style Temple. It was redesigned in the 1930s at its columns were given to the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. The building still stands today.

Sarah Joslyn was put in charge of planning the educational, cultural and entertainment activities at the Trans Mississippi Exposition. The experience introduced Joslyn to volunteering for the arts, an outcome that impacted Omaha long after the pavilions surrounding the faux Venetian lagoon vanished.

The first horseless carriage appeared on Omaha streets.

The Omaha Street Railway ordered additional new cars, repaired and refurbished older cars, and allocated $100,000 for improvements to the streetcar system in anticipation of providing transportation to as many as 100,000 visitors a day to and from the Trans-Mississippi Exposition. The allocation included the purchase of equipment for an additional 1,200 horsepower of capacity to the power plant at 20th and Nicholas Streets.

The Department of Missouri absorbed the Department of the Platte with headquarters in the “Army Building” at 15th and Dodge. Omaha became a center of troop mobilization for the Spanish-American War. The Thurston Rifles Unit was among the first to volunteer for service. The First and Second Regiments of the Nebraska National Guard were mustered into the United States service in Lincoln.

1898 According to a Trans-Mississippi promotional brochure, Omaha had 150,000 residents and 20,000 buildings in 1898.

The first woman graduated from Creighton’s medical school.

The Rees Printing Company plant in today’s Old Market area burned to the ground at a loss of $125,000.

Omaha Field Club, the city’s first country club and golf course, was founded on land leased to it by the county poor farm.

The formal opening of the new post office at 16th and Dodge Streets took place on February 22 although the building was not entirely completed until 1906. The total cost was $2 million for this architecturally significant building. “Only half a dozen public buildings in the United States could match its distinctive splendor,” according to Leslies Magazine. It served as Omaha’s main post office until 1964.

The Nebraska Clothing Company moved from 14th and Douglas to 15th and Farnam Streets. The company was founded in 1886.

The first Ak-Sar-Ben Electric Light Parade was held. Floats were positioned to run on streetcar tracks with electric power provided by trolleys from the wires overhead. The Omaha Street Railway Company supplied the power and use of the tracks.

The animal population at Riverview Park included deer, a grizzly bear, two bison on loan from Colonel William F. (“Buffalo Bill”) Cody and 120 other animals.

Belle Ryan starts at Omaha Public Schools as the first Assistant Superintendent.

With now formal art gallery in Omaha, Omaha Public Library director Edith Tobitt turned the library into Omaha’s de facto art museum by hosting art exhibits on the third floor. She served as director until 1934.

**1899**

Otto Bayesdorfer built a vehicle he called the Ottomobile and became the first of nearly a dozen Omaha car manufacturers. The Ottomobile weighed 265 pounds, had two cylinders, and could achieve a speed of 15 miles per hour. However, it could not climb Omaha’s hills.

H.E. Fredrickson established the first Omaha automobile agency.

Fred Austerlitz, later Fred Astaire, was born in Omaha on May 10 but lived here only a few years. In 2024 his home on South 10th Street still stands.

The Greater America Exposition was held on the rebuilt grounds of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition of the previous year. It showcased the people and lifestyles of the territories acquired as a result of the Spanish-American War. About 800,000 visitors attended the event scheduled from July 1st through November 1st. When the Exposition ended, the buildings were dismantled and everything sold for salvage. One of the buildings served as the pavilion at Riverview Park (now Henry Doorly Zoo) until is was razed in 1948. The only remaining piece is a gazebo that was in the backyard of the Storz Mansion at 37th and Farnam and now has been restored and is at Lauritzen Gardens.

Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll, noted iconoclast, lectured at Boyd’s Opera House. His appearance occasioned a good deal of newspaper comment. Nebraska Governor W.A. Poynter praised the Omaha World-Herald for its editorial refuting statements made by Ingersoll about Christianity.

Richard Mansfield appeared in Cyrano de Bergerac at Boyd’s Opera House.

The Daily News was established and increased to three the number of large daily newspapers in Omaha. The other two were the Bee and the Omaha World-Herald.

By an act of the legislature, Lincoln became the permanent site of the Nebraska State Fair. Ak-Sar-Ben Festivities became known as “Ak-Sar-Ben Carnival Week” once the state fair was no longer held in Omaha. The Carnival was held for a week and as many as 15,000 attended.

Eastern newspapers featured flattering reports about the increase in business in Omaha and in Nebraska.

The Illinois Central Railroad reached Council Bluffs and subsequently Omaha.

Kountze Place, near 20th and Emmet Streets, was where the first golf inside city limits was played, in late fall 1899 in the shadow of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition grounds. Omaha architect Harry Lawrie, a Scotsman who had played the Omaha Golf Club course often, came back from a visit to his homeland reinvigorated by the game and laid out a nine-hole course that lasted only until the Kountzes sold the land in 1901 for a Presbyterian seminary.

**1900–49**

**To Highlight: World War I and World War II and Nebraska’s Role, Sarah Joslyn, Annexations-Dundee, Florence, South Omaha, Benson, Ak-Sar-Ben, Utilities, Strikes, Greek Riot, Will Brown**

By the beginning of the 20th century, Omaha had developed a prosperous wholesale trade. From 1900 to 1918 20 brick warehouse buildings were built in a six-block area located downtown east of 10th Street. The name Jobbers Canyon was given to the area due to the canyon-like space formed along either side of Ninth Street.

The census listed an Omaha population of 102,555. The total population of Douglas County was 140,590. South Omaha, a suburb of Omaha known as the “Magic City”, was a booming stockyard and meatpacking town of 26,000 people. Irish or southern and eastern-European immigrants made up most of its population.

Dundee Village, an Omaha suburb, began as a real estate development that became a fashionable place to live with a population of 400 residents. It was named after a town in   
Scotland. Scottish immigrant John Malcom Dow became its first mayor.

Edward Cudahy, Jr., son of a major Omaha meatpacker, was kidnapped by Pat Crowe, a former employee at the Cudahy plant. A $25,000 ransom was paid in gold, and the boy was returned.

The Illinois Central Bridge over the Missouri River was completed.

The Omaha Auditorium Company was formed to raise funds for construction of a new city auditorium.

Construction of the present day Central High School began. John Latenser, Sr. was commissioned as the architect. Builders began with the east side, and the building grew one section at a time as construction continued around the old high school for 12 years. Finally, the old tower building itself was razed and removed before the last or north side of the new school was completed in November, 1912.

The Ak-Sar-Ben Carnival attracted crowds of people to Omaha and brought business to the city. Eventually, the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben purchased the Coliseum on North 20th Street where it entertained dignitaries that included Presidents Roosevelt and Taft. The Coliseum, known as the Ak-Sar-Ben Den, was also the site of the organization’s coronation ball.

By an overwhelming majority, voters approved issuance of bonds for the purchase of the waterworks system, but the Omaha City Council chose not to act.

The Omaha Country Club’s original home opened in 1900. The community believed it would help build Benson. The golf course was set up mainly between 52nd and 56th, Blondo to the current Northwest Radial on 100 acres of land. A later expansion was southeast of 52nd and Blondo. In July 1927 the Club moved farther north to 72nd and State Streets, where it remains in 2024. Members decided to move because the land they were was becoming too valuable to maintain as a golf course. The land was developed into the Country Club neighborhood filled with Tudor revival-style homes that was a popular architectural style in the late 1920s and early 1930s when the area was built.

Automobiles were considered a public nuisance and a "rich man's toy" in the early 1900s. First car in Omaha was Emil Brandeis' electric car The Ottomobile built by the Baysdorfer Brothers – Otto, Gus and Charles (also the first car built in Nebraska).

The first recorded balloon flight in Omaha was at the sixth annual Ak-Sar-Ben Carnival, on July 27, 1900. Prof. Sam "King" Murphy guided his balloon between the building surrounding the carnival grounds; 17th to 20th Streets, Dodge to Farnam. Landed by the Union Pacific Missouri River bridge, just east of the Metz Brewery. John Waldorf Hall an aeronaut residing at 617 South 17th Street thrilled thousands with his spectacular flights. He would get his neighbor Charles Baysdorfer, 609 South 17th Street involved in air flight. Charles and his brothers Gus and Otto would become important Nebraska aircraft enthusiasts. The balloon flight was not considered practical by aeronauts because they had to go the way the wind wanted. Balloon flights were made every May at Fort Omaha until 1913.

An occupational census in 1900 reflects an Omaha labor force of about 2,000 African Americans. They worked as meat packers, in domestic and personal service jobs, porters and helpers on the railroads and a cherished few jobs with the U.S. postal service. A scattering were professionals doctors, lawyers, clergymen and musicians.

In 1900, out of thousands of foreign born, 3968 came from Sweden, 5522 came from Germany, 2430 from Denmark, 2164 from Ireland and less than 2,000 from all other European countries.

**1901**

Sarah Bernhardt appeared in La Tosca at Boyd’s Theater and Opera House at 17th and Harney Streets.

Ground was broken for construction of a new city auditorium on the southeast corner of 15th and Howard Streets. Omaha architect John Latenser was in charge of the design.

The Nebraska State Fair was permanently moved to Lincoln. When the state fair left Omaha, the Douglas County Agricultural Society held its fair in conjunction first, with the Ak-Sar-Ben Carnival in 1900, and later with the annual Ak-Sar-Ben festival.

Thomas R. Kimball designed one of the largest Gold Coast homes for Freeman P. Kirkendall, owner of the Kirkendall Boot Company. At 3727 Jackson Street, the home still stands.

In 1901, according to a trade directory of U.S. breweries, the Nebraska Brewing Co. became the “Willow Springs Brewing Co.” In advertisements, Willow Springs at 3rd and Hickory Streets touted the “purity” of its ingredients, particularly the spring water used in the brewing process. The beer, advertisements boasted, was “a tonic for tired nerves.”

**1902**

The Omaha chapter of the Knights of Columbus was organized.

The Nebraska School of Medicine became part of the University of Nebraska system. Students attended classes in Lincoln their first two years and in Omaha the final two years.

The Governor of Nebraska appointed a new police board for Omaha and ordered the closure of all illegitimate enterprises.

Union Pacific boilermakers went on strike. In reprisal, 137 machinists were laid off in Omaha. Labor leaders, Samuel Gompers and James O’Connell, took charge locally.

President Theodore Roosevelt reviewed the Ak-Sar-Ben parade from his vantage point at City Hall.

R.B. Howell, former city engineer, was elected to the Nebraska Legislature where he secured passage of a bill in 1903 that required the Omaha City Council to purchase the water plant as mandated by the voters in 1900. The new law also provided for the establishment of the Omaha Water Board. The city council responded by assigning appraisers to determine the value of the water plant.

Gilbert M. Hitchcock, principal owner of the Omaha World-Herald, won the first of three terms he served in the U.S. House of Representatives.

North Western Railway inaugurated mile-a-minute service between Omaha and Chicago.

The cornerstone of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary was laid.

Ground was broken for a new St. Mary Magdalene Church at 19th and Dodge Streets in March. Construction was completed in time for services to be held in the new church on Christmas Day, the 34th anniversary of the dedication of the parish’s first house of worship in 1868.

Sacred Heart Church was dedicated in June on its new site at 2206 Binney Street. Built on land donated by Kountze Place developer, Herman Kountze, many prominent Omahans attended the dedication ceremony. Cost of construction was $25,000.

The Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway was established as a combination of all the electric-powered railways in the Omaha and Council Bluffs area.

Omaha Field Club began under the title Omaha Amateur Athletic association. The younger element of the city's socially elect formed this club in 1902.

On February 23, Charles Salter was formally appointed chief of the Omaha Fire Department. Salter would continue as chief for 23 years

**1903**

Alamito Dairy began operations.

President Theodore Roosevelt visited Omaha and spoke to a crowd of 12,000 people at the Ak-Sar-Ben Den, also known as the Coliseum.

A city-owned outdoor market opened on Capitol Avenue.

The Omaha Business Men’s Association (OBMA) was established to counter the power of local labor unions by returning the “open shop” in which workers were hired without regard to union membership. Just days after the announcement of the formation of the OBMA, teamsters, waiters, cooks, bartenders and carpenters struck. Much of the city’s business ground to a halt or was severely diminished when as many as 2,900 workers went on strike. The OBMA implemented a war of attrition and imported strikebreakers from outside the city and state. The 1903 strike was a serious setback for the local trade union movement and became a decisive turning point in Omaha’s labor history.

Burlington Railroad offered a round trip from Omaha to Chicago on a special excursion train for $12.75.

The Chicago Great Western Railroad reached Council Bluffs and eventually Omaha.

The Omaha Electric Light and Power Company was organized and took over all interests of the Thompson-Houston Company. F.A. Nash was president of the new company which had capital stock valued at $4,000,000. The new company furnished the city with 2,600 street lights that included 1,400 arcs and 1,200 incandescent lights. Omaha Electric Light and Power Company also provided power to a large number of private consumers and manufacturers.

Businessman Jonas L. Brandeis died. His son, Arthur Brandeis, became the head of J.L. Brandeis & Sons upon his father’s death.

South Omaha brewer Frederick Krug took over Tietz Park on the northwest corner of what is now 52nd and Maple Streets when the park’s developer, Charles Tietz, died. Krug expanded the 20 acres into an amusement park that featured several rides.

Completed in 1903, George and Sarah Joslyn built a 35-room home and named it Lynhurst although it is commonly referred to as the Joslyn. Located at 3902 Davenport, the home features mosaic tile floors, a Spanish mahogany staircase and stained glass windows throughout. It is Omaha’s best example of a historic home that has been preserved to look like it did when it was built. In 2024 the non-profit Joslyn Castle and Grounds oversees its maintenance and educational events.

Charles Tietz started a park at 52nd and Military Avenue. Tietz died in 1903 and Fred Krug took over the park and began further expansion. He planned a complete amusement park. In advertisements, it was referred to as "Omaha's Polite Resort" The park offered several rides, a "tunnel of love", an ice cream parlor, a dance pavilion, a beer garden/saloon serving his Krug beer, and a balloon ascension. It continues in 2024 as Gallagher Park.

In 103 the new city charter provided for 12 wards, Election day was moved to the first Tuesday in May.

**1904**

A new building was built for South Omaha High School at 23rd and “J” Streets. The auditorium seated over a thousand people.

South Branch Library was completed. The library was a gift to South Omaha from the Carnegie Foundation Fund.

The Omaha Municipal Auditorium opened at 15th and Howard Streets. Well-known performers such as Sarah Bernhardt and Enrico Caruso later performed there. The new hall had a capacity of 6,000 people.

Creighton Law School opened at the Edward Creighton Institute, 210 South 18th Street, with 23 students.

First Baptist Church was dedicated at Park Avenue and Harney Streets.

The Omaha Grain Exchange opened for business. Organized in 1903, its first president was Gurdon W. Wattles, and membership totaled 155. During the first year of operation, total receipts of grain were 16,433,285 bushels, the largest in Omaha’s history up until that time.

The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben purchased the Coliseum on North 20th Street from its owners, Wilson Graham and William Ure, for $12,000. Known as the Ak-Sar-Ben Den, the building was acquired mainly as a location to build the organization’s parade floats. This year’s coronation ball was held at the city’s new auditorium.

Arthur and Zerlina Brandeis hired Detroit architect Albert Kahn, to design their Gold Coast home at 500 S. 38th Street. It is a fine example of the Jacobethan style. In 1909 the home was sold to Jessie H. Millard as a residence for herself and her father, Senator Joseph H. Millard. After extensive renovations in 2009, it serves as a single-family home in 2024. (Show video)

Fire station opened at 11th and Jackson on May 28, 1904. In 2024 it is the site of Upstream Brewery.

On April 26, firefighters received a cut in hours. They had been required to be on duty for 144 hours at a time. This was six consecutive days at the fire station and resting on the seventh. They were allowed to go home for an hour, three times each day for meals. If they returned late charges were brought up against them. Now compelled to be on duty no more than 120 hours in each 144 hours

W. E. Johnson started a freight line between Omaha and Benson. Built a garage on the north side of Military and 60th Avenue. Obtained one of the largest auto freight trucks in the area.

**1905**

The Mercer Block and Hotel at 12th and Howard Streets suffered the effects of a devastating fire on January 28, 1905. It is said streetcars ran until 2 a.m. to bring spectators to the scene, and that nearby saloons did a roaring business. The building erected in its place was constructed as a banana warehouse filled with hooks to hold huge bunches, a new thing in American in 1905. Enter the building today and you will see woman’s apparel shop Nouvelle Eve.

The first radio message was received in Omaha.

A Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) monument was dedicated at Forest Lawn Cemetery to honor Douglas County’s Civil War dead.

Fort Omaha reopened as a school for non-commissioned officers of the U.S. Army Signal Corps.

The cornerstone for the new Kountze Memorial Lutheran Church was laid at its new site at 26th and Farnam Streets. The completed building was dedicated in 1906. The church is named in recognition of the family of Herman Kountze who made a large contribution toward the construction of the first church and donated a significant gift used in building the new church.

Work began on construction of St. Cecilia Cathedral on the corner of 40th and Burt Streets on what was known as Walnut Hill. The architect was Thomas R. Kimball.

The Temple Theater at 25th and “N” Streets was the first to charge admission to see a movie. Omaha’s first fulltime movie theater, the Parlor, opened soon afterward.

The state legislature took action on a bill that deprived the Omaha City Council of all authority regarding the waterworks system and vested it in the Omaha Water Board.

The Creighton University School of Dentistry opened downtown at the Edward Creighton Institute. Enrollment was 113 students. During the same year, Creighton University trustees purchased the Omaha School of Pharmacy and located it at Creighton’s medical school at 14th and Davenport Streets. Today it is known as the School of Pharmacy and Allied Health Professions.

Samuel A. Orchard and Charles M. Wilhelm moved their furniture and carpet business to a new location at 16th and Howard Streets.

The Omaha Gas Company opens a new plant at 20th and Center Streets.

According to the Omaha World-Herald, in 1905 300 Japanese immigrants were living in Omaha. “All of them, more or less, are employed at the packing houses mostly Cudahy’s.” Students at Lowell School at 33rd and J Streets, encouraged by their parents, held a protest against two Japanese students attending the school. Japanese immigrants had been used as packinghouse strikebreakers and many of the families worked in the packing houses.

**1906**

The cornerstone for the new Methodist Hospital was laid at 38th and Cuming Streets.

Edward Rosewater, founder and editor of the Omaha Bee, died.

Appraisers reported the value of the Omaha water plant at $6,253,000. The city appealed the appraisal which set off a court battle between the city and the waterworks company that went to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Benson was incorporated as a city. James A. Howard was elected the first mayor.

Construction of the eight-story J.L. Brandeis and Sons Store on the southwest corner of 16th and Douglas Streets was completed at a cost of $650,000. Designed by architect John Latenser, Sr., it became the flagship store of the J.L. Brandeis and Sons regional department store chain.

The Sprague Street Driving Park was broken up into 100 lots and offered for sale for residential purposes. The driving park was the last unoccupied part, with the exception of Kountze Park, of the huge tract of land upon which the Trans-Mississippi Exposition was held. The tract belonged to the Redick estate.

J.R. Roberts began home delivery of milk produced by his herd of 60 cows near Lincoln. The business became Roberts Dairy that later was headquartered in Omaha.

The Social Settlement Association of Omaha was founded.

James C. Dahlman was elected Omaha mayor and served in that capacity until 1918. He again served as mayor from 1921 until his death in 1930.

Robert Gilder discovered skulls of primitive man at Long’s Hill.

Members of the W.C.T.U. (Women’s Christian Temperance Union) crusaded against nude art on public billboards.

The Douglas County Association of Nebraska Pioneers was organized.

In 1906 there were 53 patrolmen. They walked their beats which were anywhere from two to ten miles in length.

Gurdon Wattles becomes president of the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company and helped develop the company. Wattles retired in 1919.

1906 - R. R. Kimball's garage at 2026-2028 Farnam serviced steam powered automobiles, including the Stanley Steamer and Steven Duryea. This garage had all the modern technology, overhead cranes, electric lifts, sufficient room, and was fireproof.

Lucille Skaggs Edwards published Women’s Aurora, the first magazine in Nebraska published by a Black woman, in 1906. She was active in politics and in the Catholic Church. In 1918, Lucille and Lula Lewis started a black Catholic Missionary society which would attract the involvement of Father Francis Cassilly, a professor at Creighton University, and become Saint Benedict the Moor Church. She died in 1972.

Harriet Dakin MacMurphy through her work at the Omaha World-Herald spearheaded the effort to help pass the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act and in 1907 was named Nebraska's State Food Inspector, serving under four governors.

**1907**

Two important Omaha business leaders died, William A. Paxton and John A. Creighton. During his lifetime and as a result of his will, Creighton donated about $2 million to Creighton University. His monetary support helped the institution survive during the difficult financial times of the 1890s.

The All Saints Episcopal Church opened at 26th Street and Dewey Avenue.

Benson had a population of 1,500 residents and qualified as a city of the second class.

The last services were held at the old St. Philomena Cathedral at 9th and Harney Streets. The property was sold to John Deere & Company. Until their new church was completed, parishioners worshipped at St. Mary Magdalene Church. A new St. Philomena Church was built on William Street between 9th and 10th Streets and dedicated in August, 1909. Cost of construction was $41,500.

The cornerstone for St. Cecilia Cathedral was laid in an elaborate ceremony on October 6th. The dimensions of the new church were 158 feet by 255 feet with twin towers that would soar 187 feet. The style of architecture is Spanish Renaissance Revival. Walls were faced with Indiana limestone. Bishop Richard Scannell dictated that construction would continue as funds became available. For this reason, more than 50 years passed before the cathedral was completed

The size of the Creighton University campus doubled to a little more than eleven acres with the acquisition of land between 25th Avenue and 26th Street, California to Burt Streets. Purchase price was $18,500. In addition, the city vacated 25th Avenue and donated it to the school.

The Happy Hollow Club was established. The clubhouse was located in the Patrick family mansion located on a farm estate that is now the site of Memorial Park at Dodge Street and Happy Hollow Boulevard. Dundee Village was located nearby.

The National Humane Society of America donated a fountain to Omaha in 1907. It was situated in the middle of Capitol Avenue at 17th Street. In the late 1970s it was moved to the Firehouse Dinner Theater (now Upstream Brewing Co.) at 11th and Jackson and today pieces of it are a block east at approximately 1009 Jackston St. It was once three tiered with water from the Lion’s head for humans, a six foot trough for horses and two lower troughs for cats and dogs.

The Webster Telephone Exchange building was completed at 2213 Lake Street. It was designed by Thomas R. Kimball and was later remodeled as a community center in 1933 and then the Great Plains Black History Center in the late 1970s. In 2024, it sits empty but plans call for redevelopment.

Brewery owner Gottlieb Storz hired Fisher and Lawrie to design his elegant Gold Coast mansion at 3708 Farnam Street. Until 2002, only members of the Storz family lived in the home. Many of the exquisite interior features remain including a solarium covered with a magnificent stained glass dome. It continues as one of the few single-family homes in the Blackstone area.

In 1907 there were 2,000 Greeks in the area, mostly in South Omaha. They worked in the packinghouses and railroads or established their own businesses. By 1909 the Greeks owned 32 businesses including shoe-shine parlors, travel agencies, coffee houses, groceries and confectioneries.

**1908**

The National Corn Exposition was held in Omaha. Omaha businessman, Gurdon W. Wattles, was president of the exposition, a regional show organized to publicize the role of Omaha as a grain center.

Levi Carter Park opened. Lake Nakoma was renamed Carter Lake.

Voters approved a bond issue to build a new courthouse at 17th and Farnam Streets.

The Union Pacific lane cut-off over Papillion Creek in Millard was dedicated.

The University of Omaha was founded and incorporated in October. The Reverend Daniel E. Jenkins was founding president. The university operated as a private, religious-oriented institution until 1931 when it became a municipal university. Three of Omaha University’s first four presidents were ordained Presbyterian ministers.

The first “around-the-world” automobile endurance race came through Omaha.

The Baysdorfer Brothers – Otto, Charles and Gus – were responsible not only for Omaha’s first automobile but built a 52 foot dirigible the Comet, and flew it over City Hall in 1908.

Republican candidate for President, William H. Taft, visited Omaha and spoke to a large audience at the auditorium.

Creighton University celebrated its first Founders’ Day to pay tribute to the Creighton family one year after the death of John A. Creighton.

The US Army Signal Corps is established at the Fort Omaha Balloon School.

Temple Israel left its location at 23rd and Harney and dedicated a new structure designed by architect John Latenser Sr. at Park Avenue and Jackson Streets. In 1954 Temple Israel moved to 70th and Cass Streets, closer to members homes, and St. John’s Greek Orthodox Church purchased the structure. In 1908 Greek immigrants built a church at 16th and Martha Streets but by the early 1950s had outgrown it and they sold their church to the Ukrainians. The Byzantine style of the synagogue provided an adaptable setting for the Orthodox Christian congregation. They remain there in 2024.

20,000 telephones were installed in Omaha in 1908. Long distance was extended to almost all parts of the state. In 1912, the Nebraska Telephone Company ran into problems because it controlled so much business and citizens complained rates were too high and they were violating fair trade practices. By 1916 the company was serving some 40,000 Omaha subscribers.

Omaha boasts an Italian population of no fewer than 2,000 persons, most of who had come recently either from Sicily or from the toe of the Italian boot, Calabria. Those from Sicily were overwhelmingly from Carlentini.

There were 120 families from Croatia and Slovenia in Omaha. They lived in Goose Hollow, an area between V, W, 31st and 35th Streets. They initially worshiped at St. Agnes at 22nd and Q along with other European newcomers into they founded their own church, Saints Peter and Paul at 36th and X Streets. The first service was Easter Sunday, 1918.

In 1908 about 75% of Omaha’s dairy industry was controlled by Danish-Americans. By 1961 there remained only Joseph P. Moeller’s Alamito Dairy, Grobeck Dairy in South Omaha and that of George E. Sorensen.

**1909**

On Feb. 19, 1909, a transient worker and gambler of Greek origin, shot and killed a police officer, Edward Lowery. The killer was arrested and taken to Lincoln for incarceration. Two days later a riot erupted. A mob, inflamed by irresponsible leaders and unable to get at the killer used clubs, arson, pistols, and fists to physically injure all Greeks they could find in the vicinity, as well as a few immigrant Poles. Homes and businesses were destroyed. Many Greeks fled South Omaha area for good. According to Dr. John M. Bitzes, a local Greek historian, while Lowery’s death triggered the riot, underlying causes were economic competition, a lack of education, greed, cultural and ethnic differences as well as poor behavior on the part of both Greeks and non-Greeks before the riot.

Several hundred street railway employees struck for a pay increase and union recognition in September. The president of the company was Gurdon W. Wattles, also a banker and well-known local booster. Wattles used the strike as an opportunity to break the union in the street railway company. He had the support of the Omaha Business Men’s Association (OBMA) in his efforts. Strikebreakers were imported from the East, and the street railway strike ended as a defeat for union workers. Founded in 1903, the OBMA was a strong force in Omaha labor history until 1939.

For the first time, classes were held at the University of Omaha in Redick Hall, the former Redick Mansion, at 24th and Pratt Streets built by prominent lawyer and realtor John I. Redick. This was the university’s only building. The school opened on September 14th with 26 students attending classes. In 1917 the house became inadequate for the college and it was sold to Rudolf Beal, an Omaha grain dealer, who dismantled the home and shipped it to a resort in Currie, Minnesota. It became the Valhalla Dance Pavilion and Café before being destroyed by fire March 3, 1928.

President William Howard Taft visited Omaha in September. As guest of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, the President was treated to dinner at the Omaha Club where guests attending paid $20 a plate. After dinner, he enjoyed viewing the comic opera, “Paprika Schnitzel”, at the Ak-Sar-Ben Den.

The National Corn Exposition was again held in Omaha. Prizewinning corn sold for $2,345 a bushel; wheat sold for $800.

“Uncle Billy” Snowden, Omaha’s first settler, died at the age of 83.

Omaha National Bank purchased the New York Life Building, 1650 Farnam, after the insurance company developed financial problems. Cost of the purchase was $675,000. The building became known as the Omaha Building.

The first successful balloon flight occurred at Fort Omaha. Captain Charles De F. Chandler was pilot of the flight which marked the beginning of the Army’s first regular lighter-than-air center. Earlier installation of a balloon house and hydrogen gas-making facility made the flight possible.

Dr. C.C. and Mabel Criss founded Mutual Benefit Health and Accident Association. After paying $300 for Mutual’s charter, Mabel managed the office and C.C. sold insurance while he studied medicine. Overshadowed in its early years by another local insurer, the Fraternal Woodmen of the World, the company that became Mutual of Omaha grew and became the nation’s top health and accident insurer in the 1950s.

Three multi-unit apartment houses were completed, the Majestic, the Strehlow and the Roland at 2024 to 2107 North 16th Street. It was Nebraska’s first known example of an integrated grouping of related apartment buildings. Contractor Robert C. Strehlow used his experience as superintendent of construction for the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition of 1898 to create this unique complex of apartments.

By 1909 the Omaha Police Department horse and old patrol wagons had been completely dispensed with. They now had one light touring car as an emergency vehicle and two big patrol autos plus started using motorcycles.

Former heavyweight champion Max Baer was born in Omaha.

Founded in 1909, the Noonday Scandinavian Club is the oldest Civic organization in Omaha.

**1910**

St. Catherine’s Hospital opened at 9th and Forest Streets.

The City National Bank, an amazing 16 stories tall, was completed at 16th and Harney Streets.

Rome Miller, associated with the Rome Hotel, started the first autotaxi service in Omaha.

The first air show was held in Omaha when Glenn Curtiss brought his aerial circus to town.

October 1 was the opening day of the Ak-Sar-Ben Speedway. Eddie Rickenbacker won all four auto races. He was better known as an American fighter pilot in World War I and was a Medal of Honor recipient.

The Midwest Aviation Meet was held in Omaha.

Gilbert Hitchcock won election to the U.S. Senate where he served for two terms. Before his election to the U.S. Senate, he served three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Arthur Brisbane spoke at a convention of advertising men.

Omaha had a population of 124,096 persons. The total population of Douglas County was 168,546. South Omaha population stood at 26,259.

Omaha’s growing prominence is reflected in its position as the country’s second-largest marketplace for corn and livestock, fourth-largest railroad center and grain market, and home to more than 30 insurance companies.

Former President Theodore Roosevelt visited Omaha for a second time during a pleasure trip to the West. That evening he was initiated into Ak-Sar-Ben.

A bomb placed on the porch of city political boss Tom Dennison’s home did not cause any injuries. It was a political hoax, and the alleged perpetrator was acquitted at trial.

The Rod and Gun Club opened at Carter Lake.

Dundee had a population of 1,023 according to the U.S. Census.

Claudia Galloway became the first graduate of the University of Omaha (OU).

Omaha University held its first athletic competition when the OU football team defeated the Nebraska Deaf and Dumb Institute by a score of 25-0.

The Creighton University basketball team played its first season.

The Woodmen of the World Life Insurance Co. began construction of a new 18-story office building at 1323 Farnam Street. At the time, Woodmen of the World was the largest fraternal life insurance company in the world. In 1919, a 19th floor was added for a radio station.

**1911**

Prostitution thrived in Omaha. In 1911 the estimated number was 2,600 prostitutes in 12 large brothels. The Arcade was rows of cribs in several alleys, covering the entire square block between 8th and 9th Streets and Dodge to Capitol Avenue. This was known as the Tenderloin District.

Most imposing was the establishment ran by Anna Wilson, the city’s most famous madam, also known as a philanthropist for worthy causes. When she died in 1911, Wilson willed her properties to the City of Omaha. The dispensary she had established for her ladies became City Hospital, sometimes referred to as Pest Hospital. Eventually, it merged with a similar service provided by Trinity Episcopal Cathedral to become Clarkson Hospital.. Wilson is buried in Prospect Hill Cemetery next to her friend, gambler Dan Allen.

By an act of the legislature, Omaha’s restricted red light district was abolished when brothels were banned. However, police enforcement was half-hearted, and prostitution spread into rooming houses and hotels instead.

A style show was held in Omaha for the first time.

The city’s new million-dollar courthouse, nearing completion, was the scene of a dynamite explosion. Damage was not extensive.

William “Pa” Rourke rebuilt the old baseball park at 15th and Vinton Streets. The stands at Rourke Park held 9,000 fans, admission was 50 cents, refreshments were sold, and fans could watch the game from their cars in an “auto yard”. Omaha baseball provided mass entertainment enjoyed by many as a popular social occasion.

The winter of 1911-1912 produced an all-time snowfall record for Omaha of 67.5 inches.

At 22nd and Ames in 1910 a new fire station was opened. In 2024 it is Dino’s Storage.

The warehouse district had grown east and north of the wholesale district. Ninth and Capitol was being filled with large warehouses for companies such as John Deere Implements.

The West Farnam neighborhood was located from 36th to 40th Streets, Jones to Davenport. Davenport was historically the dividing line between the West Farnam (Blackstone) and the Cathedral Neighborhood, but now it's more commonly seen as Dodge Street. The Cathedral Neighborhood ran from 36th to 40th Streets, Davenport to Cuming Streets. Both areas were known as upper-class suburbs. They were at their height from 1900 to 1920 although recent redevelopments have brought back both neighborhoods.

Kate McHugh was named the first woman principal of a high school in Omaha. She became principal of Omaha High (now Central High School) in 1911 and served until 1914.

Many African American businesses and many of their owners lived, as was the universal custom, next to or above their stores. It was not until the 1910s that such firms and their proprietors found new locations north of Cuming and as far north as Lake, between 24th and 30th Streets. Black families followed.

In 1910 the Swedish population in Omaha numbered 8.024, counting foreign born and those born in America of Swedish parents. Swedes resided near 20th Street north of Cuming.

Before World War II, few Japanese resided in Nebraska, even fewer in Omaha. The first group came in 1904 when Kinya Okajima, on behalf of the packinghouses, recruited about 120 laborers from Wyoming and Colorado mines. By 1901, there were 200 Japanese in the area, half working for Cudahy Packing Company. They lived in a house called the House of Good Shepherd or found lodging in a boardinghouse run by a Mr. Hashimoto who boarded 20 of them on 11th Street between Harney and Farnam.

**1912**

Acquired the land to tie all the parks together. Work began on John Creighton, Paxton, Mercer, Happy Hollow and Carter Boulevards. Mercer Boulevard and Caroline Mercer Park were donated to the city by the Mercer family.

Emil Brandeis died on the Titanic at age 44. Several months later, his brother, Hugo, died following surgery at age 43. This left the surviving brother, Arthur, to run the J.L. Brandeis & Sons store. He was joined by a cousin, George Brandeis, of Chicago who moved to Omaha to help Arthur administer the business.

The village of Ralston was incorporated. Established by the Skinner and Chase Real Estate Company on Seymour Park, the former private estate of Dr. George Miller, the location was ideal as a distributing center. The CB&Q and the Missouri Pacific railroads served the area. C.A. Ralston, a Chicago industrialist, was recruited to start an industrial center. His automobile factory produced eight horseless carriages and one truck designed by Ralph Rogers.

The Woodmen of the World (WOW) Building was dedicated at 14th and Farnam Streets. At 18 stories tall, it was the tallest building between Chicago and the Pacific coast. The cost of construction was about $1.5 million.

Construction of the north side or the last phase of Central High School was completed in November. Built in four phases over 12 years, the final cost of construction was $750,000. Removal of the heating and ventilating plant in the center of the four wings left a vacant space that was converted into a courtyard.

The cornerstone was laid for the Scottish Rite Cathedral at 20th and Douglas Streets.

A new Douglas County Courthouse was completed on Farnam Street between 17th and 18th Streets for $1 million. It occupies the same site as the second courthouse. John Latenser and Sons designed the building constructed of Indiana limestone with a rotunda that is topped by a dome 110 feet above the floor. It stands today.

The City of Omaha took possession of the Omaha Waterworks plant on July 1st ending a fifteen-year struggle for municipal ownership. The plant was purchased for $6,319,261 with the proceeds from a bond issue.

The commission form of government, officially nonpartisan and elected at-large, went into effect in May. Voters elected a board of seven commissioners who selected a mayor from their own number. As part of a reform effort, each commissioner was responsible for one city department. The mayor was also president of the commission and superintendent of the Department of Public Affairs. Despite reformers’ efforts to get the “Citizens’ Ticket” elected, it was defeated by the Dahlman ticket of commissioners who chose “Cowboy Jim” Dahlman as mayor to succeed himself.

Theodore Roosevelt visited Omaha as the Progressive Party’s candidate for President on September 20th. Later, on October 5th Woodrow Wilson, the Democratic Party’s candidate for President, spoke at the Municipal Auditorium. In November, Wilson was elected to his first of two terms in the White House.

Nicholas Senn Hospital, located on the southeast comer of Park and Dewey Avenues. Erected in 1912. In 1936 entered into a contract with the city to care for all police emergency patients.

The Tägliche Omaha Tribüne (1912-26), or the Daily Omaha Daily Tribune was founded by newspaper-entrepreneur Valentin (Val) Joseph Peter (1875-1960). It published out of a storefront at 1307 Howard Street. According to various sources, it was “one of the most widely-circulated and influential German dailies in the country. During World War I, nativists deeply resented the passionate pro-German position of his editorials. The Tribüne’s newsboys were attacked, advertisers decamped, and Peter and his family were threatened with bodily harm. After America entered the war, Peter moderated his support for the German cause. Later, during World War II, all his papers were staunchly supportive of the United States.

N.P. Dodge II graduated from Harvard College and Law School and returned to Omaha to establish his own real estate company. He went into debt, bought land and subdivided it, launching what came to be known as the Dodge Dollar Down Plan, becoming one of the largest real estate development operators in the country selling lots for $1 down and $1 a week. While in the state legislature, N.P. II introduced a bill which set up the state’s primaries, a check and balance system designed to offset irregularities of the 1912 election, which was attributed to Omaha’s Political Boss Tome Dennison. It became known as the Dodge Honest Election Law.

**1913**

Omaha’s worst tornado struck suddenly and without warning on Easter Sunday, March 23rd, about 6 PM. It resulted in the deaths of 140 people and the injury of 400 others in Omaha alone. The storm followed a path roughly from 55th and Center Streets northeast through Bemis Park and to Levi Carter Park where it crossed into Iowa. It measured about one-quarter mile in width, was seven miles long and was strewn with the debris of homes, schools, churches and businesses. The worst damage was in the neighborhood of 24th and Lake Streets. Seventeen people were killed at the Idlewild Pool Hall at 24th and Grant Streets. The Academy of the Sacred Heart, 3601 Burt Street, and the George A. Joslyn “Castle” residence at 39th and Davenport Streets were heavily damaged as were thousands of other homes, large and small. About 3,000 people were made homeless, and property damage was estimated at $8.7 million. The Easter Sunday tornado is Omaha’s worst natural disaster to date.

Omaha Public Schools (OPS) held its first vacation school at Central High School. A total of 250 high school students and 600 elementary students were enrolled. Ninety-two percent of the students passed all subjects in which they were enrolled. The total cost of the vacation school was approximately $3,000 or ten cents a day for each student.

In 1913 the 3,400 mile Lincoln Highway was completed becoming the first coast-to-coast highway. From 1913 to 1930, drivers entered Omaha via the Douglas Street Bridge and at 18th Street they turned one block south and continued on Farnam Street to 40th Street. At 40th they turned north to Dodge and then followed Omaha's main east-west artery out to Elkhorn. Gas and service stations, tourist camps and hotels and restaurants lined the route catering to travelers. Elkhorn's three mile brick street between 174th and 204th Streets is considered among the best remaining examples of the Lincoln Highway. It is on the National Register.

The nation’s 38th president, Gerald Ford, was born Leslie King, Jr. in Omaha. His home was at 3202 Woolworth Avenue. He and his mother soon moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan where she remarried and Leslie was adopted and his name changed.

The Fontenelle Forest Association was incorporated.

Krug Park at 52nd and Military reopened after three years with a variety of new attractions. They included an “airplane” ride, a penny arcade, a 72- horse merry-go-round, the Big Dipper “rolly coaster”, aerialists, human cannonballs, parachutists and horses that dove off a platform into a tank of water.

Omaha University (OU) held its first formal commencement. Shortly afterwards, the OU Alumni Association was founded by the school’s first graduating class of 11 graduates on June 6.

An all-University alumni association was organized at Creighton. During the same year, women were admitted for the first time to the school’s undergraduate program but were limited to participating in summer school classes for teachers. On another front, Creighton University students helped with community clean-up after the devastating March tornado. Students from Creighton’s medical, dental and pharmacy schools staffed emergency relief stations.

Total receipts of grain at the Omaha Grain Exchange were 66,983,800 bushels, and membership was 193, up from 155 members when the exchange was organized ten years earlier.

OPS opened the Fort School, a “Special School for Boys”, to provide students the academics as well as training in a trade or occupation. At first, 20 boys were enrolled, but the figure quickly grew to 50. By December, there was a waiting list of 17, and plans were made to add another room to the school the following year.

By year’s end, the Omaha Public Library had established branches within several OPS elementary schools. Buildings with branches included Castelar, Edward Rosewater, Kellom, Monmouth Park, Pacific and Train. The schools furnished the room and equipment while the Library provided the books and trained attendants.

The War Department closed the Signal Corps balloon facilities at Fort Omaha and moved most of the equipment to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

The state legislature created the Metropolitan Water District as a subdivision of the state. The new subdivision had control over the entire area that was provided water by the city waterworks system. This included the subsequently annexed areas of South Omaha, Benson and Florence.

The Nebraska Legislature revised the 1887 anti-miscegenation law to define Negro according to the 1/8 blood rule, i.e., a great-grandparent. The notorious octoroon rule was the same standard as that used in the Jim Crow South.

Metropolitan Water District was former by authority of the state legislature. The district could now furnish water outside of the Omaha city limits.

**1914**

An election proposition passed setting the fare for seven streetcar rides at 25 cents.

The Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman’s Suffrage is founded in Omaha. They produce a “Ten Reasons why the Great Majority of Women don’t want on the Ballot.” Reasons include making them eligible to serve on jury duty – abhorrent to women. Would bring about dissension and discord within the home and women want rest and quietude, not political excitement.

“Go to Church Day” on March 29th filled Omaha’s churches.

The first transcontinental telephone service was available in Omaha.

Jane Addams spoke to a large crowd on women’s suffrage, but Nebraska voters rejected suffrage later the same year.

The Updike Grain Company shipped a million bushels of wheat to England.

Boyd’s Theater and Opera House was sold to the Burgess-Nash Company but continued to operate as a theater until 1920.

The Omaha Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded by John A. Williams, an Episcopal priest, and Harrison J. Pinkett, an attorney.

The Flatiron Hotel was built at 1722 St. Mary’s Avenue. The triangle design was used by architect George Prinze was used to fit the irregular space at Howard Street and St. Mary’s Avenue. It served as a hotel for many years and later a home for a restaurant on the ground level and businesses up above. In 2024 it has retail and a restaurant on the ground level and apartments up above.

**1915**

The Hotel Fontenelle opened at 18th and Douglas Streets. Designed by architect Thomas R. Kimball, the main feature of its façade was an ornate “crown” of terra cotta spires that faced its top three stories. Named for Logan Fontenelle, a leader of the Omaha tribe, the “crown” symbolized an Indian headdress similar to the type Logan Fontenelle might have worn. Each of the hotel’s 350 rooms had a telephone. Cost of construction was $1,000,000.

In 1915, taxes rose sharply as did the number of policemen and firemen. New city planning commission granted unprecedented powers in platting new additions and in subsidizing the cost of grading the streets.

Omaha annexed South Omaha in June, adding over 25,000 residents to Omaha’s population. In the same proclamation, Governor John H. Morehead declared that the village of Dundee was also now a part of the City of Omaha.

Both South Omaha and Dundee are annexed. The towns of Dundee and South Omaha wanted to maintain their individuality, but the election law went by a decision based on the vote of all three municipalities, Omaha, South Omaha, and Dundee. Dundee voted against joining Omaha South Omaha voted to join Omaha, however Mayor Tom Hector refused to turn over control of South Omaha. Dundee did not give up and they went all the way to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court decided against Dundee and they became part of Omaha.

The Central High School Athletic Department held the first Road Show, an eight-act vaudeville-style presentation to raise money. Successfully clearing $200, the show continues today. It annually showcases the talents of Central High students, some of whom went on to achieve stardom. Names like Lindsay Bloom, Peter Buffett, Lars Erickson, Inga Swenson, Henry Fonda and Dorothy McGuire are a few who went on to successful careers as actors and entertainers after their Road Show experience.

The Academy of the Sacred Heart launched a four-year college course in September. Eventually, the school became known as Duchesne College.

Creighton held its first all-University commencement April 29th, but actual diplomas for undergraduates were awarded later at a separate commencement in June after seniors passed final exams.

The City of Omaha purchased the auditorium located on the southeast corner of 15th and Howard Streets from the Auditorium Company for $150,000.

The Reverend Billy Sunday held an eight-week revival meeting in Omaha at a temporary place of worship at 14th Street and Capitol Avenue. The Omaha World-Herald reported total attendance of 742,200 for the session that lasted more than fifty days.

The Omaha Drama League was organized.

Buffett & Son Grocery Store opened at 5001 Underwood Avenue in a section known as the Harte Block, named for its builders. Later, the store occupied two other locations in Dundee. The last was at 5015 Underwood Avenue, which it moved into in 1929.

Leo A. Daly, Sr. established an architectural firm when he opened an office at 17th and Farnam Streets in a building the company later renovated to create the first entirely air-conditioned structure west of Chicagos also now a part of the City of Omaha.

Area north of Miller Park was purchased for a housing tract. In the 1920s Omaha had grown north of Kountze Place (Especially along Florence Boulevard and 30th Street). People were drawn northward by Fort Omaha and Miller Park Area was named Minne Lusa ("clear water"). By 1924 Minne Lusa area had grown to over 600 homes. Area is filled with the architectural style popular during this time, craftsman bungalows.

The Monitor/Omaha Monitor started publishing. It described itself as a "National weekly newspaper devoted to the interests of colored Americans." John Albert Williams, a nationally-known African African American Episcopal priest who was also a civil rights activist was publisher and editor.

Herman’s Nut House was founded in 1915 by Herman Mirowitz, a European Jewish immigrant who starts roasting and selling peanuts out of his home. Herman sponsors his nephew, Joseph Fishel a World War II concentration camp survivor and his wife Helen. In the mid-1950s Joseph took over the nut business and expands product line of roasted nuts and obtains product placements in area grocery stores. In 1980 his son Norman takes over the business. It continues in 2024 under the name Marathon Ventures.

**1916**

Fort Omaha was reactivated as the Balloon Section of the American Expeditionary Force, known as the Fort Omaha Balloon School. As the site of the country’s first military balloon school, its personnel was responsible for training some 16,000 young men who put their balloonist skills to work on the front in France during WWI. Captain Charles De F. Chandler, pilot of the first balloon flight in 1909, was commanding officer.

General Grenville M. Dodge, chief engineer of the eastern terminus of the transcontinental railroad, died at his home in Council Bluffs.

The first Women’s State Golf Tournament was held.

The “Human Fly” climbed eighteen floors of the exterior of the Woodmen of the World (WOW) building at 14th and Farnam Streets in 50 minutes.

The golf course opened at Elmwood Park.

Nineteen parochial schools began the school year with an enrollment of almost 5,000 students in the Omaha Diocese.

President and Mrs. Woodrow Wilson visited Omaha to attend the Nebraska Semi-Centennial celebration of statehood in October. While here, he reviewed the industrial parade of Ak-Sar-Ben in the afternoon and spoke at the Municipal Auditorium in the evening.

The OU Alumni Committee chose red and black as the school colors.

The Federal Farm Loan Bank was located in Omaha.

The Ford Motor Company Assembly Plant was constructed at 1524 Cuming Street. Designed by Detroit architect Albert Kahn, Model T Fords were built there until 1932.

The Omaha Central Labor Union included more than 50 local unions affiliated with the central body and represented over 7,000 male and female workers from a variety of trades and occupations.

George Joslyn donated $25,000 (50% of total cost) to construct Joslyn Hall at 24th and Pratt Streets, which then served as the home for Omaha University until 1938, when it moved to its current location on Dodge Street.

Arthur Brandeis, last surviving son of Jonas L. Brandeis, died. Arthur’s son, E. John, assumed administration of the department store with his father’s cousin, George Brandeis. E. John and George Brandeis were responsible for adding two stories to the top of the Brandeis Building at 16th and Douglas in 1921.

An amendment to the Nebraska Constitution instituted prohibition two years before national prohibition went into effect. Sixty-three percent of Omaha voters voted against the amendment but it passed with rural voter support. Law enforcement was lax, and Omaha retained its rowdy reputation.

Bankers Realty Investment Co. built the eight-story Blackstone Hotel in 1916 as a residential hotel. The E-shaped building at 302 S. 36th St. represents the Second Renaissance Revival style of architecture that was popular between 1890-1920. Apartments varied from one to six rooms and were rented by the year rather than by the day. The exterior featured extensive terra cotta trim and cornice work. The interior was a mix of elegant appointments, with numerous ornate furnishings, a crystal chandelier, and a grand marble staircase. Three roof gardens offered a fine view of the Omaha skyline. The hotel featured fine dining and is credited with inventing the Reuben sandwich and butter brickle ice cream. The building went through an extensive renovation in the late 2010s and in 2024 is the elegant Kimpton Cottonwood Hotel.

1916 - "Auto Row" was established in Omaha on Farnam between 20th and 24th streets. This is where most of the cities car dealerships, auto part stores, and garages were found. Remnants of it are still seen in 2024. Former Auto Row was named a National Register District. <https://landmark.cityofomaha.org/article/8050-omaha-auto-row-historic-district>

**1917**

Fort Omaha became an Army balloon school. Close to 20,000 men from Omaha enlisted in World War I. A total of 15,139 men from Omaha enlisted in the U.S. Army, and 3,571 joined the U.S. Navy. Eighteen men were indicted for refusal to register for the war draft.

Florence Field, 119 acres of land about one mile north of Fort Omaha along Martin Avenue, was leased by the U.S. Government in October and cleared for balloon operations. Many Fort Omaha recruits received field training here in a simulated “on the front” balloon operations experience. Parachuting, in its infancy, was tested here too. In 1917 the first military parachute jump happened at Florence Field. It was from a balloon at 1,500 feet and lasted 1 minute, 40 seconds. Former President William Taft was in the audience.

On May 10, 1917 - City of Omaha passed the resolution to annex the suburbs of Benson and Florence.

Father Edward Flanagan founded Boys Town with a borrowed $90 to pay the first month’s rent. The first residents were five boys—three wards of the court and two homeless newsboys. The institution was housed at Byron Reed’s old mansion at 25th and Dodge Streets. It then moved to the German-American Club on South 13th Street with a capacity for 150 boys. Its last move was to Overlook Farm, its current location, 10 miles west of Omaha.

The Masonic Temple was completed at a cost of $500,000.

Iowa State College graduate and former Montana cowboy, H.H. Henningson, founded Henningson Engineering Company in Omaha. The goal of the civil engineering firm was to assist new Midwest cities and towns in building water and sewer systems.

J.J. Simon and his son, B.A., founded Table Supply Meat Company in downtown Omaha to provide Midwestern beef to restaurants and grocers in the Omaha area. It became the Omaha Steaks Company.

The Omaha Electric Light and Power Company was reorganized, and the name was changed to the Nebraska Power Company. James E. Davidson was president of the new company. It provided power to the City of Omaha, and its homes and businesses until 1946.

As a result of R.B. Howell’s efforts, the legislature authorized the establishment of the Omaha municipal ice plant which began operations in 1919 to provide ice to homes and businesses. The initial cost was $271,000. The Omaha Water Board provided supervision.

Nebraska went dry one year before nationwide prohibition took effect.

The state legislature passed a bill that gave Omaha, the state’s only city of the metropolitan class, the authority to unilaterally annex a town of fewer than 10,000 residents. Lincoln, the state’s only city of the primary class, was given the authority to annex a town of 100-800 citizens.

The First Unitarian Church at Turner Park and Harney Street was dedicated.

The First Presbyterian Church sold its old structure at 17th and Dodge Streets and dedicated its new location at 34th and Farnam Streets in March 1917.

**1918**

Russell Hughes was the first soldier from Omaha killed in WWI.

A statue of Friedrich Schiller at Riverview Park was removed for safekeeping from those expressing anti-German sentiment.

The sale of World War I Liberty Bonds began in Omaha. Omaha led all cities in per capita War Stamp Sales, and parades were met with patriotic fervor.

First Lieutenant Jarvis Offutt became Omaha’s first air fatality during World War I.

The signing of the Armistice to end the war was celebrated in Omaha.

In August, Fort Crook was assigned to the Division of Military Aeronautics as a sub post of Fort Omaha by order of the Secretary of War. Fort Crook became a basic training center for recruits entering balloon service.

The first 4-H Club was started in Omaha.

Omaha’s Boy Scouts program began. Two years later, the Camp Fire Girls program got underway, and in 1925, the Girl Scouts program was organized.

Krug Park, 52nd and Maple Streets, added a swimming pool, a bath house, a waterfall and a wave-making device.

A slate of reformers took over city government, and Ed Smith emerged as Omaha’s mayor. For the time being, Jim Dahlman’s leadership as mayor ended, a position he held since 1906. Mayor Smith could not manage the problems his administration faced; Labor problems, housing shortages, high cost of living, unemployed veterans and racial tensions. Dahlman was re-elected Mayor in 1921.

State lawmakers authorized the City of Omaha to assign the operation of the city’s gas system to the Metropolitan Water District. The name was changed to the Metropolitan Utilities District (M.U.D.) in 1923.

Omaha public officials closed churches, schools, theaters and other public venues to combat the spread of Spanish influenza that killed tens of millions worldwide. The closures occurred during the months of October and November.

The Drake Court Apartments were completed at 623-707 S. 22nd Street. Drake Realty built the apartments on property owned by Mrs. S.S. Caldwell, widow of the mayor of Omaha in 1871 and founder of the U.S. National Bank.

Lots offered for sale in Beverly Hills, between Dodge and Pacific 78th to 84th

**1919**

Omaha Kiwanis organized.

Streets and alleys were closed to facilitate the construction of the new Ak-Sar-Ben Field on Center Street in April. In July, the first harness race took place at the new Ak-Sar-Ben track. During the same year, the Ak-Sar-Ben Exposition Company was founded, and the idea of an annual livestock show was conceived. Plans were made for the exposition grounds to be located at Ak-Sar-Ben Field.

The first Mass was celebrated at St. Margaret Mary parish.

The new Dundee Presbyterian Church was dedicated.

A white mob lynched Will Brown, a black man, at the Douglas County Courthouse in Omaha. In the same incident, the mob nearly succeeded in hanging Mayor Ed Smith, and started a fire that damaged the courthouse in excess of $500,000. Brown had been accused of raping a white woman, but a trial was never held.

Harvey Newbranch, editor of the Omaha World-Herald, won the Pulitzer Prize for his editorial, “Law and the Jungle”. President Eaman de Valera of Ireland gave a speech in Omaha.

The Junior League of Omaha was established by Harriet Smith Whiting, Rachael Kincaid Gallagher and Elizabeth Davis. The organization provided assistance to many charitable groups, the first of which was the Visiting Nurse Association.

The Omaha Fire Department replaced the last piece of horse drawn equipment with a new motorized rig at Station No. 22 at 27th and Madison Streets. All the new rigs had right-hand drive, a holdover from the time of horse-drawn equipment when drivers sat on the right side.

King Albert and Queen Elizabeth of Belgium visited Omaha.

The Prince Hall (African American) Grand Lodge of Nebraska Masons was incorporated.

Joseph Malec, Sr., was born in Moravia (now a part of Czechoslovakia) and moved to Omaha from Detroit. With his brothers, Godfrey “Bob” and Jerry he bought a 10 acre plot of land located five miles west of Omaha’s city limits on located at present-day 8100 Cass Street. In 1921 he built an outdoor dance pavilion. He named it Peony Park. Across the street to the south Carl Rosenfeld grew 24 acres of peonies. Joseph knew that everyone knew where the "Peony Gardens" were, so he figured everyone would know where Peony Park was. Peony's golden era were the years prior to World War II, the big band era. People danced six nights a week to Glenn Miller, the Dorseys, Henry James, Guy Lombardo, Sammy Kaye, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway and Lawerence Welk In time Peony Park would add a swimming pool. The pool was located over a huge underground lake, so wells were used to fill the pool. In July 1958 Peony Park was annexed to the city of Omaha. With the annexation it was decided Omaha needed an amusement park, so rides were added to Peony Park. Joseph Malec, Sr. died in 1978 at the age of 85. In time the area around Peony Park would become so populated that neighbors would complain of the noise level and traffic. As a result Peony was closed in 1995, rides and land were sold.

Balloon equipment and troops were removed from Fort Omaha and Fort Crook. Eventually, the Fort Omaha Balloon School was phased out of existence although Fort Omaha remained under Army command.

St. Stanislaus Church, was completed in 1919 41st and J Streets in an area known as Gold Hill. It served the Polish residents and continues to hold an annual Polish festival today.

1919 - In a plan called *City Planning Needs of Omaha* Harland Bartholomew called for the following: Widen heavy traffic streets such as Douglas, Harney Center, 20th and 24th Streets. Add radial streets to carry traffic to the northwest and southwest corners of the city. Add an Inner Belt Traffic Way: System of streets laid out along the Missouri Pacific Railroad tracks, would allow drivers quick access to any part of the city. Add River Drive, 19 miles which would take advantage of Omaha's view of the Missouri River and be a memorial to the city efforts in World War I.

A Roman Catholic church called Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe) was founded in Omaha in 1919, and has been the "main pivot of the Hispanic community in Omaha, the state and neighboring counties in Iowa across the Missouri River."

**1920**

Omaha did not figure prominently among the top destinations for Mexican workers and their families until the 1920s, after the annexation of South Omaha and when meatpacking evolved in the city’s major economic engine. The Mexican-origin Hispanic population grew exponentially during this decade from less than 100 in 1910 to more than 2,000 in 1929.

The Mexican Mutual Society was formed in the early 1920s by a Mexican man named Mr. Correo. The organization assisted the Mexican community in civic events to support its positive endeavors in South Omaha. The organization sponsored many events up until the 1960s when it disbanded.

In the 1920s, 50% of Omaha’s population were immigrants or children of immigrants.

The former Boyd’s Theater and Opera House at 1621 Harney Street was razed to make room for an annex to the Burgess-Nash Department Store.

A flood in north Omaha broke the Florence Lake levee.

Peony Park opened for the first time for dancing, a popular social activity for couples at the time. The meadow around the new Dance Hall was transformed into an outdoor garden, and a new filling station and ice cream shop drew customers from miles around—including Omaha, then five miles away.

Omaha’s population was 191,601 inhabitants. This included 10,315 African Americans: 5,598 males and 4,717 females. The city’s population had doubled in ten years due largely to the migration of rural Southern blacks to Northern cities after WWI. The total population of Douglas County was 204,524.

Use of public transportation reached an historic high of 61 million riders this year.

The grade of Dodge Street past Central High School was lowered from 12% to 7%. The work stopped traffic for more than a year until it was completed. The new construction left the school on a sheer cliff with a 20-foot drop. Later, new terraces and flights of stairs restored the campus to its current appearance. Farther east, St. Mary Magdalene parish had to build a new first story under the church when the city lowered the Dodge Street hill at 19th Street. The original sanctuary and its stained glass windows are now a balcony overlooking the newer sanctuary and newer stained glass windows. The church is one of the only ones in the world built down.

When the street-lowering project was completed this year, Dodge Street near 20th Street was 36 feet lower than it was in 1880.

The Ak-Sar-Ben racetrack was dedicated.

Hansen’s Café Beautiful at 315 S. 16th Street was renamed The King Fong Café. Owner Gin Ah Chin imported fabrics, furniture and fixtures from Hong Kong to decorate the second-floor restaurant. He employed not only family members, but other Chinese needed jobs.

Amaranthus Grand Chapter (African American) of the Order of the Eastern Star in Nebraska was incorporated.

An 11th floor was added to the Omaha Building at 1650 Farnam, the headquarters for Omaha National Bank.

The Religious of the Sacred Heart changed the name of the Academy of the Sacred Heart of Omaha, Nebraska, to Duchesne College and Convent of the Sacred Heart. The new name was in honor of Blessed Philippine Duchesne, founder of the Society of the Sacred Heart

Nelson B. Updike bought the Omaha Bee ending Edward Rosewater’s 49-year control of the newspaper.

Dr. George L. Miller, founder of the Omaha Herald, died.

By a vote of the people and through action by the city council, the City of Omaha took over ownership and operation of the gas works effective July 1st. The city paid $5,000,000 for the plant, consistent with the recommendation of the board of appraisement. Management was assumed by the MUD board of directors.

Greater Omaha Packing Company began operations at the Omaha stockyards. By 2004, the company employed more than 800 people in a state of the art facility and had annual sales of $820,000,000.

January 8, 1920 the first mail from Chicago to Omaha was flown by pilot Walter J. Smith. He landed at Ak-Sar-Ben Field near 72nd and Pacific Streets.

Omaha's first zoning ordinance prepared in 1920. It would be the third comprehensive zoning ordinance in the United States.

The Jewish Press started publishing. It continues in 2024.

Northwestern Bell Telephone Company

Northwestern Bell Telephone Company was formed in this way:

"The name "Northwestern" was used by means of changing the Iowa Telephone Company to "Northwestern Bell Telephone Company." The Iowa company then bought the other two.

Therefore the name came from the Minnesota company. The legal home office is in Des Moines but Omaha (Mr. Yost's home town) got the top headquarters. Nice political balance, isn't it?"

Through the merger of three telephone company’s, Northwestern Bell was formed. Its headquarters was completed in 1920 between Douglas and Dodge Streets on the west side of 19th Street. Telphone Exchange areas went by names: Glenwood, Kenwood, Walnut, etc. There was a special switchboard to handle fire and police calls. In 1925 Omaha had about 62,500 telephones and ranked among the first ten large cities of the world in the number of telephones for ever hundred residents. By 1930, the company employed thousands of office workers.

Greek cousins Nicholas and Fred Payne purchase the Calumet Restaurant (opened in 1893) at 1411-13 Douglas Street and rename it the Virginia Café. The Café was open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and it would become the largest all-hour restaurant west of Chicago with a staff of 85 employees on three different shifts and served up to 3,000 diners a day. Nicholas Payne entered the American Restaurant Magazine Hall of Fame in 1956 and the Omaha Restaurant Association Nebraska Restauranter of the Year in 1967. It closed in 1969 after a fire burned down the building. The land eventually became part of the site of the W. Dale Clark Library and now Mutual of Omaha’s headquarters. Nicholas’ grandson is award-winner director Alexander Payne.

**1921**

The first direct dial telephones appeared in Omaha.

Patent number 1,378,382 was filed on November 7, 1918 and granted on May 17, 1921 to Scott Tent & Awning at 15th and Howard Streets for the modern day parachute. In its obituary for Allen C. Scott, president of the company, The New York Times stated that Scott often remarked that his solution – to use a small pilot parachute that would open and then pull out the main parachute – was so simple that he was amazed someone had not thought of it first. The obituary also quoted a Strategic Air Command spokesman in Washington, D.C., as stating that “the Scott chute was the basic model for all subsequent improvements” on the modern parachutes used by the military at the time. Scott, who is also credited with a prototype of the parachute harness, assigned his patent to the federal government.

Two additional stories were constructed on top of the original J.L. Brandeis and Sons Store at 16th and Douglas Streets for $120,000 making it a ten-story building. The size of the store increased to 525,000 square feet and included the first escalator in the Midwest. During the holiday season, the store’s front window featured an animated display that was a favorite attraction for Omahans and visitors alike.

Boys Town relocated to Overlook Farm, a 160-acre tract of land near present-day 132nd and Dodge Streets, its current location. Father Flanagan purchased the farm for $75,000 with the help of his supporters. Ten years later, he bought another 160 acres to the south of Overlook Farm. He was helped by the Women’s Bucket Brigade that raised $200,000 by forming platoons that divided Omaha into sectors. Volunteers visited nearly every home and business in their sectors asking people to fill the buckets with cash.

Myers Funeral Home was founded in Omaha at 2528 Lake Street. It is the oldest surviving black business in Nebraska.

Voters numbering 10,000 signed petitions to urge “Cowboy Jim” Dahlman to run for the city commission. Dahlman was elected commissioner and emerged as Omaha’s mayor. His slate of commissioners easily won the next three elections. Dahlman was elected mayor by the commissioners throughout.

The Creighton School of Dentistry moved into its own building on Creighton’s main campus at 26th and California and remained there for over fifty years. Creighton’s new Law School opened the same year and is also on 26th Street, across from the new School of Dentistry.

The Nebraska Legislature created the East Omaha Drainage District to coordinate the installation of a levee and flood wall to control flooding along thirteen miles of the Missouri River.

By a legislative enactment on March 3, 1921, the Metropolitan Water District became the Metropolitan Utilities District. MUD is independent of the city government. Operated by a board of six directors chosen by a vote of the people.

North Branch Library was completed. It supplied books for more than 800 homes a day.

In 1922, Victor Roos and partner A.H. Fetters formed the Roos-Bellanca company (also known as the Omaha Aircraft Company) at 723 S. 27th St. to build rising designer Giuseppe Bellanca's monoplane design, the CF. Only one example was built, but it became famous from its modern design, and publicity stunts such as holding in-flight weddings. The company dissolved in 1924.

Swedish immigrant John Engdahl opens Engdahl Top and Body Shop at 18th and California Streets. He would operate here for more than 60 years.

**1922**

The national postal convention was held in Omaha.

Five thousand railway workers went on strike in Omaha.

The city’s first radio station, WAAW, began broadcasting.

For the first time, The O-Book was noted as a publication of the senior class of Central High School. Previously, the school’s yearbook was a publication of the students of Omaha High School.

Carl S. Baum Druggists opened for business in the Harte Building at 5001 Underwood Avenue and earned a reputation as “Dundee’s Dependable Druggist”.

Gilbert Hitchcock was defeated in his third bid for the U.S. Senate by R.B. Howell, former secretary of the board of directors of the Metropolitan Utilities District, and early advocate for the municipal ownership of gas and water utilities.

Roberts Dairy opened a plant in Omaha. As many as twenty new customers were added daily to each route. Today, the site of the first plant is the dairy’s headquarters.

The Omaha Sun, a descendant of an old South Omaha newspaper, became firmly established.

The Women’s Division of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce was established as an outgrowth of the Omaha Business and Professional Women’s League which was formed in 1893. The Women’s Division of the Chamber of Commerce lasted until 1976.

The First Central Congregational Church on the southeast corner of 36th and Harney Streets was completed in 1922.

June 1922 - Archibald J. Love platted 80 acres of his farm home, located between Pacific, Shirley, 80th and 95th Street and named it Loveland.

1922 - 1,552 dwellings valued at $6,138,592 were built in Omaha.

In 1922, Victor Roos and partner A.H. Fetters formed the Roos-Bellanca company (also known as the Omaha Aircraft Company) at 723 S. 27th St. to build rising designer Giuseppe Bellanca's monoplane design, the CF. Only one example was built, but it became famous from its modern design, and publicity stunts such as holding in-flight weddings. The company dissolved in 1924.

WAAW was the first Omaha station licensed on February 14, 1922. Owned by and located in the Omaha Grain Exchange. Programs featured on this station were home talent. In 1938 the World-Herald purchased it and changed its call letters to KOWH, the OWH stood for the Omaha World-Herald.

The first Black undertaker was G.W. Obee, who arrived from Peoria, Illinois, in 1908. He opened in 1909 at 906 N. 16th and his last place of business was at 2518 Lake St. in 1916. It was there where longtime funeral director W.L. Myers got his start as an embalmer. He bought Western Funeral Home in December 1922. In 1927 he relocated to 2416 N. 22nd St. Myers Funeral Home was a North Omaha institution until its closing in 2011.

**1923**

The fire at the Armour Packing Co. resulted in putting 1000 men out of work.

The cruiser USS Omaha was commissioned.

Technical High School opened at 3215 Cuming St. in 1923 providing a comprehensive high school education focused on both academics and vocational training to nearly 2700 students. Designed by Frederick and Edwin Clarke for $3.5 million, it was the largest school west of Chicago at the time and thought to be the best-equipped facility in the region. Tech High closed in 1984 and now serves as the Omaha Public Schools Teacher Administration Building.

Through the efforts of the Police Department, Omaha became the founding city of the school safety patrol. The first safety patrol was at Farnam School, 29th and Farnam, and proved so successful other grade schools in Omaha, and in the nation followed suit.

Omaha and Douglas County’s first commercial radio station WOAW began broadcasting from downtown studios in the Woodmen of the World building. The call letters were changed to WOW three years later. Owned and operated by the Woodmen of the World Life Insurance Association. The station was created to offer a public service which would win the good will of citizens of this country and at the same time interest them in the company's insurance. Listened to in every part of the United States, in South America, and the even the North Pole.

Harry Houdini performed in Omaha.

The College of St. Mary was founded by Mother Mary Leo Gallagher and the Sisters of Mercy as a two-year teacher’s college dedicated to the education of women in the liberal arts. Graduates were prepared to teach in church schools. The new school occupied the old Continental Hotel at 15th and Castelar Streets.

The Omaha Home for Boys was founded by the Masons. George W. Megeath donated a mansion on South 33rd Street in memory of his father, Omaha pioneer, J.G. Megeath, to house the new institution.

The Community Chest was organized after three years of study by the Omaha Chamber of Commerce. It became the central collection agency for 33 charitable organizations in the city.

James G. “Jim” Jewell was one of the first black men to build in North Omaha. His two-story Jewell Building at 24th and Grant Streets became home to the Dreamland Ballroom on the second floor. The club featured big bands and jazz performances by musician-greats Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Lionel Hampton, Louis Armstrong and Nat King Cole, to name a few.

Omaha was the second-largest livestock market in the world. The stockyards and packing houses employed 13,000 people with an annual payroll more than $13 million. A total of 62 commission firms had offices in the exchange building. The “Big Four” packing companies were Armour & Co., Cudahy, Swift and Morris.

The Aquila Court at 1615 Howard Street was completed. Designed by the Chicago firm of Holabird and Roach, the building included an interior courtyard surrounded by space for offices, shops and apartments. Although common today, the multi-use concept was a new experiment in the 1920s. Today the Aquila Court is a hotel.

St. John’s AME Church was completed at 2402 N. 22nd Street. The church is one of Omaha’s few mature examples of Prairie School of architecture developed and conceived by Frank Lloyd Wright.

A water filter plant is erected in Florence. Water is free, but good water costs money because it must be manufactured. The raw material is the muddy Missouri River water. The finished product is pure water that comes to your home. Providing water for fire protection is the most costly single function of the Water Department.

Benson Branch Library was completed. Had a daily circulation of 700 volumes.

The Florence Branch Library was completed.

The 1920s was the height of streetcar travel. In 1923 the streetcars provided rides for 83 million passengers.

Russell J. Walsh put all his savings of 13 years, $10,000 into the purchase of a small bus. Started a bus line from Omaha to Nebraska City on February 21, 1913. Made one trip to Nebraska City and back to Omaha each day. September 22, 1923 he bought the Omaha to Lincoln line. Made three trips daily between Lincoln and Omaha. In 1923 Walsh joined other bus lines and became transcontinental. Union Pacific bought the Interstate Transit Lines in 1923 and asked Walsh to stay on as president. These lines would eventually be bought by the Greyhound Corporation. Bus traveling was popular because it was cheaper than the train, more convenient because they would pick up passengers anywhere along the highway, and a trip to Lincoln on the bus was cheaper than driving a car.

The Edward Morsman home, completed in 1923 at 518 S. 38th St., was the first Omaha house to have an attached garage.

**1924**

The Nebraska Children’s Home Society opened at 3549 Fontenelle Boulevard.

North High School opened in the fall of 1924 at 36th and Ames Avenue. The building was designed by John Latenser and Sons was for $959,000.

Actor Marlon Brando was born April 3 at the Omaha Maternity Hospital, 22nd and St. Mary’s Avenue. His family lived at 1026 South 32nd Street.

The Omaha Symphony Orchestra and the Omaha Community Playhouse were established. The symphony played its first concert with Hungarian Sandor Harmati as conductor.

David Warfield appeared as Shylock in The Merchant of Venice. Edna St. Vincent Millay lectured to members of the Society of Fine Arts.

Creighton’s Blue and White teams got a new mascot: the Bluejay. During the same year, tuition was charged for undergraduate and high school students for the first time.

A small tornado hit Ak-Sar-Ben Field and destroyed an air hangar.

Omaha’s first traffic streetlight at 16th and Farnam Streets caused such confusion that the words “STOP” and “GO” had to be painted on the appropriate colors.

Worthington Hall, a three-story red brick and stone building, was completed as the first unit of Brownell Hall’s new plant at Underwood Avenue and 54th Street. The building would be used as a dormitory.

Highland Country Club opened at 132nd and Pacific Streets catering to Jewish patrons who were excluded at other clubs. It later became Ironwood Country Club and gave way to the Sterling Ridge a mixed-use development.

Groundbreaking for the Jewish Community Center in downtown Omaha took place on November 30. The cornerstone for the new building was laid on July 19, 1925.

1924 - New, exclusive Happy Hollow residential area was being opened north of Underwood and west of the Happy Hollow Boulevard. Was known as the city's newest Gold Coast. Included Fairacres and Buena Vista. Fairacres was located west of the Happy Hollow Club, between Dodge and Underwood. Buena Vista was south of Dodge Street, west of 66th Street.

Grounds acquired for the Omaha Muncipal Airport in 1924 as an addition to Levi Carter Park. Land was swampy and filled in and raised with silt dredged from the bottom of the lake. New airport put under the jurisdiction of Street Department Commissioner, Dean Noyes, who was an aviation enthusiast. Overland Airways owned by Roy Furstenberg had the biggest operation on the new airfield, they had six planes. Air traffic wasn't booming at this time, because airplanes were not reliable, pilots and passengers were not comfortable and they could not carry a great deal. The Municipal Airport had no runways in 1925.

KFAB radio station started broadcasting on December 4, 1924. Was owned by the Union Holding Company in Lincoln, Nebraska but had station transmitters in Omaha. Programs feature agricultural information, market reports, and items of local, as well as more general interest. Moved to Omaha in 1948. Continues in 2024 at 5010 Underwood Avenue.

**1925**

Dundee Theater opened at 50th and Dodge Streets.

The Enchanted Cottage was the first play staged by the Omaha Community Playhouse. It was produced at the Mary Cooper Dance Studio near 40th and Farnam and starred Dodie Brando, one year after the birth of her son, Marlon. The cast included Jane Fonda, sister of Henry Fonda, who was studying journalism in Minneapolis at the time. Six months later, Fonda started his acting career when he debuted in the Playhouse production, You and I.

Malcolm Little, a civil rights activist who later changed his name to Malcolm X, was born at 3448 Pinkney Street in Omaha. In his autobiography, Malcolm X wrote that white men on horseback continually terrorized his parents’ home at night.

An addition designed by John Latenser, Sr. was built to the former South Omaha High School at 23rd and “J” Streets with a main entrance that now faced 24th Street. Because South Omaha had been annexed by Omaha in 1915, the school’s new name was now Omaha South High School.

R. A. Leusller initiated bus service to the community. Area was between 42nd and Leavenworth and 45th and Grover Streets, traversing Standard Place, Twinridge and Morton Meadows, fast growing new additions.

In May, the new Peony Park Dance Hall opened to replace the first dance hall which burned to the ground the previous winter. Constructed for $60,000, the new facility featured a cove ceiling and had stage settings built to produce special acoustic effects. Equipped with table service, the Dance Hall could accommodate 500 persons. Free parking was available with a capacity for 1,000 cars.

President Calvin Coolidge traveled to Omaha to attend the American Legion National Convention.

Memorial services for William Jennings Bryan were held at Municipal Auditorium.

The Happy Hollow Country Club originally located where Brownell Talbot and Memorial Park is today moved to 98th and Center Streets in 1925.

Omaha's auto industry was estimated at $6 million in 1915 and by 1925, car sales, accessories and gas and oil was $73 million dollars, becoming one of the city's leading industries. In the 1920s Omaha was one of the largest car distribution centers in the country. The city had dealerships in every important auto line. For example: Dewey Smith Chevrolet; Frank Glover's Velia Motors; H. H. Chevrolet; Hansen Packard; Millard and Kund Chevrolet, Omaha's largest dealership; Hart and John Opiz Ford.

KOIL radio station, owned by Mona Motor Oil Company, started July 10, 1925. Broadcasting takes place from studios atop the Brandeis Building in Omaha and the Hill Top Studios in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Sicilian immigrant Grazia Bonafede Caniglia founded the Santa Lucia Festival in 1925 at Sixth and Pierce Streets in Little Italy. She wanted to give Italians a connection to their former home and faith in their new one. The festival continues today with procession through Little Italy, a Catholic Mass, ceremonial lighting of the festival arch, crowing of a Queen, a bocce ball tournament and plenty of Italian food and drink.

Omaha’s Skinner Macaroni Company introduces Raisin Bran to the country when Lloyd Skinner dropped a handful of raisins into a vat of bran flakes.

**1926**

Sokol Auditorium opened at 13th and Martha Streets. It is now known as the Admiral Theater.

The new Benson High School Building opened at 52nd and Maple Streets on December 17, 1926. Students had previously attended what is now Benson West Elementary School. Construction cost for the combined junior-senior high school was $481,000.

The first Jewish Community Center at 20th and Dodge Streets was dedicated on June 6.

Queen Marie of Romania visited Omaha. While here, her visit was protested by delegates to the National Convention of Hoboes meeting here at the same time.

Walter W. Head of Omaha was elected President of the Boy Scouts of America.

The Livestock Exchange Building was constructed on a hill at the stockyards. Designed by architect George Prinz, it provided office and meeting space and a grand ballroom for executives and livestock commission agents at the heart of a thriving Omaha livestock market. It was builders Peter Kiewit and Sons first project over $1 million.

A sniper, Frank Carter, terrorized Omaha, mortally wounding a mechanic and a doctor, injuring a railroad worker in Council Bluffs, and shooting into a downtown drug store. Carter was captured in Iowa and later executed.

The Riviera Theater was constructed at 2001 Farnam Street. Built to resemble a Moorish palace, it had a seating capacity of 2,776. Glazed brick on the outside is arranged in diamond-shaped patterns to give it a distinctive appearance. In 2024, it is known as The Rose Theater.

The Medical Arts Building, located on the corner of 17th and Dodge Streets, was completed. Designed by Thomas R. Kimball for $2 million the 17-story decorative brick building housed medical offices.

Valley View golf course opened in 1926 southwest of Oakdale School near 102nd and Center Streets. The course became a housing subdivision after World War II.

On June 9, the Police Department consisted of 271 members. There was an Auto Theft Bureau and Detective Bureau. Patrolmen had cars and motorcycles to use.

1926 - Omaha Lincoln Railway and Light company ran to Ralston and Papillion. It was possible to reach any location in the city at a minimum cost of ten cents cash fare. Streetcar revenue also came from the Douglas Street Toll Bridge which the company owned and an amusement park at Lake Manawa, which burned in 1926.

**1927**

The first talking sound movie was shown in Omaha at the World Theater.

General John J. Pershing visited Omaha.

The first Boeing Airlines flight arrived in Omaha. Boeing later became United Airlines.

The closing sale of the Lininger Art Gallery was held.

Immaculate Conception Church was dedicated at 24th and Bancroft Streets.

The Fontenelle Park pavilion was dedicated.

The new Orpheum Theater opened at 16th and Harney Streets. Chicago architects, Rapp and Rapp, designed the building which was constructed in sixteen months. Cost of construction was $2 million. Built as a vaudeville house, the 2,600-seat proscenium theater was later converted to a movie theater. The Creighton Orpheum Theater built by John A. Creighton stood at the same location from 1906-1926.

Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig came to Omaha to play in an exhibition game.

Roman Catholic Archbishop-Bishop Jeremiah Harty died after a long illness. At the time of his death, Omaha was still recognized as a diocese. Reference to Bishop Harty as “archbishop” refers to his work as Archbishop of Manila before he was assigned as Bishop of the Omaha diocese.

The Omaha Bee was consolidated with the Omaha Daily News and became the Omaha Bee News.

A large welcoming crowd greeted Colonel Charles Lindbergh when he stopped in Omaha.

Fire destroyed the old Ak-Sar-Ben Den on North 20th Street. Ak-Sar-Ben Field, a 260-acre tract of land at 63rd and Shirley Streets, became the focal point for Ak-Sar-Ben’s activities.

Prince William of Sweden visited Omaha.

The first telephone call from Omaha to London was completed.

The Omaha Urban League began operation in November. Formed to provide recreational and educational programs for residents in North Omaha, it became the Nebraska Urban League after 1968.

The Metropolitan Utilities District opens its downtown headquarters at 18th and Harney Streets.

The Omaha Guide a weekly African-American newspaper began publishing. Among the Guide's editors were Charles Chapman Galloway, better known as "C.C.," Gaines T. Bradford, and Mason Devereaux. Of these, C.C. Galloway, a local minister, was associated with the paper the longest and was the most influential. The paper reported on national, state and local news of interest to the African American community. It ceased publication in 1958.

**1928**

The new pavilion was dedicated at Hanscom Park.

The new Robbins School was named after brothers Charles and Melvin Robbins. Melvin and Charles rescued their mother from a burning house in 1928. Melvin died from his injuries. Charles killed same year when struck by a car while sledding. It is the only school in OPS named for students.

An Indian pageant marked the founding of Camp Gifford. Democratic Presidential candidate Al Smith spoke at the Auditorium.

The Omaha Bee News was sold to William Randolph Hearst.

Omaha University held its first homecoming highlighted by a downtown parade that featured decorated cars and floats.

A “temporary” theater was constructed in a record 28 days on a cow pasture at 40th and Davenport donated by Mrs. Sarah Joslyn to house productions of the Omaha Community Playhouse. Omahan Henry Fonda starred in Merton of the Movies, the second production in the new theater. Mrs. Dorothy Brando, the mother of Marlon Brando, and Dorothy McGuire also acted in roles during the early years of the Playhouse.

Carter Lake, Iowa, separated from Council Bluffs and was incorporated as a village.

The first hangar at Municipal Airport was dedicated.

The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben built a Coliseum at 63rd and Shirley Streets. The 5,200-seat facility was constructed with revenue from racing. The Ak-Sar-Ben Coliseum became home to the annual Livestock Exposition and Rodeo, an ice arena and location for bigname entertainers who performed for Ak-Sar-Ben members.

A new School of Nursing opened as part of Creighton University.

Dundee Presbyterian Church on thenNorthwest corner of Happy Hollow Blvd. and Underwood Avenue held its first services in 1928.

**1929**

Jack Dempsey and James J. Corbett refereed a boxing match in Omaha.

The Omaha Symphony performed Handel’s Messiah for the first time.

The Jazz Singer, the nation’s first feature length talking movie, opened in Omaha.

The Union Bus Station opened at 16th and Jackson Streets.

The new Paxton Hotel opened at 1403 Farnam Street. The $1.5 million, 325-room modern hotel was named for businessman and community leader, William A. Paxton, a founder of the Union Stock Yards Company and Paxton-Vierling Steel Co. Wealthy cattle barons regularly stayed at the Paxton when Omaha was a leader in the livestock industry.

The Lincoln Highway (Hwy. 30) was re-routed to cross the Missouri River at Blair on the newly constructed Abraham Lincoln Memorial Bridge.

Public transportation had 41 million riders this year, a significant decrease from the historic high of 61 million riders in 1920.

In 1929, a dozen years after Prohibition began in Nebraska, Omaha had 1500 drinking establishments.

**1930**

Mayor James Dahlman died while in office. “Cowboy Jim” Dahlman was mayor from his initial election in 1906 for all but three years (1918-1921) until his death, having won seven out of eight mayoral campaigns. For this reason, he became known as Omaha’s “perpetual mayor”. Dahlman’s era paralleled that of Tom Dennison’s boss rule, although the extent of their connection is not clear.

Henry Fonda returned to Omaha to play opposite Omahan Dorothy McGuire in an Omaha Community Playhouse of A Kiss for Cinderella.

Aviator Amelia Earhart visited Omaha.

The roller coaster at Krug Park crashed, killing four and causing injury to seventeen of the 23 passengers on board. It was the beginning of the end for Krug Park. Soon after, the Omaha City Council approved an ordinance banning roller coasters.

The first night baseball game was played in Omaha.

The population of Omaha was 214,184 residents. The total population of Douglas County was 232,982. Greater Omaha covered 39 square miles.

A gymnasium, auditorium and band room were added to the north side of Central High School.

The three-day Sixth National Eucharistic Congress was held in Omaha in September. Roman Catholic Bishop Joseph Rummel was host for the Eucharistic Congress.

Warren Buffett was born in Omaha.

The Burlington Railroad Station was dedicated after an extensive renovation. The renovation was undertaken to compete with the new Union Station that opened nearby a year later in 1931. The exterior and interior of the building were dramatically altered. Examples include removal of 24 of 28 pink Colorado granite columns from the outside and removal of the grand double staircase on the inside.

Omahans voted to establish the Municipal University of Omaha founded originally by the Reverend Daniel E. Jenkins in 1908.

OU had the first NCAA football team to travel by airplane to a game when it traveled to Fremont to play Midland Lutheran College. The game ended in a 0-0 tie, and OU returned to campus by bus.

Northern Natural Gas Company was founded in Omaha. Its headquarters was in the City National Bank Building on 16th Street between Harney and Howard Streets. By the end of the year, Northern was supplying natural gas to 44 communities in Nebraska, Iowa and Kansas.

The White Rose gas station was completed at 38th and Farnam Streets. Built by the White Rose Oil Company along the Lincoln Highway, it provided a national model for its gas stations and to glamorize automobile travel. In 2024, it serves as a bank.

In 1930 Omaha had three major schools of higher education, The Municipal University of Omaha (now University of Nebraska at Omaha), Creighton University and the Nebraska College of Medicine

Richard L. Metcalfe became acting mayor in 1930 with the death of James Dahlman.

Junior Fire Patrol was established in June of 1930. Junior fire patrols were to be formed in schools to educate students on fire safety.

Omaha had 49,128 registered vehicles. During the 1930s because of the Depression the auto industry. like most industries in America and Omaha. Declined. However, Omaha still increased in car dealerships during the Depression, particularly in 1931.

In the 1930s, the largest foreign-born group in Omaha were Czechoslovakian. Census figures show 3,946 foreign born Czechs in Omaha. In 1940, 23,000 Douglas County residents classed as Czech immigrants or first or second generation descendants of Czech immigrants.

Yellow Cab and Baggage Company started by Sam Houster. In 1908 it was a one cab company with a stand at the old Schlitz hotel. By 1930 had grown to a fleet of 100 cabs, 25 drive-it-yourself cars and 14 baggage trucks Located at 20th and St. Mary's Did more than any on concern to promote public safety. Drivers paid a bonus for careful driving. Installed a signal system at 16th and Farnam. Organized the Omaha Safety Council. Organized Boys Safety Traffic Patrol. Traveled nearly two million miles a year. Baggage department handles around 70,000 pieces of baggage a year

In the 40 square miles within the Omaha city limits, 49,128 motors vehicles of all types were registered. 4,250 of these were trucks, which meant there was an economic demand for their use. One out of every ten motor vehicles in the city of Omaha in 1930 was a truck.

In June Northwest Airlines, Inc started service between Minneapolis and Omaha. Boeing signed a 50-year lease at the Municipal Airfield. In November Omaha voters approved airfield improvement bonds. Hangars and an administration building erected in 1930-1935.

**1931**

The Visiting Nurse Association opened a pre-school clinic.

The Joslyn Art Museum opened and quickly became a cultural center for the Omaha community. The Joslyn Memorial contained 155,000 square feet and housed 10 large galleries and a 1,000-seat concert hall. The $3.5 million structure was a gift to the city from Sarah Joslyn in memory of her late husband, George Joslyn, who made a large fortune in the printing and paper industries.

The “darkest day” in Omaha banking occurred on August 15 when the closing of Union State Bank ignited a run on every bank in Omaha. Two of the three largest banks—Omaha National and U.S. National—kept their doors open until 9 PM, nine hours beyond the usual Saturday closing time. $3,000,000 in additional currency was flown in from the Federal Reserve Bank in Kansas City while bank officers served lemonade and sandwiches to Omaha National Bank customers waiting in line to withdraw their deposits. By Monday, most clients returned their money for deposit when they realized the banks were not going to fail.

Omaha police tested bulletproof windows.

From 1931 to 1938 Omaha sponsored air races. In 1931 Charles “Speed” Holman was killed at the Omaha Air Races.

Auto liability insurance was required.

Radios were used in police cars for the first time.

The Municipal University of Omaha was created on January 21. The university operated as a municipal university until 1968.

Peter Kiewit took over the family construction firm after his father’s death. Under his leadership, the company grew into one of the country’s largest builders.

The new art deco-style Union Station building designed by Gilbert Stanley Underwood opened. Today it houses The Durham Museum. By 1948, the terminal saw 80 passenger trains daily while its neighbor across the tracks, the Burlington Station, hosted 34 trains each day. The total for the two terminals helped to make Omaha the fourth-largest rail center in the country by 1954.

Unemployed groups marched to city hall and presented eight demands for relief to Mayor Richard Metcalfe.

The City of Omaha appropriated $5,000 for ten recreation centers.

Harry Lapidus, businessman, philanthropist and outspoken critic of Tom Dennison’s machine, was found shot to death near Hanscom Park. The mysterious murder shocked the entire city.

**1932**

The concert hall in the Joslyn Memorial Art Museum opened.

Saddle Creek Road was paved.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt visited Omaha.

Federal offices began a five-day work week.

A farm strike resulted in a blockade of roads into Omaha to prevent milk and other farm products from reaching markets in the city. The strike was an effort to bring about an increase in prices paid for farm produce. For three nights in late August and early September, sheriff’s deputies and pickets engaged in pitched battles at the city limits. On one occasion, 1,000 bystanders watched as 40 deputies were pelted with logs and rocks as they guided farm trucks through a line of 150 pickets on Dodge Street.

Crime became a grave problem for the city. Changes were made in police personnel.

Tom Dennison was indicted in a liquor conspiracy case. The trial resulted in a hung jury, and mistrial was declared.

Unemployed groups marched to city hall and presented demands to Acting Mayor Arthur Westergard.

The Douglas County Hospital was built at a cost of approximately $1 million including its equipment. Built to accommodate 400 patients, the hospital was designed by Omaha architect, John Latenser and Sons, and is located on 42nd Street between Pacific Street and Woolworth Avenue.

Japanese immigrant Harry Watanabe opens a gift shop selling Kewpie Dolls and cheap imports to traveling carnivals. Today that initial shop is now Oriental Trading Company, a direct merchant of value-priced party supplies, arts and crafts, toys, novelties, and school supplies. Oriental Trading has been recognized as one of the top 100 Internet retailers and one of the top 50 catalog companies by the National Retail Foundation's STORIES magazine. It was owned by the Watanabe family until 2000. In 2024 it is owned by Berkshire Hathaway.

**1933**

The Army Corps of Engineers established its first office in Omaha.

The Millard Hotel fire resulted in the deaths of seven firemen.

Omaha felt the full force of the Great Depression. Bank clearings fell from $2.9 billion in 1929 to $997 million in 1933. During the same time, deposits dropped from $115 million to $83 million.

Militant farmers joined the Farm Holiday movement to halt mortgage foreclosures.

New Deal work relief projects started in Omaha during the 1930s. Both the PWA (Public Works Administration) and the WPA (Works Progress Administration) employed thousands of Omaha citizens and had a positive impact on the economy until the effects of the Great Depression decreased with the onset of WWII.

The Federal Building on the southwest corner of 15th and Dodge Streets was dedicated. Above the entrance on a six-ton piece of limestone is an eagle with a wing span of 10 feet and is 4 feet high. The eagle was carved by Omaha craftsman Peter Laux. Today the building serves as a hotel.

After three decades, boss rule in Omaha came to an end when political boss Tom Dennison’s ticket was lost to a slate of moderate reformers headed by Roy Towl. Dennison died in 1934.

Ten monkeys escaped from Monkey Island in Elmwood Park.

St. Paul United Methodist Church opened.

Tarzan the alligator got loose in Riverview Park.

Beer sales resumed in Omaha once prohibition was repealed.

A 55-mile per hour dust storm swept the city and fanned 44 fires in eight hours. Only one fire resulted in great damage.

Johnny Goodman, winner of the U.S. Open Golf Tournament, was welcomed home to Omaha. Goodman is the last amateur player to win the U.S. Open.

Peony Park founder, Joseph Malec, Sr., started the Tower Tourist Village, a 36-unit motel near Peony Park that eventually expanded to 100 units. It later became the New Tower Hotel Courts with a total of 340 rooms.

U.S. Senator George W. Norris spearheaded a petition drive to place the issue of a nonpartisan one-house legislature on the ballot as a constitutional amendment in Nebraska.

The Junior Chamber of Commerce hired Reinholdt Frederick Hennig to design a “House of Tomorrow” at 2043 N. 53rd Street in Omaha’s Country Club neighborhood. The stone and concrete home was built to encourage home building in the area and to showcase the newest innovations in home construction including an electric kitchen, air conditioning and a semi-enclosed terrace on the roof. The organization raffled the home off to one lucky winner.

The Brandeis Theater opened in 1933 presenting live shows and movies.

In July Omaha Muncipal Airport first used as an airport for commercial flying.

**1934**

Senator Gilbert Hitchcock died in Washington. He served three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives and two terms in the U.S. Senate for a total of 18 years. On the home front, he was the principal owner and driving force behind the Omaha World- Herald newspaper.

The first Golden Gloves boxing match was held in Omaha.

The new Federal Building at 15th and Dodge Streets was dedicated.

Federal Housing Authority loans became available.

Two strikes by members of the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees against the Omaha Traction Company failed to win union recognition, a wage increase or resolution of other demands. This was in spite of federal arbitration efforts.

The first Union Pacific streamlined passenger train was exhibited shortly before it went into cross-country service. The new train could achieve a maximum speed of 110 miles per hour.

Nebraska voters approved a constitutional amendment that provided for a nonpartisan, one-house or unicameral legislature by a voting margin of 60% to 40%.

The Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska reorganized with tribally-elected officials under the Indian Reorganization Act.

**1935**

George M. Cohan performed in Ah, Wilderness at the Omaha Technical High School auditorium.

Streetcar and bus drivers went on strike against the Omaha Traction Company in April. Company refused to arbitrate the demands for wage increase, union recognition, a six day week and seniority rights. 268 men walked out. The company employed 250 strikebreakers in heavily armed cars to continue service. Public sentiment supported the striking employees. By mid-June, heavy rioting broke out on the south side of Omaha and continued for three nights. Streetcars were burned and looting occurred that caused an estimated $400,000 in damage. Two persons were killed and 100 were injured. Eighteen hundred National Guardsmen were called in to quell the violence.

Omaha voters approved the sale of liquor by the drink.

The racehorse Omaha won the Belmont Stakes and the Triple Crown of horse racing.

Admiral Richard E. Byrd spent his 47th birthday in Omaha.

Nebraska’s bicameral legislature met for its last regular session. The session lasted 110 days, resulted in the passage of 192 bills and cost $202,593. Two years later, the first Unicameral session ran 98 days, 214 bills were passed and the cost was $103,445.

Horseracing begins at Ak-Sar-Ben.

**1936**

The South Omaha Bridge, 4,300 feet long, was opened to traffic in January. The new bridge provided a more direct route for farmers in southwest Iowa to deliver livestock to the Union Stockyards in Omaha.

The early months brought protracted extremely cold weather. A heavy snowstorm brought out horses and sleds. Doctors made house calls on horseback. During the summer, Omaha suffered from dust storms and heat. Five deaths were recorded when the temperature set a new record of 114 degrees.

A new location for the Municipal University of Omaha was selected at 60th and Dodge Streets on 52 acres of land. The university had outgrown its original home at 24th and Pratt Streets.

The Omaha tribe was incorporated under the Indian Reorganization Act. Government by a seven-member tribal council began.

Father Flanagan’s Home was incorporated as Boys Town.

The old Rourke Park Municipal Stadium, 15th and Vinton Streets, was destroyed by fire on August 13th. It was the park used by the Western Baseball League.

Omaha’s first rescue squad went into service on June 4th.

Parking meters were established in the City of Omaha by Ordinance #14414 effective on August 27th.

Dan Butler became Mayor of Omaha.

Union Pacific engineer and Omaha native James Curran invents the first ski lift. The lift is built for Union Pacific’s ski resort in Sun Valley, Idaho.

**1937**

In May taxicab drivers went on strike for better wages and improved working conditions. Several drivers were beaten and cabs demolished.

Mayor Butler’s censorship of Tobacco Road and Idiot’s Delight and his banning of the movie, Ecstasy, led to accusations that Omaha was puritanical and brought snickers from around the country.

The future Archdiocese of Omaha establishes a home at 63rd and Dodge Streets.

William Randolph Hearst sells the Omaha Bee News to the Omaha World-Herald which secured that paper’s monopoly on Omaha newspaper circulation.

Rose Blumkin (later known as “Mrs. B”) founded the Nebraska Furniture Mart in the basement of a small shop at 1312 Farnam Street.

The first session of the Nebraska Unicameral Legislature convened on January 5th. U.S. Senator George W. Norris, an outspoken advocate for the unicameral system, addressed the newly-elected body. A few days later, a resolution naming the legislature the “Senate” was adopted, and lawmakers took the title, “State Senator”. Membership in the Unicameral was 43 Senators in contrast to 133 House and Senate members in the bicameral. The number of committees was reduced from 61 to 18 in the new Unicameral. A total of 581 bills were introduced in 1937 as opposed to twice that number in the last session of the bicameral in 1935.

World War I Veterans Monument at Turner Park and Farnam Street was dedicated by the American War Mothers. The three stars represent blue for those who served, silver for those who were injured and gold for those who died. It was built with private donations and the aid of the Workers Progress Administration (WPA).

Parking became a problem and the first parking meter was installed downtown in 1937.

The Lozier company begins in 1937 when Gordon Lozier starts a small refrigerator repair service out of his garage. He soon saw an opportunity to expand the business and began manufacturing his own brand of refrigeration systems for small general grocery stores. It is now the nation’s largest manufacturer of retail merchandising equipment.

**1938**

The world premiere of the movie, Boys Town, was held at the Orpheum Theater with Father Flanagan and stars, Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney, in attendance. Boys Town earned Spencer Tracy an Oscar for his portrayal of Father Edward J. Flanagan. The movie helped to bring in donations from around the world that enabled Boys Town to expand to 1,000 acres with fifty buildings.

The Administration Building, now Arts & Sciences Hall, was dedicated on the Omaha University campus. At the time, it was the only building on the new campus at 60th and Dodge Streets. Matching PWA (Public Works Administration) monies helped to finance the construction.

A $2 million project of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, Logan Fontenelle Homes was located between 20th and 24th Street, Paul and Seward Streets area. It featured 20 one- and two-story brick buildings arranged facing landscaped courts for 284 families. Apartments consisted of three to five rooms and had playgrounds for children and recreational centers for adults. After years of neglect, they were demolished in the early 1990s.

The Omaha Star newspaper was founded and published by Mildred Brown and her then husband Dr. S. Edward Gilbert. After divorcing in 1943, Brown continued to run the newspaper until she died in 1989. Under her leadership, the Star grew into one of the most prosperous weekly newspapers in the country with a staff of 20 and a circulation of more than 30,000. Brown became widely known in local and national political circles as a voice for Civil Rights. The newspaper continues today under female leadership.

An ice rink was added to the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben Coliseum, making it possible to have hockey, public skating and ice shows.

The On Leong Tong, a Chinese-American merchants’ association moves from a narrow three-story red brick building at 111 N. 12th Street to a brick building at 1518 Cass Street. The original Tong was in Omaha’s early “Chinatown” which was originally centered around 12th and Douglas Streets until circa 1940. The tong served in many ways as the business, social, and cultural center of the Chinese-American community in Omaha during the early- to mid-20th century. During the time it occupied the building, the Tong, as a Chinese- American “chamber of commerce,” served as an all-male organization composed of the city’s Chinese businessmen – farmers, restauranteurs, shopkeepers, laundrymen, and others. The organization supported newly-arrived immigrants, who arrived with letters of introduction from friends, associates, and family members in China. The tong supported the immigrants until they got jobs, often at On Leong member businesses. The On Leong was like a benevolent society that assisted member and sometimes non-member Chinese-Americans with short-term financial or other assistance.

The tong was a focal point of celebration for Chinese holidays and other days of cultural importance. The On Leong headquarters were also used as a meeting place for the local Gee How Oak Tin Association, an unrelated Chinese family association that included the locally-prominent Chin family. Unknown numbers of Chinese- Americans, new immigrants or those already established, may have lived in the On Leong building. During traditional Chinese holidays, the tong headquarters was the scene of multiple-day feasts, the payment of debts, the negotiation of contracts, and conducting other business that was part of larger social-cultural celebrations. The tong flew the Nationalist Chinese flag below that of the United States from a flagpole on the roof, and a sign with Chinese characters was displayed along the cornice. In 1959 the tong died out after the death of Chin Ming Yuet (also known as George Hay), the head of the association and one of the last active members.

**1939**

The world premiere of the motion picture, Union Pacific, was held at the Orpheum Theater. The premiere was held in conjunction with the Golden Spike Days celebration to commemorate the completion of the transcontinental railroad seventy years earlier.

The first community sing was held at Elmwood Park.

Nile Kinnick won the Heisman Trophy as the nation’s outstanding football player at the University of Iowa. Kinnick starred for Benson High School and quarterbacked the Hawkeyes to a national title with a 6-1-1 record that included upsets of football powerhouses, Notre Dame and Minnesota.

Gas Works Park opens in 1939. The 15 acre tract from the east side of 20th Street from Center to Martha Streets. Includes a 35 acre area landscaped by MUD in 1934 comprised of trees, shrubs, foot walks, a circular stone fountain. Above the park, two huge gas storage tanks are located.

The Omaha McDevitts, representing Omaha American Legion Post No. 1, won the American Legion Junior Baseball World Championship in 1939. The Junior World Series was played in Omaha from Aug. 31-Sept.3 at Fontenelle Park. Over 20,000 attended the final game when the McDevitts beat a team from Chicago.

1939 - Omaha Public Library had 202,000 volumes and a nearly complete file of the Omaha newspapers. Had become a vital part of the city's cultural life. The extension department added offering personal services to readers and students. Operated libraries at three large hospitals Maintained deposit stations at smaller hospitals.

The federally funded South Side Terrace Homes, located between R and W, 28th to 30th Streets, opened. Plans were to keep 25 to 30 percent of the homes for Blacks They only needed ten percent.

In 1939 Omaha had a total number of 183 churches: 43 Catholic Churches; 27 Methodist Churches; 25 Lutheran Churches; 24 Presbyterian churches; and small denominations often had only one church.

**1940**

Gone with the Wind opened at the Paramount Theater at 20th and Farnam Streets.

Sarah Joslyn died.

The bison emblem was first used on Omaha Police Department badges.

George Burns and Gracie Allen came to Omaha to perform at the Ak-Sar-Ben Coliseum as a follow-up to the Golden Spike Days celebration the previous year.

The first all-state Nebraska electric service connected from Omaha.

The cornerstone was laid at the new Mutual of Omaha headquarters site at 33rd and Farnam Streets. Previous to this the site was the Turner Home, the land around it being the Turner farm. Mr. Turner donated a portion of the farm to the city in memory of his son Curtis creating the Curtis Turner Park and Turner Boulevard.

In the 1940s into the 1950s, Indian Hills was an 18-hole public course between 84th and 90th Streets south of West Dodge Road. Its clubhouse was where Swanson Towers sits on the hill by Methodist and Children’s Hospitals. The land became mixed use, at first notably for the now-gone Indian Hills Inn and Indian Hills Theater.

The federally funded South Side Terrace Homes, located between R and W, 28th to 30th Streets, opened in March. They provided affordable housing.

Omaha’s population was 223,844 inhabitants. The total population of Douglas County was 247,562.

The Omaha World-Herald reported 15,000 Poles in Omaha mostly living in two main areas, Sheelytown (South of Hanscom Park area) or Little Poland (25th to 29th Streets, F to L Streets). In 1960 the number had risen to 18,000.

**1941**

The USS Omaha captured a German ship on November 6th, marking the first U.S. military action of World War II.

Figure skater Sonja Henie opened Ak-Sar-Ben’s winter season.

Two persons from Omaha died in the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Pershing Drive was dedicated.

CBS aired the first broadcast of the Boys Town choir.

A portion of Fort Crook was leased to establish the Martin Bomber Plant where B-26 Martin Marauders and B-29 Superfortresses bombers were produced for use in fighting World War II. Two of the B-29s dropped the first atomic bombs on August 6, 1945.

Dowd Chapel at what is now Girls and Boys Town was dedicated. In the same year, Boys Town completed the square-mile site of its main campus when it purchased 320 acres from three Douglas County farmers at a cost of $107,000. The square-mile is bounded by 132nd, 144th, Dodge and Pacific Streets and encompasses 640 acres.

Actor Nick Nolte was born in Omaha.

The Fairacres addition was annexed by Omaha.

The Brandeis Store used “charge-a-plate”, an early name for today’s credit card, for the first time

The Omaha Home for Boys moved to 52nd and Ames Avenue where personnel provided care for 80 boys in five brick buildings.

The first of the “Big Boy” locomotives, the world’s most powerful steam locomotive, arrived at Union Pacific Railroad in Omaha.

A sewage disposal plant is completed at 61st and Harrison Streets. It was learned that it was hazardous to public health and detrimental to wild life and recreation areas to discharge untreated wastes into the streams and rivers the public used. Instead sewage was delivered through underground pipes to a disposal plant that would clean the sewage then release it into the Papio Creek and use the dried sludge for plant food for lawns and gardens.

**1942**

Creighton University played its last football game and lost to Tulsa University by a score of 33-39.

The Omaha World-Herald published the first booklet to inform readers about how they could support the country’s war effort. The newspaper initiated the National Scrap Drive. Over 25,000 Douglas County residents served in the military during WWII. A total of 120,000 Nebraskans served during the war.

The Glenn L. Martin Co. Bomber Plant began production of B-26 and B-29 bombers at Fort Crook in Bellevue. As many as 14,500 people worked at the plant, including thousands of women who had never done factory work before. In 1945, the plant produced the B- 29s that dropped atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end the war.

During WWII, Fort Omaha served as a support installation for the 7th Service Command, an induction center, and as a work camp for Italian prisoners of war.

Ak-Sar-Ben Coliseum activities were put on hold through 1945 during World War II. The building and grounds were used as a U.S. Army vehicle depot.

Roberts Dairy used milk cartons instead of glass bottles for the first time.

The Benson branch library opened.

Petty Officer 1st Class Charles Jackson French, an Omaha mess attendant, gained the nickname “the Human Tugboat” for jumping into the sea and towing 15 wounded shipmates in a lifeboat for hours through shark-infested waters after their ship was sunk near Japanese-occupied Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands on Sept. 5, 1942. French was Black; the wounded soldiers were White. Although he was nominated for the Navy Cross – the sea service’s second-highest valor award – the rigidly segregated Navy of that era only presented him with a letter of commendation. French remained in the Navy for the rest of the war. He died in 1956, at age 36, of alcoholism that his family linked to post-traumatic stress from his wartime military service. His obituary made no mention of his heroism. French’s story resurfaced in 2021 after Bruce Wigo, the retired CEO of the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, researched and published an article about it on the organization’s website and posted links on social media. Wigo’s viral post got a response from the Navy’s chief information officer and prompted stories nationwide. USA Swimming took note of his achievements during the U.S. Olympic Swimming Trials in Omaha in 2021, inviting several of French’s living relatives from Omaha to attend. A year later, the post office in Benson was renamed for French in September 2022 following efforts by Nebraska’s congressional delegation. Also in 2022, the Navy finally paid tribute by renaming a training pool at Navy Base San Diego. And it recognized his bravery by awarding him the Navy and Marine Corps Medal, the Navy’s highest award for noncombat heroism. It was announced in 2024 that the Navy will name one of the new Arleigh Burke-class destroyers (DDG-142) after him one of the highest honors the Navy can present.

**1943**

The Martin Bomber Plant produced the 1,200th B-26.

The Kellogg Company comes to Omaha after purchasing the local Miller Cereal Company.

The Omaha & Council Bluffs Street Railway (O&CB) began training women as streetcar operators in October. The company experienced an acute shortage of male operators as more men were called into military service during WW II. The women learned quickly and became capable streetcar operators who were paid the same wages as their male counterparts.

Spring floods spurred a community sandbag effort that involved as many as 3,000 people. Volunteers and officials fought the rising Missouri River for a week only to lose the battle when homes and industries in eastern Omaha were flooded, including Municipal Airport. No lives were lost.

Grace Bible Institute, an inter-Mennonite Bible institution, opened with 23 students. Within a year, the college purchased Stuntz Hall, 1515 South 10th Street.

**1944**

Wendell Wilkie withdrew from the presidential campaign during his visit to Omaha.

Johnny Rosenblatt, member of the Municipal Stadium Committee, became a leading advocate for a new baseball facility. He believed such a facility would attract fans, tourist dollars and semiprofessional farm teams to Omaha. An Omaha native and well known semi-pro baseball player, Rosenblatt served as Omaha’s mayor from 1954-1961.

Carver Savings and Loan Association, formed by a group of African Americans, opened near 24th and Lake Streets in Omaha.

The Omaha Electric Committee purchased the Nebraska Power Company from its parent company, the American Light and Power Company in December. Nebraska Power was the main supplier of electricity to the City of Omaha, its homes and businesses.

**1945**

The first Italian POW camp was established at Fort Omaha.

A Japanese balloon bomb fell near 50th Street and Underwood Avenue in Dundee on April 18. No injuries were reported.

Gas rationing ended in Omaha.

By a three-to-one margin, Omaha voters approved the first of two bond issues to finance construction of a new Municipal Stadium. The new facility would replace the old Western League Rourke Park Stadium that burned down in 1936. The first bond issue was for $480,000; the second one, passed some years later, was for $290,000.

Charles W. Leeman became mayor. One of his first moves was to form the Omaha Improvement Commission Comprised of 15 private citizens. Produced a citywide improvement plan called "The Omaha Plan."

The dance pavilion at Peony Park was expanded to accommodate 3,500 dancers. Ballroom dancing was very popular. Big Bands that included Lawrence Welk, Glenn Miller, Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey, Ray Anthony, Guy Lombardo and Duke Ellington were a few of the famous names who played and drew crowds to the Peony Park pavilion during its heyday.

The Nebraska Furniture Mart moved to a new location at 2205 Farnam Street.

Pope Pius XII designated Omaha as an archdiocese. The Reverend James Hugh Ryan was installed as Omaha’s first archbishop at St. Cecilia Cathedral on October 10th.

**1946**

The State of Nebraska created the Omaha Public Power District. OPPD, a governmental subdivision of the state, went into business on December 2 when it took over Nebraska Power electric properties. In doing so, it provided the last link in the state’s unique all-public power system. The people of Omaha were now the owners of the power company. In 1946, OPPD had 82,100 customers and had a net generating capability of 116 thousand kilowatts.

Plans were announced to build a new Veteran’s Hospital at 42nd and Center Streets.

The Mayor’s City-Wide Planning Committee recommended the appointment of five separate citizen commissions charged with allocating the expenditure of $20,000,000 of bond funds for capital improvements for the city which the electorate approved. The improvements included upgrades for Omaha’s streets and sewers and construction of public facilities. Voters agreed to the recommendation for the oversight commissions which added another layer to Omaha’s commission form of government.

Fort Crook was renamed Offutt Field in honor of First Lieutenant Jarvis Offutt, Omaha’s first air fatality during World War I.

Charles W. Durham and Willard Richardson became partners in the Henningson Engineering Company, which became HDR.

Following a national pattern of growing hostility toward labor unions, Nebraska voters approved a constitutional amendment that provided for the “open shop”. An “open shop” is one which allows the employment of non-union workers. Laws passed in 1947 and 1949 implemented this open shop, anti-union direction which was especially controversial in Omaha, a stronghold for organized labor.

In August, Sicilian immigrants Cirno and Giovanna Caniglia opened an addition to their bakery at Seventh and Pierce Streets and called it a pizzeria introducing Omaha to pizza.

**1947**

The District 66 school district was organized.

Omahans celebrated the toll-free status of the Ak-Sar-Ben Bridge, connecting Douglas Street to Council Bluffs, and the South Omaha Bridge. As owner of the bridges, the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben later donated both spans to the governments of Iowa and Nebraska.

Ak-Sar-Ben featured a World Championship Rodeo and linked it to an annual livestock show.

Headquarters, Fifth Army gave command of Fort Omaha to the Navy. The new official name for Fort Omaha was the Naval and Marine Corps Reserve Center, Omaha, Nebraska.

The cornerstone was laid for a new headquarters building for the Omaha World-Herald at 14th and Dodge Streets.

Creighton University’s Reverend John Markoe, S.J. organized the city’s first “sit-in” demonstration which resulted in the integration of Dixon’s Café near the county courthouse. Founder of the DePorres Club, Markoe and the club’s members picketed businesses, protested unfair labor practices and held watches at the homes of Black families who moved into white neighborhoods.

Drummer Buddy Miles was born in Omaha. Miles's father played upright bass for Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Charlie Parker, Dexter Gordon, and others. By age twelve, Miles had begun touring with his father's band, the Bebops. He dropped out of Omaha North High School in 1965 and in 1967 became the founding member of the Electric Flag, a member of Jimi Hendrix's Band of Gypsys (1969–1970), founder and leader of the Buddy Miles Express and later, the Buddy Miles Band. Miles also played and recorded with Carlos Santana and others. He also sang lead vocals on the California Raisins claymation TV commercials and recorded two California Raisins R&B albums.

**1948**

Omaha becomes nation's leading meat supplier, generating annual business in excess of $5 billion.

The former Martin Bomber Plant near Bellevue became Offutt Air Force Base. The new base was selected as the home of Strategic Air Command (SAC) headquarters. Within ten years, 20,000 military personnel and dependents were stationed here.

Children’s Memorial Hospital began serving patients.

Omaha initiated a handicapped parking ordinance.

World-Herald employees moved into World-Herald Square, the newspaper’s new headquarters, at 14th and Dodge.

Boys Town founder, Father Edward J. Flanagan, died in Germany.

76 West Dodge, Omaha’s first drive-in theater, opened.

President Harry Truman placed a wreath at the base of the memorial arch to dedicate Memorial Park on June 5. The park was designed by Leo A. Daly Co. as a tribute to veterans of the First and Second World Wars.

Municipal Stadium was completed on a 40-acre tract of land west of Riverview Park at a cost of nearly $1,000,000. The city-owned site was purchased a few years earlier for $17 at a tax foreclosure sale. Weeds, trees and shrubs originally covered the nine-square block hilltop that had good streetcar service. A special Dedication Baseball Game attracted 10,000 cheering fans on October 17th when the ballpark was dedicated and opened to the public. It was known as Rosenblatt Stadium, home to the College World Series. It was named for the man who had been most instrumental in its completion, Johnny Rosenblatt Omaha became a member of the Western League under the affiliation of the St. Louis Cardinals and later the Kansas City Royals.

Elizabeth Davis Pittman became the first black woman to graduate from Creighton Law School and the first black woman to practice law in Nebraska.

Packing house workers in Omaha went on strike against all of the Big Four meatpackers as part of a national action sponsored by the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The strike ended in defeat as UPWA strikers went back to work under the same terms as those offered by their employers before the walkout occurred.

Glenn Cunningham becomes mayor.

The Armour Company invented the first effective deodorant soap, Dial, and test-marketed it in Omaha in 1948.

**1949**

WOW-TV (now WOWT) with a tower at 35th and Farnam Streets and KMTV with a tower at 26th and Harney Streets began broadcasting. Johnny Carson, one of WOWT’s early announcers, hosted a daily 15-minute local show where he earned $50 a week. In 2024, both continue to broadcast.

The first football game was played at Al Caniglia Field when OU took on a team from Northern Illinois.

Municipal Stadium got its first tenant, a St. Louis Cardinals Class A Western League team, the Omaha Cardinals, who played at the stadium until 1959. The Los Angeles Dodgers moved their AAA farm team to Omaha in 1961 and stayed here through 1968. The

Kansas City Royals established their No. 1 farm team in Omaha beginning in 1969. The Omaha Royals remain at Rosenblatt Stadium until moving to Werner Stadium in Sarpy County in 2011.

A new pavilion was built adjacent to the Ak-Sar-Ben Coliseum replacing the old barns.

The Nebraska right-to-work provision approved by voters in 1946 was ruled constitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court. The provision allowed the open shop in the work place. This means workers are not obligated to join the union at any time as a condition of employment. Nebraska remains a right-to-work state today.

In 1940 there were 65,489 autos registered in Omaha. Even with World War II restricting auto production, Omaha's registration increased to 95,004 by 1950.

Francis P. Matthews of Omaha served as Secretary of the Navy from 1949 to 1951 then served as U.S. Ambassador to Ireland from 1951-1952.

Omaha changed the eating habits of the nation when C.A. Swanson of Swanson Foods of Omaha invented the Swanson frozen TV dinner in 1949.

**1950–99**

**Highlights: Redeveloping Downtown Omaha and the Old Market – Creating Gene Leahy Mall, ConAgra Campus. Closing of Packinghouses. Civil Rights. Riots in North Omaha. Telecommunications Industry. Philanthropic Omaha. Freeway Projects. Move to the suburbs.**

**1950**

The Q Street viaduct opened.

An Omaha University team played its first basketball game in what is now known as the Lee and Helene Sapp Fieldhouse. The opposing team was from Creighton University.

The population of Omaha was 251,117 residents. The total population of Douglas County was 281,020.

For the first time, the College World Series (CWS) was held in Omaha at Municipal Stadium. The Texas Longhorns won the series and the NCAA Division I national baseball championship title. Before moving to Omaha, the first three CWS tournaments were held in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

The Sisters of Mercy purchased 80 acres of land next to 72nd Street, then a dirt road, and what would become Mercy Road. The $150,000 site was the future home campus of the College of St. Mary.

Robert C. Cooper donated his farm to the Omaha Home for Boys. There the boys could take advantage of opportunities to participate in livestock feeding and a variety of 4-H projects.

Uta Halee was founded by Protestant churchwomen as a haven for homeless girls. Uta Halee is a Native American term for “on the sunny side”.

Voters in Omaha defeated a plan to change from a commission to a city manager form of city government.

Elizabeth Davis Pittman became the first African American to serve on the Omaha Public Schools Board of Education. She served until 1951.

The new official name for the Henningson Engineering Company was Henningson, Durham & Richardson (HDR). Local projects included work for the Strategic Air Command at Offutt Air Force Base. HDR added an architectural department in the mid-1950s to provide total in-house services to clients.

The Reverend Carl Reinert, S.J. became president of Creighton University. His fundraising efforts included appeals to Omaha business leaders for advice and contributions. He also appealed to Creighton alumni for donations, and money rolled in from both segments. Creighton underwent a period of expansion on campus.

Civil Rights leader Whitney M. Young Jr. became president of the National Urban League's Omaha, Nebraska chapter. In that position, he helped get Black workers into jobs previously reserved for whites. Under his leadership, the chapter tripled its number of paying members. He served until 1954. In 1961, at age 40, Young became executive director of the National Urban League. Within four years he expanded the organization from 38 employees to 1,600 employees; and from an annual budget of $325,000 to one of $6.1 million. Young served as President of the Urban League until his death in 1971.

**1951**

Calvary Cemetery opened.

Veteran’s Hospital opened.

The Marr Baking Co. made the first commercial ice cream cones in Omaha.

Augustana Lutheran Church, 3647 Lafayette Avenue, was dedicated.

A bakery strike was held in Omaha.

An Air Force ROTC program began at Omaha University.

Fort Omaha was designated the U.S. Naval Personnel Center.

Shut down of the streetcar lines began. Last run by any streetcar was the Dundee line in 1955, Streetcar number 1017.

Robert “Todd” Storz headed a very successful chain of American radio broadcasting stations and is generally credited with being the foremost innovator of the Top 40 radio format in 1951. The selection of records to be played was based on sales reported by record stores, an indication as to which would be of greatest interest to listeners. Only the favorites would be played, in rotation. Some sources also credit his Omaha stations KOWH-AM and its FM companion outlet KOAD as among the first to play at least some rock and roll records.

Private First Class Edward Gómez (August 10, 1932 – September 14, 1951) a United States Marine from Omaha posthumously receives the Medal of Honor — the United States' highest decoration for valor — for gallantly sacrificing his life to save the lives of four fellow Marines on his machine gun team during the Battle of the Punchbowl. PFC Gomez was the 18th Marine to receive the Medal of Honor for heroism during the Korean War.

**1952**

The Mormon Pioneer Bridge opened to traffic on December 14 at the exact location where the Mormons first crossed the Missouri River into Nebraska in June 1846. Girls from the Uta Halee Home were the first passengers to travel across the bridge on opening day. Formal dedication of the Mormon Pioneer Bridge was held on June 1, 1953.

A Missouri River flood emergency was called. Omaha experienced the river’s highest flood stage when it crested at 30.4 feet on April 17. A strong system of dikes, a flood wall of steel and concrete and quick action by volunteers kept Omaha and Council Bluffs from being devastated. Nevertheless, one person died, and damage to homes and businesses was reported at $1.4 million. Following the great flood of 1952, a levee extending from what is now Eppley Airfield to the railroad bridge on the south edge of downtown was built. The Missouri River has not flooded downtown Omaha since construction of the levee.

A polio epidemic hit Omaha.

Table Supply Meat Company President Lester Simon started the company’s first mail order business. Direct mail fliers and catalogues were initially sent to customers in 1963.

In its first televised athletic contest, the OU football team defeated Doane College 27-0 on what was then WOW-TV.

The Omaha Zoological Society was organized to improve the zoo and provide administrative assistance to the City of Omaha.

One of 11 children of Czech immigrant parents, attorney Roman Hruska was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1952. He served only part of one term, as he ran for a United States Senate seat in 1954, which was vacated by the death of Hugh Butler. Hruska won, was reelected in 1958, 1964 and 1970, and served in the Senate until his retirement in 1976. Hruska became an influential member of the Senate Appropriations Committee and the Senate Judiciary Committee. Hruska voted in favor of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, 1964, and 1968, as well as the 24th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the Voting Rights Act of 1965,and the confirmation of Thurgood Marshall to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Roman L. Hruska Federal Courthouse in Omaha was named in his honor.

Mediocrity comments

**1953**

The Sisters of Mercy began a $3 million construction project to build the new home for the College of St. Mary.

First National Bank’s John Lauritzen helpd invent the bank credit card. The card started in 1953 is called First Charge.

**1954**

A huge birthday cake was the centerpiece for Omaha centennial celebration shows held at Turner Park during the summertime. The show, Omaha! Chuck Wagon of America, featured a cast of 1,500.

Ten railroads converged on the city making Omaha the fourth largest rail center in the country.

The first one-way streets were designated in Omaha.

In August, a light turn out of voters approved holding a charter convention. Convention delegates were to address the issue of whether to revise the current commission form of government or recommend an entirely different form of city government.

**1955**

The Omaha Civic Auditorium at 1804 Capitol Avenue was dedicated on January 2nd. It replaced the old Municipal Auditorium at 15th and Howard. Designed by architect, Leo A. Daly Co., it was built for $7,000,000.

The last streetcar made its final run in Omaha.

The College of St. Mary became an independent corporation and opened its new campus at 1901 South 72nd Street on the outskirts of Omaha with an enrollment of 255 students. By 1958, the College of St. Mary became a four-year fully accredited college.

Omaha University defeated Eastern Kentucky State in the Tangerine Bowl with a score of 7-6.

Omaha acquired its first Class AAA baseball franchise, a St. Louis Cardinals team, which would play at Municipal Stadium. A Class AAA franchise is the highest minor league status. By the end of the 1955 season, more than 317,000 fans came to watch the Omaha Cardinals at Municipal (now Rosenblatt) Stadium. It was the third highest attendance of any minor league park in the country in 1955.

The Omaha Stockyards was the largest livestock market in the world and remained so until 1973.

The Center shopping mall opened at 42nd and Center Streets. It was Omaha’s first enclosed shopping center and a new concept for Omaha. Developer John A. Wiebe described it to investors as having “air conditioned and heated sidewalks”

J.L. Brandeis & Sons began development of a shopping center on the west edge of Omaha. Crossroads Mall was intended to be an adjunct operation to business at its flagship department store downtown.

Tampico, one of the first Mexican establishments in Omaha, was opened at 10th and Pacific Streets by Atilano Oropeza. The venue served as a social haven for the Mexican community to gather, listen to live music and share in friendship. Sounds of the Barrientos Brothers, the Tampico Trio and traditional music filled the air.

**1956**

Werner Enterprises was founded by C.L. Werner in Council Bluffs when, as a nineteen-year-old, he used his car as a down payment to buy a 1956 Ford truck with a V-8 engine. Later, the trucking company’s corporate headquarters was moved across the Missouri River to the Omaha area.

Omaha voters elected 15 delegates to participate in a Charter Convention with the goal of making a recommendation as to the form of government Omaha would have in the future. Most of the delegates were male, middle-aged business leaders who volunteered their time and worked through the summer in a non-air conditioned room on the top floor of city hall. A.V. Sorensen, president of the Chamber of Commerce, chaired the convention charged with completing its work within 120 days. The delegates finished their work on the 119th day. Later, Sorensen recalled it was the worst job he ever had in terms of getting 15 minds to agree on one recommendation. He later served as mayor for one term, 1965-1969.

The new Home Rule Charter was approved by voters in November. It authorized the implementation of a strong mayor/city council form of government and extended the term of the mayor to four years. The Charter placed the selection of the mayor back into the hands of the voting public.

The Greater Omaha Historical Society was organized at a meeting held at the Joslyn Art Museum. Dr. John M. Christlieb was elected the society’s first president, a constitution was adopted, and annual dues were set at $1. Membership was open to anyone interested in local history.

HDR got its first large architectural project, the Omaha Federal Building.

A 390-acre tract of land southwest of Omaha and northeast of Millard was purchased for construction of a huge Western Electric manufacturing plant. Groundbreaking occurred in June, and the plant opened in the fall of 1959.

In 1956 Mutual of Omaha was enlarged by Peter Kiewit Sons. At this time the Mutual symbol, the head of a native American, was displayed on the top sides of the building, as overlooking the city. In 1979 the Dome was added and an underground meeting area was created, the largest of its kind at that time.

**1957**

The mayor-city council form of government took effect in Omaha. For the first time in almost 50 years, John Rosenblatt himself, became the first directly elected mayor.

The cornerstone was laid for Creighton Preparatory School at 7400 Western Avenue.

The last burial took place in Potter’s Field. Over 3,900 people were buried at the cemetery at 48th and Young Streets during the 70 years between 1887 and 1957.

KETV began on-the-air broadcasting.

The Omaha Press Club held its first dinner show at the Birchwood Club on October 26th. The purpose of the event was to raise money for aspiring journalists and to spoof news stories of the previous year. Two scholarships were presented for $50 each.

The Omaha Fire Department was desegregated and the seniority system of advancement came to an end. The first five-member, all Black company of firefighters was formed and put into service in 1895.

**1958**

Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy and his wife, Jacqueline, were pictured together at the Fontenelle Hotel.

Elvis Presley performed at the Omaha Civic Auditorium.

A recall was attempted for the mayor and three city councilmen.

Creighton Prep moved from the Creighton University campus to its new 35-acre campus at 7400 Western Avenue.

The Omaha Civic Opera Society was organized as an all-volunteer community opera association. A year later, it presented its first production, Puccini’s Madame Butterfly. The organization’s name was changed to Opera Omaha in the mid-1970s.

Omaha was designated an All America City by the National Municipal League and Look Magazine. The new charter was regarded as a feature of civic progress that brought national recognition to Omaha by means of this award. City spokesman and former Chairman of the 1956 Charter Convention, A.V. Sorensen, was recognized as “Omaha’s Top Salesman” by the Omaha Sales Executive Club.

The Omaha Plan, a $68 million proposal to provide for construction of 13 capital improvement projects by means of general obligation bond issues, was soundly defeated by voters in a special election in June. One of the proposals was for a new airport terminal building. Many of the proposals for street and sewer improvements and new public buildings won voter approval during the next decade.

Guarantee Mutual Life Company Moved west in April 1958. Located at 8721 Indian Hills Drive The new building has won national acclaim. It was Designed by the Leo A Daly architectural firm of Omaha.

**1959**

St. Cecilia Cathedral was consecrated. Just prior to the consecration, work was completed on the 187-foot-tall twin towers that are topped by identical domed cupolas.

The racehorse, Omaha, died and was buried at Ak-Sar-Ben Field. The horse won the Belmont Stakes and Triple Crown in 1935.

The musical Say, Darling opened the new Omaha Community Playhouse at 69th and Cass Streets.

The Omaha Airport Authority was created by action of the state legislature to undertake the task of modernization and expansion of the Omaha Municipal Airport. However, the new semi-autonomous board of five members did not have taxing authority. In June, the Federal Aviation Agency approved an $885,000 grant to assist in funding construction of a new terminal building. This was supplemented in December by a $1,000,000 grant from the Eugene C. Eppley Foundation.

Leo A. Daly Co. moved to a new 40,000 square-foot office building at 8600 Indian Hills Drive, where the firm’s headquarters remain today.

Construction began in September on the Crossroads Mall, a $10 million, 600,000-square-foot shopping center.

Western Electric Omaha Works opened with more than 4,000 employees west of Omaha. Workers at the large plant produced telephone cable and dial equipment for the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company. Omaha was the headquarters for Northwestern Bell. Its president, A.F. Jacobson, was instrumental in making the decision to locate the Western Electric plant in the Omaha area. The new manufacturing facility stimulated the growth of the city as Omaha expanded westward.

Lithuanian immigrant Father Juozas Jusevicius passes away. From 1932 to 1958 he was pastor of the St. Anthony of Padua church on the southwest corner of 32nd and S Streets. Many of his parishioners were refugee Lithuanians whom the Russians had driven from their homeland. He and fellow parishioners sponsored them and helped them find shelter and work in Omaha.

**1960**

The Village of La Vista was incorporated.

Push-button banking was introduced in Omaha by the National Cash Register Co.

Sears was the first store to open at the new Crossroads Shopping Mall at 72nd and Dodge Streets. Brandeis was the other anchor store at the new shopping center which opened in September.

Telephone numbers in Omaha increased from six to seven digits.

Omaha’s population reached 301,598 persons. The total population of Douglas County was 343,490.

Omaha’s Bob Boozer, a member of the U.S. basketball team at the Rome Olympics, became the only Black Nebraska athlete to win an Olympic gold medal.

A record snow depth of 27 inches was recorded at Eppley Airfield.

United Airlines began Boeing 720 jet service to Eppley Airfield in August.

N.P. Dodge built the subdivision of Maple Village. It was the city’s largest subdivision at the time and the first to have underground electrical wiring.

**1961**

Groundbreaking occurred for the construction of the new post office at 12th and Mason Streets.

The first long-distance direct dialing capability became available in Omaha.

Interstate 80 reached Omaha when the 52-mile stretch of highway called the Omaha-Lincoln Freeway linking the two cities was officially opened with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in August.

Omaha’s Kilpatrick’s Department Store, one of the city’s pioneer mercantile establishments, became a wholly-owned subsidiary of Des Moines-based Younker Brothers, Inc.

Construction of the new Eppley Airfield Passenger Terminal was completed in September. It was almost triple the size of the old terminal.

The Kiewit Plaza building at 36th and Farnam Streets was completed in 1961 with a modernist architectural style. Peter Kiewit with Peter Kiewit Sons Co., Morris E. Jacobs with Bozell and Jacobs, and Charles Durham with HDR led the development team. When it opened, the main floor featured men’s and women’s clothiers, Parsow’s and Topp’s, The Fountain Room restaurant, Class A businesses, and residential space. In 2024, the 15-story property, renamed the Blackstone Plaza, is managed by The Lund Company.

**1962**

Plans for an interstate highway system through Omaha were announced.

The OU football team defeated East Central Oklahoma by a score of 34-21 to win the All-Sports Bowl.

**1963**

Mutual of Omaha’s “Wild Kingdom” premiered on national television.

Postal ZIP codes were introduced in Omaha.

Margaret Hitchcock Doorly donated $750,000 to the zoo with the stipulation that it be named for her late husband, Henry Doorly, chairman of the World Publishing Company.

The old Omaha Municipal Auditorium, 15th and Howard Streets, was torn down to make way for a parking lot. President Woodrow Wilson spoke there during his 1919 western tour to boost American participation in the League of Nations. Presidential candidates, Al Smith and Wendell Wilkie spoke at the Auditorium, and Enrico Caruso sang there. Musicians John Philip Sousa, Paderewski, Paul Whiteman, Fritz Kreisler, Rachmaninoff, Pablo Casals and Leopold Stokowski performed at the old hall.

In 1963, Omaha Star publisher Mildred Brown and two bold Black ministers, Kelsey Jones and Rudy McNair, adopted an aggressive, deliberate strategy to tackle discrimination in Omaha. They called themselves the Citizens’ Coordinating Committee for Civil Liberties, the 4CL, and protested institutions from City Hall to The World-Herald to Omaha Public Schools. The City of Omaha Human Rights Commission was formed in response to protests by the 4CL.

Utilizing nonviolent protest, Herb Rhodes, Betty Jo Moreland, and Dale Anders, along with fellow members of the NAACP Youth Council, succeeded in opening Peony Park’s popular swimming pool to African Americans for the first time. The group enjoyed the support of white colleagues to integrate this privately-owned business.

Two thousand Blacks gathered at City Hall to urge the Omaha City Council to adopt an ordinance banning discrimination in housing and employment.

Charles B. Washington, an Omaha civil rights activist, helped stage a sit-in at the downtown Omaha Woolworth & Co. store to protest discrimination against blacks in public places.

Edward Danner began his term as a member of the Unicameral and served until 1970.

Don Benning was hired as head wrestling coach at Omaha University (now UNO). When he accepted the position, he became the first Black head coach of any sport at a predominantly white university anywhere in the country.

The Eugene C. Eppley Institute for Research in Cancer and Allied Diseases was dedicated in June. The new center was constructed on the campus of the University of Nebraska College of Medicine with a $2,500,000 grant from the Eppley Foundation.

**1964**

Bergan Mercy Hospital opened.

HDR completed construction of Nebraska Methodist Hospital, the company’s first health care client. The hospital was also HDR’s first interior design project.

A severe thunderstorm dumped more than eight inches of rain over the Omaha metro area on June 16th. Floodwater in area creeks rose so quickly full evacuation was prevented, and seven deaths occurred. About 18,000 acres were flooded in the communities of Omaha, Ralston, Millard, Papillion, Elkhorn, Bellevue and Bennington. It is the worst flood on record in the metro area’s Papillion Creek watershed.

The Omaha City Council voted to rename Municipal Stadium the Johnny Rosenblatt Stadium in honor of the former mayor, a leading advocate for construction of the facility during the 1940s. It later became affectionately known as “The Blatt” to Omahans and visitors alike.

Mayor James J. Dworak was indicted by a grand jury for allegedly soliciting a $25,000 bribe regarding a land rezoning petition from John B. Coleman, a Chicago real estate developer. The scandal played a role in the mayoral election the following year.

The Omaha Mustangs, a semi-pro football franchise in the Continental Football League, played at Rosenblatt Stadium this year through 1969. Former Husker standouts Ted Vactor, Jerry Patton, Bob Churchich and Frank Solich played on the team. Team owner Bob Adwers started the franchise partly to fill the pro sports void in Omaha at the time.

**1965**

William J. Bryan High School was dedicated.

Woodmen of the World merged with Woodmen Circle, the women’s auxiliary of Woodmen, resulting in the addition of more than 130,000 members to the Woodmen organization.

KYNE (Channel 26/UNO television) went on the air.

A.V. Sorensen soundly defeated incumbent James J. Dworak in the election for mayor by a margin of nearly 24,000 votes. Sorensen won 62.5% of the total votes cast after a hotly contested race.

Omaha City Council members elected were Arthur Bradley, Al Veys and Betty Abbott, the first woman ever to win a seat on the council. Abbott went on to serve 12 years, 1965 to 1977. She is credited with helping save and restore the Orpheum Theater, helping the Henry Doorly Zoo gain national recognition, and working with Rachel Gallagher and Friends of the parks to keep UNO from building a parking lot on Elmwood Park’s ravine and fighting to keep Midtown’s neighborhoods intact.

The Omaha City Council took action to approve the annexation of a small area of land in Sarpy County. A court challenge followed on the grounds the City of Omaha lacked the authority to annex across a county line. The challenge was upheld by District Judge John C. Burke who ruled that Omaha did not have the power to annex land across county lines even though Nebraska statute did not specifically prohibit such action.

The first branch of the YMCA was the Maple Street YMCA which opened this year at 7502 Maple Street.

The Omaha Zoological Society was reorganized and charged with planning construction, and with the operation and maintenance of the zoo as a nonprofit organization for the city. The first phase of the zoo was dedicated to Henry Doorly. Included in this phase were the bear grottos, the gorilla and orangutan buildings and Ak- Sar-Ben Nature Kingdom.

**1966**

The first Omaha area soldier serving in Vietnam was designated as “Missing in Action” (MIA).

Masked men donated $500,000 to the YMCA fund drive.

Groundbreaking for the new Woodmen Tower took place at 17th and Farnam Streets.

Despite efforts to save the building, Omaha’s main post office at 16th and Dodge Streets was razed. The result was the formation of Omaha’s first historic preservation group, Landmarks Inc.

The 31st and Grover Streets traffic interchange on I-80 opened in Omaha. The interchange brings together traffic from the four compass points. Interstate 80 runs east and west. Interstate

480 goes north toward downtown, and the John F. Kennedy Freeway goes to South Omaha extending to F Street. Eventually, construction was completed to Q Street.

Work began on the North Freeway. The Freeway, between 27th and 28th Street, ripped through Omaha’s predominantly African American community, demolishing more than 1,000 homes and businesses.

The Ak-Sar-Ben Coliseum was remodeled at a cost of $2 million. The facility was completely renovated, and a new Ak-Sar-Ben Hall was built to accommodate 1,500 people for banquets and receptions.

A pop bottle thrown at a police officer touched off three nights of violence on Omaha’s Near North Side. Five hundred National Guardsmen were summoned to clear 24th Street and quell the lawlessness.

Table Supply Meat Company opened a new plant and headquarters in Omaha. At the same time, the company’s name was changed to Omaha Steaks International.

The Nebraska Supreme Court upheld a district court ruling which forbade the City of Omaha from annexing land in Sarpy County in Barton v. City of Omaha. Omaha could expand its borders by annexation but only within the confines of Douglas County.

A Time for Burning, a documentary about race issues in Omaha, was released and received an Oscar nomination. It features a young Ernie Chambers.

The national headquarters of the Danish Brotherhood in America, a Danish-American benevolent society and insurance company, is completed on the southeast corner of 38th and Harney Streets. The Danish Brotherhood started in Omaha in 1882.

**1967**

Cinema Center opened at 84th and Dodge Streets.

Omaha Burke High School was completed at 120th and West Dodge Streets.

Cudahy Packing Company closed its Omaha operation. Closures by Armour, Swift and Wilson packing companies followed soon afterwards and marked the closing of a chapter in Omaha history. The stockyards and meatpacking houses were a staple in the city’s early economic development, much like the role played by the railroads.

Public discussion about the future of Omaha’s riverfront came about as the result of a class project by three architecture students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The students suggested the area should be developed.

Pachyderm Hill was built on the site of a former baseball diamond at Riverview Park, now the Henry Doorly Zoo. Today it is home to the zoo’s population of African elephants and white rhinos.

The Eugene C. Eppley Foundation approved a grant of $2,250,000 to the City of Omaha and Douglas County to purchase land for the construction of a city-county building. The grant stipulated the new center was to be built downtown at a location bounded by Farnam and Harney Streets on the north and south and Eighteenth and Nineteenth Streets on the east and west. Eppley directors selected this site just west of the Douglas County Courthouse for the convenience of the public.

The University of Omaha named the NAIA national champs in bowling.

The German American Society is completed south of 120th and Center Streets.

**1968**

The Municipal University of Omaha (OU) became the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) as a result of its merger with the University of Nebraska on July 1st. OU’s final commencement was held in June.

Sam Mercer began efforts to develop the Old Market area. The French Café opened in the Old Market.

Omaha native Bob Gibson of the St. Louis Cardinals won his first of two National League Cy Young Awards given annually to the league’s top pitcher.

Disorder erupted during the Civic Auditorium appearance of presidential hopeful George Wallace, a segregationist and former governor of Alabama. The violence spilled out of the auditorium and into the streets. Ten businesses were looted, and two white motorists were beaten. Howard Stevenson, a 16-year-old black youth, was shot and killed by a police officer during widespread looting. Other violence occurred throughout the summer.

Armour Packing Company ceased operations in Omaha.

Duchesne College closed, and the elementary school was phased out during the 1970s. The high school continued.

Westroads Shopping Mall opened at 102nd Street and West Dodge Road. For a time Westroads was the nation’s largest mall until Minnesota made its move.

The Black Panthers open a chapter in Omaha.

Robert Kennedy speaks in Omaha.

**1969**

The current downtown site of the YMCA of Greater Omaha was dedicated and opened at 430 South 20th Street.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha held its first formal commencement as UNO on January 25th.

The Omaha Royals baseball team played its first game at Rosenblatt Stadium.

The 30-story Woodmen Tower, Omaha’s tallest skyscraper, was completed at 17th and Farnam Streets at a cost of $28 million. At 498 feet, it remained the city’s tallest building until 2002 when First National Bank’s 40-story, 635-foot office tower at 16th and Dodge Streets became Omaha’s tallest building.

The largest meat packing houses closed down and left 10,000 unemployed. Swift Packing Company closed.

Union Pacific began to use the world’s most powerful diesel-electric locomotive with a 6,600 horsepower capacity. In the same year, Union Pacific Corp. was created as a holding company for the railroad’s valuable oil and mineral operations.

Fourteen-year-old Vivian Strong, a young black girl, was fatally wounded by a white police officer, James L. Loder, who responded to a prowling call at the Logan Fontenelle Homes in Near North Omaha. The death triggered five nights of rioting that torched much of North 24th Street. The violence resulted in one death, 21 injuries, $750,000 in damages and 88 arrests.

City of Omaha passes an Open Housing Law.

BLAC, the Black Liberators for Action on Campus, was a student group established circa 1968 at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. BLAC protested discrimination at UNO and helped to establish a Black Studies program at UNO.

Omaha’s oldest downtown department store, Thomas Kilpatrick & Company, closed. The store contained 140,000 square feet of retail space and had observed its centennial anniversary in 1968. The closing provided Kilpatrick’s the opportunity to concentrate efforts on its two stores which remained open, one at the Center and the other at the Westroads Shopping Mall.

Fr. Anthony Petrusic, of Saints Peter and Paul Church, forms the Croatian Cultural Society to promote the country’s literature, music and folklore. It continues today at 8711 S. 36th St.

**1970**

UNO won the NAIA national wrestling championship.

The population of Omaha was 347,328 residents. The total population of Douglas County was 389,455. Between 1950 and 1970, the populations of Douglas, Sarpy and Pottawattamie Counties increased from 310,249 to 542,646 inhabitants. Because of urban sprawl that followed WWII, it was no longer possible to gauge the extent of an urban area merely by considering the population of the central city.

Mayor Gene Leahy appointed a committee headed by businessman Mike Yanney to develop a “Back to the River” plan for downtown Omaha. The goal of the plan was to keep jobs downtown and increase the residential population in an area that traditionally had been Omaha’s financial and business center.

Sea Lion Plaza opened at the Henry Doorly Zoo at the site of what had been a public swimming pool at Riverview Park in 1916. The pool was buried in 1944 and later “rediscovered” and converted into a sea lion pool that is home to California sea lions today.

Larry Minard, a white police officer, was killed by a booby-trap when he answered a call at a vacant house in Near North Omaha. Black Panther members, David Rice and Edward Poindexter, were arrested, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison for the crime.

The Nebraska Furniture Mart opened a new store at 700 South 72nd Street to supplement business at its downtown store. The two operated in tandem until 1980 when the west Omaha store became the sole location.

The Omaha Police Headquarters located at 505 South 15th Street was completed on June 6, 1970 for $3.5 million. It was designed by Leo A. Daley and constructed by Hawkins Construction Company.

Ernest William Chambers (born July 10, 1937) was first elected to North Omaha's 11th District in the Nebraska State Legislature. He served from 1971 to 2009 and again from 2013 to 2021 making him the longest-serving state senator in Nebraska history, having represented North Omaha for 46 years. For most of his career, Chambers was the only nonwhite senator.

**1971**

UNO athletic teams became known as the Mavericks, a change from the previous name of Indians.

The Fontenelle Hotel closed and remained vacant a number of years before being razed.

The Orpheum Theater closed at the end of April due to declining attendance and deteriorating conditions.

The City of Omaha annexed Millard as a necessary step in Omaha’s future expansion. The annexation occurred after a four year court battle. There was no direct impact on either the Omaha or Millard school districts even though parts of Millard lay within Omaha’s city limits. OPS enrollment was nearly 64,000 while Millard had just over 5,100 students. After the annexation, the administration of Mayor Edward Zorinksy slowed the wholesale annexation policy. This was due to the tremendous expense of providing city services to outlying developments.

Elizabeth Davis Pittman became the first woman and first black municipal judge in Omaha and in Nebraska.

Nebraska Consolidated Mills became known as ConAgra and evolved from milling into a company that offered a variety of products from livestock feed to grocery items. Under Charles “Mike” Harper’s leadership, ConAgra went from an $11.4 million loss in 1974 to a $4.1 million profit a year later.

The bank cooperative that began in Omaha in 1969 was reorganized as First Data Resources, a private business.

The City of Omaha adopted a fair employment practices ordinance.

The City of Omaha assumed operation of the East Omaha Drainage District and gained control of hundreds of acres of land for flood control and development purposes. Mayor Leahy’s “Back to the River” plan envisioned a park-like mall connecting the riverfront with downtown businesses.

The First National Center was dedicated in November 1971. Contained two of the dominate structures in downtown Omaha – The 22-Story First National Bank building and The Hilton (Doubletree Hotel in 2024).

Omaha Northwest High School was completed at 8204 Crown Point Avenue.

Omaha Bryan High School at 4700 Giles Road opened its doors in September 1971. It is the only Omaha High School situated within Sarpy County.

The Malcolm X Foundation was created by Rowena Moore as a memorial for the birth site of Malcolm Little, most commonly known as Malcolm X at 3448 Evans Street.

**1972**

The Fontenelle Forest Nature Center was dedicated.

KVNO (FM 90.7) began broadcasting from its offices at UNO. By 2006, KVNO had an estimated 44,000 weekly listeners. A study by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting ranked it among the top ten per cent of public radio stations across the country for outstanding audience service and excellent financial health.

The Interstate system through Omaha, including I-680 and I-480, was completed. Hundreds of homes were moved or demolished to make room for the highways, and some close-knit neighborhoods never recovered. On the other hand, the interstate and freeway systems brought jobs, businesses and industry to the entire metro area.

The Council Bluffs YMCA merged with the YMCA of Greater Omaha.

World heavyweight champion, Joe Frazier, defeated local boxing star, Ron Stander, in a match for the heavyweight title at the Omaha Civic Auditorium Arena.

The Omaha Building, the city’s first skyscraper at 1650 Farnam Street, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Dick Mueller opened the Firehouse Dinner Theater in the Old Market at 11th and Jackson Streets. Constructed in 1903 for just under $30,000, the building was the city’s first permanent firehouse. It was occupied as Fire Department Sub Station #1 from 1904- 1944. The building stood vacant for several years before it was used for truck storage and automotive parts. Mueller’s theater saved it from the wrecking ball and brought new life to the Old Market.

Omahan Vinod Gupta borrowed $100 to mail a brochure to 1,000 mobile home manufacturers announcing a list of mobile home dealers. The list was yet to be prepared. He and colleague, Glen Humphrey, received orders totaling $35,000 within six weeks. The two men used 4,800 telephone directories from cities across the country to prepare a database of information about mobile home retailers that industry manufacturers could use to increase sales. Their work launched American Business Lists Inc. that later became American Business Information Inc. and then InfoUSA with headquarters in Omaha.

The Storz Brewery closes permanently.

Omaha Tech High graduate Johnny Rodgers helped the Huskers win the first two national titles in school history (1970 and 1971) before becoming the first Nebraska Heisman winner in 1972.

**1973**

Members of the Omaha City Council voted to appropriate $2,375,000 to begin construction of the Central Park Mall on the eastern edge of Omaha’s downtown business district. After leaving office, former Mayor Eugene Leahy continued to promote development of the downtown and riverfront areas. He headed the Riverfront Development Foundation, a business-backed foundation to secure public and private funding to revitalize a roughly 200- hundred square mile stretch of land along the Missouri River, mostly in the Omaha area.

The Western Heritage Museum was founded by a nonprofit organization and had its headquarters at the former Union Station on 10th Street. Union Pacific Railroad gave the terminal to the City of Omaha.

A New York firm purchased the Omaha Union Stock Yards Company ending ninety years of local ownership.

Fort Omaha was abandoned as a military installation.

The staff of The Sun Newspapers of Omaha was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for Local Investigative Specialized Reporting in 1973 for uncovering the large financial resources of Boys Town to reforms in the organization's solicitation and use of funds contributed by the public. Sun Newspapers ceased publishing in 1983.

William Theisen opens the first Godfather’s Pizza. He expanded the restaurant into more than 40 states before selling the company in the mid-1980s to Pillsbury and stepped down from operating the company. Pillsbury has long since sold the restaurant chain.

Theisen in 1983 constructed a 20,125 square feet mansion in Regency, at the time the largest mansion in Omaha; he sold the mansion in 1995 to Terry Watanabe, former owner of Oriental Trading Company. In 2009 he opened Pitch Pizzeria in Omaha, his first new pizza restaurant since he sold his interest in Godfather's in the mid-1980s. Unlike Godfather's, Pitch is a coal-fired, thin-crust pizzeria.

**1974**

Trinity Episcopal Cathedral was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The new Jewish Community Center at 333 South 132nd Street was dedicated on May 5.

Metropolitan Community College was created when the Unicameral consolidated the original eight technical community college areas (created in 1971) into six. The Omaha Nebraska Technical Community College Area merged with the Eastern Nebraska Technical Community College Area under the new name, the Metropolitan Technical Community College Area. First year enrollment for the new Metropolitan Technical Community College was 2,430 students in 1974-1975.

The Burlington Railroad terminal closed and sat vacant. On June 5, 2013, Hearst Television announced the purchase of the historic Burlington Station; the former train station was adaptively reused into a broadcasting and web media facility for KETV. On October 28, 2015, KETV's news operation moved into the renovated building in downtown Omaha.

The Fort Omaha Historic District achieved a listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Encompassing 825 acres that included six buildings, it was the largest historic district in Douglas County for many years.

Omahan Chip Davis founded American Gramaphone and developed it into one of the country’s largest, most successful recording labels ever. His group, Mannheim Steamroller, sold more than 41 million albums and became the bestselling Christmas musical group of all time.

Katherine Fletcher was named principal of Laura Dodge School, making her the first Black principal of a West Omaha school. Previously she had been the first African American teacher and principal at Kellom Elementary. She started Nebraska's first school breakfast program.

**1975**

The Western Heritage Museum opened in the former Union Station on South Tenth Street.

The ice arena at Hitchcock Park opened.

The grand re-opening of the newly-renovated Orpheum Theater occurred on January 7 and starred comedian Red Skelton. The Orpheum became the city’s premiere concert and theatrical venue.

A January blizzard with winds of fifty-sixty miles per hour velocity buried parts of the city with as much as 19 inches of snow and snowdrifts 15 feet deep. Wind chills dropped well below zero. Hundreds of Omahans were stranded at their businesses or at hotels/motels. It took several days before several hundred abandoned vehicles were moved to allow for snow removal. As many as 10 people died from shoveling snow or walking outside, most dying from heart attacks.

The new Omaha-Douglas Civic Center at 1819 Farnam Street was dedicated in March. The city-county building was in the planning stages since the mid-1960s.

A huge tornado struck Omaha on May 6th causing a nine-mile path of destruction from Ralston to Benson. Some two thousand square blocks of the city were decimated. Especially hard-hit was 72nd Street, a main commercial thoroughfare. The Nebraska Furniture Mart sustained heavy damage and had to be rebuilt. Damage to homes and businesses was in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Lewis and Clark Junior High and Westgate Elementary School both severely damaged.

A siren-warning system and continuous information and instruction from personnel at radio stations kept the number of injured to 200 persons and the number of fatalities at three.

The first Summer Arts Festival held in Omaha.

Omaha Steaks opened an inbound call center to keep up with consumer demand. Outbound telemarketing was added three years later, and in 1979, a toll-free customer service line was installed.

The Soviet Union’s Apollo-Soyuz astronauts visited Omaha.

UNO won the Women’s College World Series national softball title.

Senator Ernie Chambers was instrumental in getting a bill through the Unicameral requiring district election of members of the Omaha Public Schools Board of Education. Governor J.J. Exon vetoed the measure which was subsequently overridden by the legislature.

The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed a lower court decision and ordered the integration of the Omaha Public Schools. The court ruled that actions by the Omaha district, including the hiring and placement of Black faculty members, contributed to segregation in OPS. The district was ordered to desegregate students by autumn of 1976. The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the school district’s appeal.

Results of a Fortune magazine survey revealed that Union Pacific Railroad, with sales of $1.7 billion, ranked as the fourth largest transportation company in the nation.

Omaha Typesetting Co., 1119 Douglas Street, was the first building to be demolished in an area that became the Central Park Mall. A year later, most of the site had been cleared for an estimated cost of $15 million, financed largely through the use of federal funds.

J. Joe Ricketts and three partners each invested $12,500 to open First Omaha Securities, a discount brokerage business. The firm handled stock purchases for individual investors without the advice of full service brokers, a revolutionary concept. The rate was $25 a trade. First Omaha Securities, Inc. later became TD Ameritrade.

Metropolitan Technical Community College received the deed to Fort Omaha from the federal government. The site became Metro’s first permanent campus at 30th and Fort Streets. The campus sits on 73 acres of land and contains 32 buildings that encompass 377,701 square feet of space. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the buildings and grounds are maintained in the original 19th century architectural theme, although classrooms and offices have been updated to meet 21st century needs. Located on the perimeter of the campus, the Naval and Marine Corps Reserves still deploy troops from the Fort Omaha site.

**1976**

President Gerald Ford visited Omaha and broke ground for Bergan Mercy Hospital’s East Tower.

The A.V. Sorensen Branch Library opened in August at 48th and Cass Streets on land donated by former Mayor A.V. Sorensen.

The Omaha Public Schools initiated a program of federally mandated busing to achieve integration in response to the 1975 Eighth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in United States v. School District of Omaha. A total of 9,300 students were bused to other OPS schools outside their neighborhoods.

Wilson Packing Company, the last of the Big Four packing plants, ceased operations in Omaha. Closure of the Big Four—Cudahy, Armour, Swift, Wilson—resulted in the loss of more than 10,000 Omaha jobs and an estimated $500 million annually in wages, services, purchases and taxes over a nine-year period since the closure of the Cudahy plant in 1967.

The Kutak, Rock and Campbell law firm, which started with offices in the Omaha Building in 1965, purchased the building at 1650 Farnam Street and spent $4.5 million to renovate it. Renovation went into 1977.

J.C. Penney, 104 South 16th Street, closed its doors. The store was the last national clothing retail company to operate downtown.

The Great Plains Black Museum opened as the largest Black- American historical/cultural institution west of the Mississippi River. Housed in the original Nebraska Telephone Building that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it was located at 2213 Lake Street. Founder Bertha Calloway started the museum with a $100,000 federal grant.

Quarters One on the grounds of Fort Omaha was dedicated as the General Crook House, a historic home built in 1879. Also in 1976, the Douglas County Historical Society leased the Crook House from Metropolitan Technical Community College located on its Fort Omaha campus. Intended for use as a historical museum, the historical society began restoration of the home the same year.

The first Omaha Steaks retail store opened in Omaha. The first store outside Nebraska opened in Houston, Texas in 1985.

Expansion of the Ak-Sar-Ben grandstand resulted in 1,500 additional seats which brought total seating capacity to 11,000. Cost of the expansion was $2 million.

Omaha Symphony is made of a core of 36 full-time professional musicians, which became a semi-professional orchestra in 1976

**1977**

In March, the W. Dale Clark Library at 215 South 15th Street opened. Located at the head of the new Central Park Mall, it is the headquarters of the Omaha Public Library system. The first section of the Central Park Mall was dedicated and opened later in the year.

The addition of a full-sized gymnasium was added to the north and east of the main building at Central High School.

Al Veys, a former city council member, finished second as the result of a write-in campaign for the mayoral primary. This entitled him to a place on the ballot in the run-off election for mayor in which he defeated Betty Abbott, a long-time city council member and the first woman to run for mayor. Veys served as mayor from 1977-81.

In June, Elvis Presley appeared in concert before 10,500 fans at the Civic Auditorium. It was Presley’s fifth and final concert in Omaha.

**1978**

Metropolitan Community College opened its South Omaha Campus on 40 acres of land at 27th and Q Streets in the heart of South Omaha.

Creighton University observed its centennial anniversary. The 65- acre campus included several buildings constructed during the previous twenty years. New dormitories, three Criss Health Sciences buildings, the new 433-bed Saint Joseph Hospital, intended as a teaching hospital for health sciences students, the Boyne School of Dental Science, and the Ahmanson Law Center stood on the expanded campus.

Inmates Peter Hochstein, C. Michael Anderson and Dan Sheppard escaped from the maximum-security cell on the sixth floor of the Douglas County Courthouse. The escapees eventually were captured just south of the Canadian border.

**1979**

Senator Ernie Chambers was instrumental in getting a bill through the Unicameral to require the election of members of the Omaha City Council by district rather than on an at-large basis. The Council had been elected at-large since 1912.

The Beach Boys appeared in concert at Rosenblatt Stadium before an audience of 25,000 people—15,000 of them on the field. Up until then, it was the largest crowd at a rock concert in Omaha history.

Girls were admitted to Boys Town for the first time as a means of helping juvenile courts determine treatment needs for troubled girls. They did not become long-term residents on the Boys Town campus until some time later.

Central High School, formerly Omaha High School, and the Douglas County Courthouse were added to the National Register of Historic Places. The architect for both was John Latenser, Sr. who implemented the French Renaissance Revival style of architecture in each building.

Goldstein-Chapman Co., a women’s clothing store, closed its downtown location at 219 South 16th Street. Located on the northeast corner of 16th and Farnam Streets, the store opened in 1923. Abe Goldstein and his brother-in-law, Max Chapman, were partners in the new venture.

The Mormon Pioneer Memorial Bridge across the Missouri River on I-680 becomes toll-free on April 21.

Dallen Peterson founded The Merry Maids, a cleaning service. It now has more than 500 locations across the United States.

**1980**

The first Earth Day celebration was held in Omaha.

The Peter Kiewit Conference Center, 1313 Farnam Street, was dedicated and began service as an extension of the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held downtown for the new Central Park Plaza office building.

Northern Natural Gas Company changed its name to InterNorth, Inc. The new name reflected its diversification in the form of five operating companies. They included liquid fuels, petrochemicals, onshore drilling operations, Northern Coal Company and the original natural gas division.

The population of Omaha was 313,989 residents, and the metropolitan area had 569,614 inhabitants. The total population of Douglas County was 397,038.

Brandeis closed its downtown store at 16th and Douglas Streets by the end of the year. For nearly a century, J.L. Brandeis & Sons Inc. flagship store acted as a magnet drawing business not only to its own doors but to other merchants in a thriving downtown retail market area. Not long after its closing, Brandeis outlets in North Omaha, Columbus and Lincoln also closed.

The Jewell Building, 24th and Grant Streets, home of the Dreamland Ballroom, was designated an Omaha landmark. In 1983, it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Astro Theater at 2001 Farnam Street closed. Originally the Riviera Theater, it became the Paramount Theater in 1929 before it closed as the Astro. In 1981, Rose Blumkin, founder of the Nebraska Furniture Mart, bought the building from Creighton University for $200,000 to save it from demolition. By then, it had been designated a city landmark before being listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Elkhorn Valley Campus of Metropolitan Community College opened at 204th Street and West Dodge Road. The new campus serves western Douglas County and parts of Dodge and Washington Counties.

The Omaha School District was the largest in the state in the early 1980's. They had about 71,000 students and 72 elementary, 13 junior high and eight high schools.

Omaha Softball Association

By 1980 the Omaha Softball Association had 30,000 people playing in leagues. Omaha is the nation's softball capital. There are teams for everyone of every age Ball diamonds are all over the city.

There were more than 40 insurance companies based in Omaha. Omaha was the fourth-largest insurance center in the United States.

The 1980 Census listed Omaha’s population at 350,000 and Douglas Counties at 420,000.

Omahans Jim Hartung and Phil Cahoy make the U.S. Olympic Gymnastics team but don’t compete because of an Olympic boycott by the United States.

Lawrence Robert Klein (September 14, 1920 – October 20, 2013) an American economist who was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 1980 for his work in creating computer models to forecast economic trends in the field of econometrics in the Department of Economics at the University of Pennsylvania. He was born in Omaha, the

**1981**

The Northwestern Bell Building was dedicated downtown at its location on Douglas Street between 13th and 14th Streets. The 16-story building was later occupied by Qwest Communications. By 2007, it became home to offices of the Omaha World-Herald, its new owner. In doing so, World-Herald Square at 14th and Dodge Streets, occupied since 1948, was abandoned.

Alden Aust retired as city planning director after 25 years. Aust was a champion of the “Back to the River” plan as a way to keep jobs downtown and increase the number of residents living in the downtown area.

Fred Conley became the first African American elected to serve as a member of the Omaha City Council.

The South-Southwest YMCA opened at 13010 Atwood Avenue just south of 132nd Street and West Center Road.

Duchesne Academy celebrated its centennial anniversary as the only private, four-year high school for girls in the Omaha area that concentrates exclusively on college preparatory education.

**1982**

An extensive renovation of Central High School was undertaken during the 1981-1982 school year while school was in session. Toward the end of the project, a helicopter was used to lower supports in place for a translucent dome to cover the courtyard.

The Gerald R. Ford Expressway was dedicated.

The first River City Roundup was held to salute Omaha’s western heritage.

The first major segment of the Central Park Mall from 14th to 10th Street, between Douglas and Farnam Streets was completed. The City of Omaha accepted possession of the Central Park Mall from A. Borchman Sons Co., the company that built it largely from federal grants.

Union Pacific merged with the Missouri Pacific and the Western Pacific railroads in its first major merger. It doubled the size of the Union Pacific and made it the country’s third-largest rail system with 21,500 miles of tracks. John C. Kenefick was president of Union Pacific at the time of the merger.

The Douglas County Historical Society occupied “Quarters Two” on the north end of “Officers Row” on the Metropolitan Community College campus at Fort Omaha. As the Society’s Library/Archives Center, it is the official repository for Douglas County history. The historical society also operates from “Quarters One”, the General Crook House Museum located next door.

**1983**

After several redevelopment efforts failed, the Fontenelle Hotel at 1806 Douglas Street was razed.

Fear spread through the metro area when two Sarpy County boys, Danny Joe Eberle, 13, and Christopher Walden, 12, were mysteriously abducted and murdered. Offutt airman John J. Joubert, 21, was arrested in 1984 and later convicted for the killings. He was executed in 1996.

An Omaha attorney pulled a 36-year-old woman to safety when she was about to jump from the fifth-floor balcony ledge inside the Douglas County Courthouse

Receipts of salable livestock at Omaha’s packing industry stood at 1,245,300 head. Ten years later, receipts fell to 469,500 head.

Former TV personality Joni Baillon was hired to work for Civic Auditorium Manager Terry Forsberg as the new public events media coordinator for an annual salary of $21,500.

Investor Warren Buffett purchased 90% of the Nebraska Furniture Mart (NFM) business for $60 million. NFM founder Mrs. Rose Blumkin (Mrs. B) and Buffett exchanged a simple handshake to seal the deal adding NFM to Berkshire Hathaway.

**1984**

The breakup of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T) meant the end of Northwestern Bell, which had an office in Omaha. Seven regional companies, including US West Communications, were established.

Members of the state legislature officially recognized the 50th anniversary of the Unicameral by naming the legislative chamber “The George W. Norris Legislative Chamber” in honor of the U.S. Senator’s contributions to unicameralism in Nebraska.

Omahan Jim Hartung wins an Olympic gold medal in gymnastics.

**1985**

Pipal Park, a 15-acre recreational area at 7802 Hascall Street, was dedicated.

Brenda Council was elected to her first one-year term as the first Black president of the Omaha Public Schools Board of Education. She was again elected president in 1991, 1992, and 1993, her last year on the board.

Omaha-based InterNorth, Inc., formerly Northern Natural Gas Company, purchased Houston Natural Gas for $2.3 billion creating HNG InterNorth, Inc., the largest U.S. natural-gas pipeline system. Later the same year, the HNG-InterNorth board approved operating headquarters in Houston. Corporate headquarters were located in Omaha.

Ak-Sar-Ben set a record attendance of 1,305,753 for a full race meet this year. A crowd of 21,792 watched horse racing on the season’s final day on August 25.

The Omaha Grain Exchange closed when railroad deregulation and computerized quotations of grain prices made it unnecessary.

The first transcontinental fiber-optic cable followed the Platte River Road.

Mayor Mike Boyle was elected to his second term. However, just 19 months later, Boyle was recalled from office in 1987. In order of succession, Steve Tomasek, Jr., Bernie Simon, Fred Conley and Walt Calinger filled out his term until 1989 when Paul J. (“P.J.”) Morgan was elected mayor.

**1986**

Ken Lay was named chairman and CEO of HNG-InterNorth, Inc. Later the same year, Enron Corporation was adopted as the company’s new name. Enron voted to move its corporate headquarters to Houston. So began the exodus of 2,000 Enron jobs from Omaha to Houston over a two-year period.

John C. Kenefick retired as chairman and chief executive of Union Pacific Railroad.

The decline of Ak-Sar-Ben’s horse racing track began when its gambling monopoly ended. Attendance at Ak-Sar-Ben fell 24% when dog racing began at Bluffs Run in Council Bluffs. In addition, new horse tracks in Kansas City, Minneapolis and Des Moines drew race crowds away from Omaha.

West Corporation began as an inbound telemarketing service bureau.

ldelman Telemarketing began. Known nationally as founders of the telemarketing industry.

Telemarketing employed 11,000 persons in Omaha this year. Sitel, West and Idelman the big employers.

Borsheims Jewelry moved to Regency Court from its downtown location at 315 South 16th Street.

Janice Stoney becomes CEO of Northwestern Bell.

**1987**

For the first time, five women were recruited to begin training as Omaha’s first female firefighters. Not only was the 1987 class the first to include women firefighters, it also was the first class required to submit to drug testing before being hired by the fire department.

Work began on the 80-year-old McKesson and Robbins warehouse to convert it into the Greenhouse Apartments at 900 Farnam Street.

Passage of LB 775, the Employment and Investment Growth Act, and LB 270, the Employment Expansion and Investment Incentive Act, resulted in tax concessions for companies that invested in Nebraska and expanded employment. The new tax laws assured that ConAgra headquarters would remain in Omaha. The shift in state tax policy spurred corporate construction that added nearly 3,000,000 square feet of work space downtown, the equivalent of 50 football fields.

Nebraska football legend, Bob Devaney, kicked off a $775,000 “Let’s Go to Bat for Rosenblatt” fundraising campaign to match a grant from the Peter Kiewit Foundation for needed improvements at the stadium. The foundation agreed to pay $1.7 million toward the project. The improvements were necessary to keep the College World Series in Omaha at Rosenblatt Stadium.

Senator Edward Zorinsky died of a massive heart attack about an hour after performing a musical spoof at the annual Omaha Press Club Gridiron Show and Ball at Peony Park. He was 58 years old. Zorinsky first served on the Omaha Public Power District Board before becoming Omaha mayor in 1973. In 1976, he was elected the state’s first Democratic U.S. Senator in 42 years. He was re-elected to the U.S. Senate in 1982 and planned to seek a third term in 1988.

Metro Area Transit (MAT) provides public transportation. In 1987 they had 195 buses and 30 routes.

**1988**

Omaha hosted the vice-presidential debate between Republican Senator Dan Quayle and Democratic Senator Lloyd Bentsen at the Civic Auditorium, 1804 Capitol Avenue.

The North Freeway was dedicated.

The ConAgra Corporation announced plans to build its new headquarters on Omaha’s riverfront and broke ground for the $80 million project later in the year.

Demolition began on the former Duncan Hines plant, 8th and Jackson Streets, the first step in razing Jobbers Canyon, Omaha’s historic wholesale district of early 1900s warehouses. The area bounded by 10th Street to the west, 8th Street to the east, Farnam to the North and Jackson Street to the South was redeveloped to became ConAgra’s headquarters.

Union Pacific’s earlier acquisition of the Missouri Pacific Railroad prompted a decision by UP to close its shops north of downtown and move the shop work to North Little Rock, Arkansas. The Omaha shops employed about 800 persons. With their closure, most of the adjoining tracks were dismantled. This left a large piece of unused land along the highway and the riverfront between downtown Omaha and the airport.

Construction began on the $15 million Lied Jungle at the Henry Doorly Zoo.

The Omaha Lancers made Ak-Sar-Ben their home when they brought hockey back to the Coliseum.

The Chief Standing Bear Memorial plaque was dedicated on the northeast corner of the parade ground at Fort Omaha on the campus of Metropolitan Community College.

American Business Lists Inc. (now InfoUSA) announced plans for construction of a 30,000-square-foot warehouse-office facility in Carter Lake at 200 Owen Parkway. Iowa business growth incentives which were paid at the beginning of an expansion project were an attraction. By contrast, Nebraska’s LB 775 incentives were awarded after a company has paid for a new building or equipment and hired new employees. Corporate headquarters remained in Omaha.

Accutrade, Inc., then the name for Ameritrade, was the first company to offer automated stock trades using touch-tone telephones for the first time.

**1989**

Union Pacific’s new Harriman Dispatching Center opened just south of the new ConAgra campus downtown near Ninth and Jackson Streets. Located in UP’s 1891 renovated freight house, the new high-tech center centralized dispatching in Omaha and gained a reputation as the world’s most advanced rail control system.

1989 – The Omaha Airport Authority completed a $70 million expansion program for the airport. Mid-1990s - Eppley served more than three million passengers a year

**1990**

Omaha’s population was 335,795 persons. By 1994, the estimated population was 342,862. In 1996, the population was estimated to be at 348,894. By the mid-90s, the population of the Omaha metro area was estimated to be 662,801, making it the 60th largest urban center in the country. In 1990, the population of the metropolitan area was 639,580 residents. Also in 1990, the total population of Douglas County was 416,444.

The 1990 census reported more than 16,000 person of Mexican descent living in Douglas, Sarpy and Pottawattamie County and 38% increase over 1980. In 1997 more than 31,000 Latinos lived in the Omaha Metropolitan area.

ConAgra cut the ribbon to open its new thirty-acre riverfront campus in October. Although the corporation funded its development, the city contributed to street and sewer redevelopment. The project also received tax subsidies. In the same year, ConAgra became the country’s largest meat and poultry company.

Heartland of America Park, a Douglas County project, was completed and dedicated. A focal point of the park is a lake that is officially part of the ConAgra downtown campus but was paid for by the company and Douglas County. The lake is an early example of a “public-private partnership”. The park links the new ConAgra Inc. campus to the east end of the Central Park Mall.

The Omaha City Council approved a $2-a-night hotel and motel room tax. Much of the revenue generated from the tax was used to pay for needed improvements to Rosenblatt Stadium during the 1990s.

The Ponca Tribe was restored as a tribal government on October 31. The restoration resulted in federal recognition for tribal members.

For the first time, Omaha Steaks’ customers could place online orders via computer. A website was developed in 1995.

F.W. Woolworth Co. closed its downtown store at 120 South 16th Street. Not far away, Natelson’s Clothing Store closed at 1517 Douglas Street.

Chronicle of Philanthropy ranks Omaha as one of the nation's ten most generous cities in per capita and foundation giving to major charities in the 1990s. The Peter Kiewit Foundation's home is in Omaha and it was one of the 100 largest charitable foundations in the nation in the 1990s.

**1991**

UNO won the NCAA Division II national wrestling championship, the school’s first NCAA title in any sport.

The Creighton Bluejays played in the College World Series at Rosenblatt Stadium. Creighton’s appearance was the first one by a Nebraska school in the CWS. Since then, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln team has played in the series.

1200 Landmark Center, a $35 million office tower on Farnam Street, opened downtown.

Edmonson Youth Outreach, 4400 ½ Fontenelle Boulevard, merged with the YMCA of Greater Omaha.

The owners of Peony Park filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy citing heavy debts and continuing operating losses

**1992**

By a vote of the city council, the Central Park Mall was renamed the Gene Leahy Mall to honor the mayor who promoted riverfront development. Two years later, passage of a city bond issue provided funding to complete the Mall from Tenth to Eighth Streets.

The Lied Jungle and Durham’s Tree Tops Restaurant opened at the Henry Doorly Zoo. The largest indoor tropical rainforest in the world, it spans 1.5 acres and encompasses re-creations of three separate geographic zones—the Asian, African and South American rainforests. It stands eighty feet tall and is roughly equal to the height of an eight-story building.

In the face of declining revenues, the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben sold the horse track, the Coliseum and the grounds to Douglas County.

Members of the Unicameral voted to change the name “Metropolitan Technical Community College Area” to “Metropolitan Community College Area”.

U.S. Senator Bob Kerrey (D-NE) made an unsuccessful bid for the office of President of the United States.

Carol Woods Harris becomes Douglas County’s first Black elected official. She served three terms on the Douglas County Board focusing on justice issues. She was elected board vice present and president.

**1993**

Ground was broken in June for a 58,000 square-foot addition to the Joslyn Art Museum. English architect Sir Norman Foster was in charge of the design that would provide enlarged exhibit space.

The old aquarium at the zoo was closed and construction began on a new aquarium. The Henry Doorly Zoo received a conservation award for its black-footed ferret management program and the Significant Achievement Award for the Lied Jungle

Rose Blumkin and her family donated the vacant Astro Theater at 2001 Farnam Street to be the future home of the Emmy Gifford Children’s Theater.

The Missouri River crested at 30.2 feet in the Omaha area, the second-highest level after the river’s record-high crest of 30.4 feet during the great flood of 1952. The summer of 1993 brought significant flooding along the Missouri and Mississippi River systems that caused the loss of lives and extensive property damage in some locations.

Oak View Mall opened at 144th Street and West Center Road.

Landon’s Clothing Store closed at 115 North 15th Street.

Ameritrade, a full-service clearinghouse for the securities industry, opened a new corporate headquarters at 4211 South 102nd Street. The previous headquarters was located at 19th and Douglas Streets. The new location was purchased to provide space for an increase in personnel and more electronic broker systems.

Magdalena Garcia opens El Museo Latino Museum to promote Latino culture and art. In 2024 it is at 25th and L Streets in the former Polish Home.

**1994**

The Kennedy Freeway into Bellevue opened as an important link between Omaha and Sarpy County.

The new addition to the Joslyn Art Museum opened November 19th. The Scott Pavilion added 58,000 square feet and included an atrium, café and galleries to provide more space for the museum’s growing collection and to enhance opportunities to attract touring exhibits. The façade of the $15.9 million addition is pink Georgia marble from the same quarry as that used to construct the original Joslyn Memorial Art Museum building.

Peony Park, a favorite family entertainment center for generations, closed. An auction of its amusement park rides and other removable items yielded $1 million. Sale of the site to a private development group was announced.

Mayor P.J. Morgan resigned less than one year after being elected to a second term.

Mega-Mart opened on the 77-acre campus of the Nebraska Furniture Mart. The new building was constructed to house the electronics and appliances division of NFM.

Omaha’s Ameritrade became the first company in the world to receive orders for securities transactions over the Internet. A year later, Ameritrade’s parent company, Ameritrade Holding Corporation, acquired K. Aufhauser & Co., Inc., the first brokerage firm to offer Internet trading via its WealthWEB.

Pottawattamie County voters approved the addition of riverboat casinos and the installation of slot machines at Bluffs Run dog racing track.

Paul and Lori Hogan founded Home Instead, Inc. in 1994 in Omaha, Nebraska. Paul's own family experience caring for his grandmother led him to realize many families could use the help of an in-home caregiver. He and Lori set about creating a company to help seniors to live independently at home. They have created a global enterprise that combines high touch care with high-tech solutions to expand the world’s capacity to care.

**1995**

The final segment of the Gene Leahy Mall, two blocks from Tenth to Eighth Streets, was completed. The mall now stretched from Eighth Street to Fourteenth Street, Farnam to Douglas.

The Butler-Gast YMCA opened at 3501 Ames Avenue.

The 72,000 square-foot Walter and Suzanne Scott Kingdoms of the Seas Aquarium opened at the Henry Doorly Zoo. It featured an 850,000-gallon coral reef/shark system with underwater tunnel and an Arctic penguin display that produces twenty tons of man-made snow daily. The zoo attracted more than 1.6 million visitors in 1995, a new record.

Omaha Officer Jimmy Wilson, Jr. was shot and killed during a traffic stop on August 20. Omahan Kevin Allen was convicted of the killing.

Western Heritage Museum began a multimillion-dollar restoration and renovation.

The Rose Blumkin Performing Arts Center, or “The Rose”, opened at the newly-renovated Astro Theater, 2001 Farnam Street. The Rose Blumkin family donated $1 million to the $6.5 million renovation of the building. Later, it became home to the Omaha Theater Company for Young People and the Omaha Theater Ballet.

Omaha investor Warren Buffett was ranked as the country’s wealthiest person.

The fifth floor of the Douglas County Courthouse was the setting for the filming of the CBS miniseries, “Gone In the Night”, starring Shannen Doherty, Kevin Dillon, Dixie Carter and Ed Asner.

Casino gambling began in Council Bluffs as the result of a $19 million project to construct a casino addition to Bluffs Run. The new Bluffs Run Casino housed more than 1,000 new slot machines in addition to continuing its regular program of dog racing. In the same year, the Iowa Racing and Gaming Commission granted licenses to two Nevada gaming firms, Harveys and Ameristar Casinos, for the addition of riverboat casinos and the construction of hotels, restaurants, entertainment venues, and a convention center in Council Bluffs. The land-based facilities were critical in making Council Bluffs a destination for convention and tourism business.

In 1995, 85 percent of Omaha families were homeowners. Many of these homeowners have moved west of 72nd Street. These homes have been built since 1950. Homes in this area are affordable by middle-class families with children.

**1996**

UNO won the NCAA Division II national volleyball championship by defeating Tampa to cap a 35-2 season. The Mavericks started the season with a school record of 20 straight wins.

UNO’s College of Information Science and Technology (IS&T) was established with an initial enrollment of 124 students. Within ten years, enrollment increased to more than 1,200. IS&T’s undergraduate degree in bioinformatics was one of the first four such programs in the country offered by a major university.

The Union Pacific and Southern Pacific Railroad lines merged. During the 1980s, the Western Pacific and the Missouri Pacific were incorporated as part of UP. This latest merger made the Union Pacific the country’s largest railroad in route-miles. In the same year, space needs dictated the closure of the railroad company’s museum at its headquarters in downtown Omaha.

Live thoroughbred horse racing at Ak-Sar-Ben came to an end when this year’s meet was canceled in February. It was the first time since the 1940s the horses did not run

First Data Resources, a processor in one-third of the nation’s credit card transactions, is Omaha’s largest private employer in 1996. Its 6,500 employees worked in 41 buildings throughout the metro area.

One big new feature at Rosenblatt Stadium was a $4.75 million press box built to accommodate up to 195 reporters, broadcasters and photographers. Renovations at the stadium since 1988 were numerous. The addition of about 7,800 permanent grandstand seats increased capacity from 15,000 to more than 22,000 seats.

The Upstream Brewing Company opened in the Old Market at the newly-renovated site of the former Firehouse Dinner Theater at 11th and Jackson Streets.

Peony Park was demolished. The 26-acre tract was sold to the Cass Street Partnership for about $3.4 million. The group planned to build apartments and retail stores on the site.

HDR returned to being a fully employee-owned company in September. CEO Richard Bell led the employee buy-back and became the company’s chairman in 1997.

The Hiland-Roberts Ice Cream Company was formed when Mid- America Dairymen sold the Gillette ice cream plant in Norfolk, Nebraska, to joint-venture partners, Hiland Dairy of Springfield, Missouri, and Roberts Dairy of Omaha, Nebraska.

Ameristar and Harveys began operations in Council Bluffs. The opening of Bluffs Run Casino in 1995 and that of Ameristar and Harveys the following year resulted in the creation of nearly 2,400 jobs.

A portion of the Byron Reed coin and document collection owned by the City of Omaha went on sale at a landmark auction in 1996. The sale of these coins and documents brought over $4 million dollars to the City of Omaha.

**1997**

UNO added men’s hockey as a Division I sport and played its first NCAA hockey game against the University of Manitoba at the Civic Auditorium.

The Lozier IMAX 3D Theater opened at the Henry Doorly Zoo. The giant screen theater has an 83-foot wide screen that is six stories tall. The IMAX enhances the zoo’s goals regarding public education by means of spectacular nature and eco-films.

Douglas County completed its sale of Ak-Sar-Ben to three new owners for $10 million. The new owners are First Data Resources, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and the Ak-Sar-Ben Future Trust, a nonprofit organization. First Data Resources bought the north 140 acres, seventy acres of which it donated to UNO to be developed as an information science, technology, and engineering campus. The bulk of the property, including the Ak-Sar-Ben Coliseum, will be owned and operated by the Ak-Sar-Ben Future Trust which received about $4.5 million of the $10 million proceeds from the sale.

Brenda Council narrowly lost her second bid to be elected mayor against incumbent Hal Daub. With 49.6% of the vote, Council came within one percentage point of defeating Mayor Daub. He won with an 878-vote margin of victory out of more than 109,000 votes cast. It was the second-closest mayoral election in recent Omaha history.

Mayor Tom Hanafan of Council Bluffs, Omaha Mayor Hal Daub and U.S. Senator Bob Kerrey promoted the back-to-the-river concept of downtown and riverfront development begun by Mayor Gene Leahy in 1970. In 1997, the Asarco battery plant stood where the Kiewit Luminarium is today. The old Union Pacific shops were vacant, and a junkyard greeted people traveling from Eppley Airfield to downtown Omaha.

An October snow and ice storm caused a reported $50 million in damages in the Omaha area. Since most trees still had leaves on them, the weight of the ice and snow caused branches to break and power lines to snap and fall. Nearly 300,000 homes and businesses were without electricity for several minutes, hours or days before power was restored.

A $26.3 renovation of the Civic Auditorium resulted in a new main entrance, lobby, restrooms, an ice rink for hockey, and an electronic marquee. The Music Hall was also renovated and a new 450-stall parking garage was built on the west side of the building.

Mrs. B continued to work at the Nebraska Furniture Mart until she was 103 years old. Frequently seen moving around the store in her golf cart, she remained steadfast in her philosophy to “sell cheap and tell the truth”. Rose Blumkin, affectionately known as Mrs. B, died at age 104 in 1998

American Business Information (InfoUSA today) began work to prepare and market a new database on 113 million private households throughout the country similar to the one it sold on businesses. The new database was sold to businesses for marketing and sales of products to individual consumers. Much of the information on the database was taken from Yellow Page and white page listings in the nation’s 5,000 telephone directories.

In 1997 OPPD serves 5,000 square miles. Average system with reliability of more than 99 percent Innovative technology helps maintain a reliable power supply. Operates a coal fired plant in North Omaha and a nuclear power generating facility in Fort Calhoun, Nebraska.

1997 - Omaha had welcomed new chains like Barnes & Noble, Borders, Home Place, Circuit City and Kohl's.

In 1997, Omaha is the headquarters for four Fortune 500 companies: ConAgra, Peter Kiewit Sons, Mutual of Omaha and Berkshire Hathaway

Banks:

**1998**

The Garden of the Senses opened at the Henry Doorly Zoo. The Lee G. Simmons Conservation Park and Wildlife Safari also opened 22 miles west of the Omaha Zoo at Exit 426 on I-80. It offered visitors the opportunity to drive through four miles of prairies and wetlands to view North American animals from the car.

First Data Resources opened its information technology center on the site of the former Ak-Sar-Ben property.

The Florence Mill at 9102 North 30th Street (next to I-680, Exit 13) achieved placement on the National Register of Historic Places. Listed as Weber Mill in recognition of the Weber family’s 104 years as the millers of Florence, the mill contains the only structural remains of the Mormon Winter Quarters. Originally built under the supervision of Brigham Young as a gristmill in 1846, the Florence Mill contains some of the original hand-hewn beams and wooden pegs cut by the pioneers. A grain elevator was added in 1915. In 2024, the Florence Mill is home to the Winter Quarters Mill Museum and the ArtLoft Gallery. Renovation of the structure is ongoing.

For the first time, Roberts Dairy products of Omaha were sold in all the markets in its six-state region.

Ameritrade introduced electronic trade confirmations by email.

American Business Information shareholders approved changing the name of the company to InfoUSA to better reflect the company’s broadening business base. The company’s first Internet unit was created with infoUSA.com which was soon followed by VideoYellowPages.com. InfoUSA sold data on 11 million businesses and millions of private households throughout the country. Information was drawn from thousands of public sources, especially Yellow Pages telephone listings.

The Lied Transplant Center opened as part of the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) in November. The 14-story center at 43rd and Emile Streets housed four transplant related programs for transplant patient care. Cost for the center and related construction was $61.3 million making it the most expensive building project in the history of the University of Nebraska to date.

**1999**

The greatest rainfall ever recorded for a 24-hour period in Omaha took place on August 7. The amount was 10.48 inches. One person died, and damage in a five-county area was estimated at

$17 million. The new record replaced the old one of 7.03 inches recorded in 1903.

UNO’s Peter Kiewit Information Science Technology and Engineering (IST&E) Institute was dedicated, as well as University Village at the former Ak-Sar-Ben site.

The Omaha Public Schools ended its federally-mandated program of busing for integration and replaced it with a voluntary integration plan. The new plan established geographic attendance zones within which students had a choice of schools to attend. In the same year, voters approved the OPS $254 million bond issue for urban schools.

The Omaha Livestock Market moved to Red Oak, Iowa, and the City of Omaha demolished the remaining livestock pens and most of the buildings.

First National Bank opened its new technology center.

Sue’s Carousel, a 36-foot carousel that features 30 handcrafted animals including exotic wildlife, horses and chariots opened at the Henry Doorly Zoo. Construction of the Desert Dome began.

The old Medical Arts Building, later known as the Professional Tower, at 17th and Dodge Streets, was imploded to make way for the new forty-story First National Tower on that site. The building’s terra cotta façade was removed piece by piece, numbered and stored, and later reassembled on an interior wall of the new First National Tower.

The Omaha Community Foundation commissioned the Omaha Philanthropy Study to explore the vision residents of Omaha had for the city’s future. Omaha by Design was an outgrowth of the results of this study.

Duchesne Preschool reopened for boys and girls.

Omaha Steaks moved its corporate and executive offices to a new 60,000 square-foot structure not far from its call center. The company continued to be the country’s largest direct response marketer of steaks and a variety of other frozen gourmet foods.

Omaha-based InfoUSA completed its purchase of Donnelley Marketing, a division of First Data Corp., for about $200 million in cash. The Donnelley Marketing office in Lincoln was closed.

Donnelley employees compiled information on businesses and residents from phone books for sale to marketing companies and telemarketers, the same work that was being done by InfoUSA at its Papillion operations.

Ameritrade Holding Corporation began offering customers the option of trading stocks over the Internet using wireless telephones.

Millennium Lights illuminated downtown Omaha with holiday lights between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day. The Holiday Lights Festival with its lighting ceremony and variety of entertainment options soon became a popular annual tradition.

**2000–present**

**Highlights:**

**2000**

By a margin of 63% to 37%, voters approved construction of a new riverfront convention center and arena on the site of an old rail yard on the north edge of downtown.

The Creighton University soccer team lost the NCAA men’s championship game to Connecticut with a score of 0-2.

The population of Omaha was 390,007 residents. The total population of Douglas County was 463,585. The population of the metropolitan area in 2000 was 716,998.

The Gallup Organization announced it would build its new headquarters and leadership training center along Omaha’s riverfront between the airport and the new convention center-arena. Long-based in Lincoln, the company wanted better access to airline connections and a more competitive market for telecommunications service.

The Paxton Manor, 1403 Farnam Street, closed. It was an assisted living facility for the elderly and mentally disabled that was housed in the old Paxton Hotel. The building stood vacant for several years before being developed into luxury condominiums, and commercial, retail and office space in 2005-2006.

US West Communications, with headquarters in Denver, Colorado, was acquired by Qwest Communications in June.

Nebraska voters approved an amendment to the state constitution that limited state senators to two consecutive four-year terms in the Unicameral. The term limits provision went into effect in the 2006 election. Term-limited lawmakers are ineligible to serve in the Unicameral until at least four years after leaving office.

The “Dale Chihuly: Inside and Out” traveling exhibit at the Joslyn Art Museum set a new record for attendance. It attracted 161,726 viewers from February 12—June 4 when it closed.

The Field Club Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in November.

Children’s Hospital opened at 8200 Dodge Street. Designed by HDR architects, the cost of construction was $87.6 million. The 142-bed facility featured private rooms specifically designed for children. In 2007, the hospital announced plans for construction of a new five-story, $55 million outpatient care facility that will house specialty clinics to treat children with heart and lung disorders and cancer and developmental disabilities. Children’s is the area’s sole full-service pediatric specialty hospital.

Ameritrade introduced Express Account Opening to pave the way for the paperless opening of accounts. During the same year, Ameritrade Holding Corporation opened a customer service center in Ft. Worth, Texas to house 500 employees. The center also provided computer and telephone backup to the online stock brokerage headquarters in Omaha.

U.S. Senator Bob Kerrey secured nearly $19 million in federal funds for construction of a pedestrian bridge linking Omaha and Council Bluffs before he left office. Plans called for the bridge to be a dynamic signature element that would highlight Omaha’s back-tothe- river effort. Additional funding would come from Iowa and Nebraska, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District and private philanthropies

**2001**

UNO won the NCAA Division II national softball championship.

Scott Business and Technology Development Center opened at UNO for companies that develop from research conducted at the Kiewit Institute.

The Omaha World-Herald completed its new Freedom Center production facility downtown at Fourteenth Street and Capitol Avenue at a cost of $125 million.

Aaron Ferer & Sons Co. removed 37,000 tons of scrap metal from its four-acre site to make way for the Gallup Organization’s riverfront campus. The Port of Omaha, Miller’s Landing and Kenefick Park also occupied part of the 60-acre tract that would become Gallup’s new corporate headquarters and training facility north of downtown.

First Data Resources opened its second office building at the former Ak-Sar-Ben site.

April and May hailstorms in the metro area resulted in 250,000 insurance claims filed for damages to homes and cars, totaling $500 million.

Renovation of the Zorinsky Federal Building at 17th Street and Capitol Avenue began in August and was expected to be complete by January 2004. Estimated cost was $40.6 million. Numerous delays for a variety of reasons caused the project to continue into 2007. The revised estimate for the construction cost was placed at $49.4 million.

President George W. Bush flew to Offutt Air Force Base on the day of the 9/11 terrorist attacks to hold a National Security Council meeting by teleconference.

The Omaha Performing Arts Society (OPAS) announced plans to renovate the Orpheum Theater for $10 million. Also announced were plans to build a new $90 million concert hall that became the Holland Performing Arts Center, 1200 Douglas-On-The-Mall.

Job cuts at Ameritrade call centers in Omaha and Ft. Worth totaled about 830 regular and temporary employees. Nationwide, Omaha-based Ameritrade had 2,300 employees and was the country’s fifth largest online brokerage. The cuts began to take effect in December 2000 and were due to lower trading volumes and market conditions that affected other large online brokerage companies as well. Joe Moglia was named CEO of Ameritrade to replace J. Joe Ricketts, Ameritrade founder and previous CEO. Ricketts retained his position as chairman.

**2002**

Employees of First National Bank moved to a new home office in the First National Tower constructed on a full square block bounded by 16th, 17th, Dodge and Douglas Streets. Designed by Leo A. Daly Co., the 635-foot, forty-story tower contains nearly 1,000,000 square feet and is the tallest structure between Chicago and Denver. Construction cost was $208 million.

The final livestock show and rodeo were held at the Ak-Sar-Ben complex.

Downtown Omaha was host to a celebration marking the passage of the Olympic torch on its way to the cauldron at the 2002 Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City, Utah. The torch was carried by 11,500 people during its 65-day, 13,500 mile relay journey to the site of the Olympic Games.

The population of Omaha was 399,357 residents. The city’s estimated population in 2003 was 404,267.

The Desert Dome, the world’s largest indoor desert, opened at the Henry Doorly Zoo. Inside, under the world’s largest glazed geodesic dome, exhibits from three different deserts are featured— the Namib, the Central Australian and the Sonoran. Construction of Hubbard Gorilla Valley began.

The City of Omaha granted the Omaha Performing Arts Society a 50-year lease to manage the Orpheum Theater through 2052. The city retains ownership of the theater, the renovation of which was completed in 2002.

The Nebraska Furniture Mart opened a state-of-the-art, 651,000 square-foot warehouse and distribution center on its 72nd Street campus. It included a newly-renovated Mrs. B’s Clearance Center and Factory Outlet store.

Omaha-based investment broker Ameritrade purchased Datek Online Holding Corp. of New Jersey for $1.3 billion. The merger immediately made Ameritrade the industry leader in daily volume of transactions.

**2003**

A new $291 million convention center and arena opened on September 1, creating a dramatic signature element on Omaha’s evolving skyline. The Qwest Center Omaha, 455 North 10th Street, included an exhibit hall, ballrooms, and an arena for concerts and sporting events with a seating capacity of 17,000. In 2006, seating was expanded to more than 18,000 seats. With 64,000 square feet of meeting space and banquet capacity for 2,100 guests, the Qwest Center, now known as CHI Health Center, provides the largest amount of meeting space in Nebraska.

Creighton University celebrated its 125th anniversary and ranked No. 1 among Midwest universities that offer master’s degrees and some doctorates in U.S. News and World Report’s listing of college rankings for 2004. Student enrollment was 6,327, and the school’s annual budget was $255 million.

Scott Village residence halls at UNO were dedicated. Ten residence buildings encompassing 480 bedrooms were opened for UNO students.

The new Gallup University corporate headquarters and training center opened in August. The 285,000 square-foot main building has Class A office and training space for 500 employees and a nearly 25,000 square-foot child development center for their children. As many as 5,000 students are expected to participate in Gallup University training programs each year, most of whom are mid-career executives. The final cost of the Gallup project was $46 million. The campus is part of the $1.8 billion revitalization of Omaha’s riverfront area.

Eugene T. Mahoney Kingdoms of the Night, the world’s largest nocturnal exhibit, opened beneath the Desert Dome at the Henry Doorly Zoo. It features a wet cave, caverns, a bat cave and the world’s largest indoor swamp. A reverse-light cycle is used so visitors can observe animals when they are awake and active.

Mayor Mike Fahey appointed Thomas H. Warren as the city’s 28th Chief of Police and the first African American to hold this position.

Omaha Police Sgt. Jason Tye Pratt was fatally shot by parolee Albert Rucker, who was then mortally wounded by another officer. Pratt’s widow, Stacy, began an effort to keep armed felons from avoiding justice.

Results of a study by Compass Facility Management Inc. of Ames, Iowa recommended a need for the Civic Auditorium to remain even though the new Qwest Center and Arena opened in September.

Roberts Dairy gained national recognition when it was named a Quality Award winner for its milk and culture products.

Regency Court completed a $10 million renovation which brought in upscale specialty retailers that included Williams-Sonoma, Pottery Barn and Ann Taylor Loft.

The new Union Pacific Railroad Museum opened in the old Carnegie Library in Council Bluffs on May 10, the 134th anniversary of the driving of the golden spike that signaled completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. Council Bluffs is the eastern terminus of the Union Pacific.

UNMC’s Durham Research Center was dedicated in November. The 10-story $77 million state-of-the-art facility was designed to be competitive with other leading academic centers for medical research. At the time of the dedication, plans were underway to build a second research tower nearby which would focus on biodefense and other programs.

The White House Office of Management and Budget expanded the boundaries for the Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) to include eight counties, an increase of three more than the previous five. In Nebraska, Saunders County was added to Washington, Douglas, Sarpy and Cass Counties. In Iowa, Pottawattamie County was joined by Harrison and Mills Counties. The estimated population of the new eight-county Omaha-Council Bluffs MSA was 767,041. An MSA includes counties in which at least 25% of their workers commute to work in the central county of the metro area.

Lewis and Clark Landing was dedicated in 2003, built on the site of the former Asarco plant. The concrete plaza serves as a protective cap over soil contaminated by the former lead-smelting plant. It is further protected by nine feet of imported clean soil placed over a protective liner.

**2004**

I-80 just east of 42nd Street carried an average of 167,000 vehicles daily. At the same time, Omaha had the third-shortest commute time among cities with populations of 250,000 and more, according to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau statistics. The average Omaha resident could get to work in 17.3 minutes.

In January, Governor Mike Johanns announced Union Pacific Corp. would move 1,038 jobs from St. Louis to its new Omaha headquarters. The move qualified the company for tax incentives under the Invest Nebraska Act and LB 775. Annual payroll for the 1,038 jobs was estimated at $62 million, excluding benefits. The additional jobs brought UP’s employment in Nebraska to about 8,000 with 4,500 of those in Omaha.

The pedestrian bridge project to link Omaha with Council Bluffs went back to the drawing board when an initial low bid of $45 million was submitted in March. The amount was double the $22 million budgeted for the design and construction of the landmark project. In 2006, new bids were submitted on a design-build basis. Mayor Mike Fahey announced his selection of one of the bids in May, and construction began in October. Completion date is projected for autumn of 2008. The curved suspension bridge features twin 204-foot concrete towers with 44 cables that support the bridge deck. Cost is $22 million. The bridge spans 2,700 feet across the Missouri River into Council Bluffs and provides access to 150 miles of trails in Iowa and Nebraska for bicyclists and pedestrians.

In May, the first of 4,100 Union Pacific employees moved to the new Union Pacific Center headquarters at 14th and Douglas Streets. About 50 employees moved in each day through the end of August. The 20-story building contains a 19-story atrium, has 1.1 million square feet and accommodates all 4,100 workers. Cost of construction was $260 million.

The annual Florence Days celebration marked the 150th anniversary of the opening of the town’s first civic facilities in 1854, the same year Omaha was founded.

The Hilton Omaha, 1001 Cass Street, opened. The Hilton Omaha is a 450-room full service, convention center hotel joined to the CHI Health Center by a skywalk over 10th Street. It cost $71 million to construct and is Nebraska’s only AAA Motor Club’s Four Diamond Award winner. Its conference rooms are named for Omaha’s earliest hotels.

The Carl T. Curtis National Park Service Midwest Headquarters opened at 601 Riverfront Drive. Designed by Leo A. Daly Co., it was constructed at a cost of $12.7 million. It is home to the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and serves a 13-state region. The headquarters won an environmental “gold” rating for incorporating environmentally friendly features into its design and construction. It is the first building in the state to be rated under LEED—the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design system.

Omaha participated in events to commemorate the Bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806. Members of the expedition camped in the Omaha, Bellevue, and Council Bluffs area in July-August 1804, on their way up the Missouri River. Omaha marked the beginning of its 150th birthday celebration with a press conference at Central High School, site of Capitol Hill where the first settlers celebrated the founding of Omaha on July 4, 1854. Other events followed during the weekend of July 16th-18th to celebrate the anniversary. It culminated with a family festival at the Qwest Center Omaha (now CHI Health Center) which featured a huge 30-foot-by-45-foot birthday cake for all to enjoy.

Renovation of the Livestock Exchange Building was completed. As a mixed-use complex, the facility now offers affordable housing, meeting and reception space, and later became the site of One World Community Health Center.

Omaha-based Werner Enterprises became the nation’s first trucking company to receive a federal exemption that allowed it to track drivers’ work hours using a paperless system based on global positioning technology. The exemption ended a six-year pilot program during which Werner was the first company that had federal approval to use the satellite-based Qualcomm system in its trucks for tracking and messaging to implement paperless log books.

Hubbard Gorilla Valley opened and features gorillas that roam free. The new facility allows the Henry Doorly Zoo to be a major player in gorilla conservation. Located on a three-acre site, it has two acres of gorilla and visitor space several times larger than the previous area.

The Nebraska Medical Center set a new one-month record of 33 for the number of organ transplants performed there. This record stood until a new record of 37 organ transplants was performed in September, 2006. Each year, the majority of all organ transplants in the state are performed at UNMC. They include heart, liver, kidney, pancreas and small bowel transplants.

The grandstand at Ak-Sar-Ben was razed.

The letters of Joseph Barker, Jr. to his family in England were published in edited format in Their Man in Omaha, Volume I, 1860 to 1868 by the Douglas County Historical Society. A second volume of his correspondence from 1869 to 1871 was published in 2006. His nearly 200 letters provide a unique eyewitness account of life in frontier Omaha as the town grew and prospered.

The Metropolitan Entertainment and Convention Authority (MECA) took over management of the Civic Auditorium under terms of a contract with the City of Omaha.

The Alfonza W. Davis Chapter of Tuskegee Airmen Inc. hosted the national organization’s 33rd annual convention at the Qwest Center Omaha in August. The Tuskegee Airmen were the country’s first Black fighter squadron who flew with distinction as part of the 332nd Fighter Group of the U.S. Army Air Forces during WWII. The Tuskegee Airmen never lost a bomber to enemy fire. In 2007, Congress recognized the Tuskegee Airmen with the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest honor it can bestow upon civilians. About 25 Tuskegee Airmen have Nebraska ties. Each airman received a bronze replica of the gold medal which is on display at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. A banquet to celebrate the occasion was held in downtown Omaha to recognize the honorees. Tuskegee Airmen Lieutenant Colonel Charles Lane of Omaha, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Adams of Lincoln, Lieutenant Colonel Harrison Tull of Bellevue and Corporal Robert Holts of Omaha were the guests of honor.

Village Pointe, the city’s newest open-air shopping center, opened at 168th Street and West Dodge Road.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the City of Omaha, and the nonprofit company that promotes and presents the College World Series, CWS of Omaha Inc. announced a five-year contract extension that will keep the College World Series at Rosenblatt Stadium through 2010. The new contract called for $2.2 million in improvements at Rosenblatt that included a permanent video board and a new scoreboard, among other items. For the first time, the city agreed to spend $50,000 annually on general maintenance of Rosenblatt Stadium. A clause in the agreement stipulated a renegotiation provision to begin August 1, 2009.

Members of the Omaha Planning Board and the Omaha City Council unanimously approved the new Urban Design Element for the City of Omaha Master Plan. Organizers of the Omaha by Design initiative described the 21 goals in the new Urban Design Element as a means by which Omaha can develop as a more livable and attractive city for current and future residents, businesses and institutions. The plan is comprehensive in scope and, for that reason, is remarkable for a city the size of Omaha.

**2005**

Central High School’s new 5,500-seat Seemann Stadium was dedicated amid fanfare in late August. The stadium’s opening came at a time when most of a multimillion-dollar renovation was nearing completion. Classroom and office space was updated, and for the first time, the high school had central air conditioning.

The Holland Performing Arts Center, 1314 Douglas-on-the-Mall, opened amid fanfare in October. The $92 million, 175,000 squarefoot structure quickly won acclaim among artists and audience members alike for its excellent acoustics. The center includes a concert hall, chamber music hall and courtyard. It is the new home of the Omaha Symphony and is named for Richard and Mary Holland who generously contributed to the project.

During the first six months of 2005, Qwest Center Omaha ranked eighth internationally among arenas for the number of concert tickets sold, and placed fifth for ticket sales among U.S. indoor

venues.

The Tip Top Loft Apartments opened at 1524 Cuming Street. The building was former home to the Ford Motor Company Assembly Plant, the Tip Top Company and a tire warehouse before being remodeled into market-rent loft apartments. The apartments represent the first major redevelopment project north of downtown in an emerging residential/entertainment district referred to unofficially as “NoDo” now known as the New North Makerhood.

NP Dodge Co. celebrated 150 years in business as one of the largest full service real estate companies in Nebraska and Iowa. It is Omaha’s oldest continuously operated family business. Its seven entities are comprised of 500 employees and 500 sales associates.

The Hubbard Orangutan Forest opened at the Henry Doorly Zoo. Named for primary donor, Claire Hubbard, the forest provides a one-of-a-kind, man-made habitat designed specifically for orangutans. The outdoor forest habitat extends for 3,763 square feet, is 65 feet tall, and is covered by 21,211 square feet of stainless steel net. Cost of construction was $8.5 million.

The Henry Doorly Zoo continues to be the state’s “Number One” tourist attraction. The most popular exhibits are the Lied Jungle, Scott Aquarium, Hubbard Gorilla Valley and the Cat Complex.

The Board of Education of the Omaha Public Schools passed a resolution to absorb the schools, land and tax base in the Millard, Ralston and Elkhorn school districts that are within the Omaha city limits on June 6. Referred to as “one city, one school district”, the resolution drew fierce opposition from school superintendents and community members within the metro area. Governor Dave Heineman announced his support for suburban districts, and the Unicameral responded to the controversy with passage of LB 1024 the following spring.

District Court Judge Gerald Moran ruled in favor of Omaha in its effort to annex Elkhorn. Elkhorn city officials appealed Judge Moran’s ruling to the Nebraska Supreme Court. In January 2007, the Supreme Court upheld the ruling of the lower court allowing the annexation to proceed. In response, the Elkhorn City Council voted unanimously to request that the Nebraska Supreme Court rehear the city’s case against annexation by Omaha. The state Supreme Court rejected Elkhorn’s request to rehear the case in February 2007. A subsequent appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court for a stay of the annexation also failed. Omaha’s annexation of Elkhorn and five neighboring subdivisions went forward on March 1, 2007. The annexed areas added more than 10,000 residents to Omaha’s total population estimated at 427,872 citizens in 2007.

The Shoppes at Ak-Sar-Ben opened on the southeast corner of 72nd and Pacific Streets.

Members of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral looked forward to celebrating the congregation’s sesquicentennial anniversary in 2006. Founded in 1856, the present church was completed in 1883. Located at 18th Street and Capitol Avenue, the classic Gothic structure is Omaha’s oldest church building still in use. It is the headquarters for the bishop of the Nebraska Episcopal Diocese.

Omaha was home to five Fortune 500 companies: Berkshire Hathaway, ConAgra Foods, Union Pacific Corp., Peter Kiewit Sons’ Inc. and Mutual of Omaha Companies. It is home also to three billionaires, the only three from Nebraska included on the Forbes magazine list of the world’s 793 billionaires in 2006. Warren Buffett of Berkshire Hathaway ranked No. 2 with $42 billion behind No. 1 Bill Gates, Microsoft founder, with $50 billion. J. Joe Ricketts of TD Ameritrade ranked No. 292 with $2.5 billion. J. Walter Scott of Peter Kiewit Sons’ Inc., with $1.7 billion, ranked 451 on the list.

The Iowa Grocer’s Association named Omaha-based Roberts Dairy the 2005 Vendor of the Year. In 2006, the company observed its centennial anniversary of continuous operation.

Kenefick Park at Lauritzen Gardens opened west of the Missouri River bridge along I-80. The park’s two massive locomotives located on a hillside north of the interstate provide an impressive front door for residents, visitors and those just passing through Omaha.

Ameritrade announced its purchase of TD Waterhouse USA, the U.S. online brokerage of Canada’s Toronto Dominion Bank. The $2.9 billion merger was completed in January 2006 when Ameritrade became TD Ameritrade. Projected average number of trades per day for TD Ameritrade was 239,000, a figure larger than that of Charles Schwab and E-Trade, Ameritrade’s largest rivals.

Rajive Johri, a native of India, came aboard at First National Bank to head the bank’s credit card operation. In 2006, Chairman Bruce Lauritzen named Johri bank president. First National Bank noted its 150th anniversary in 2007, the same year it launched FBNO Direct, the institution’s new online banking service.

Plans were announced for the installation of a new video screen at Rosenblatt Stadium as part of a $2.2 million improvement project to keep the College World Series (CWS) in Omaha. The new screen would measure 57 feet wide and 29 feet tall and will cost $1.26 million. It will serve both as a scoreboard and to show video replays, graphics and presentations. Rosenblatt seats 23,145 fans and had undergone $34 million in improvements and expansions in the past 14 years, mainly for the CWS. Also in 2005, CWS of Omaha Inc. hired a consultant to develop a master plan for Rosenblatt Stadium with the goal of keeping the College World Series in Omaha beyond 2010.

**2007**

On December 5, the Westroads Mall shooting occurred, leaving nine people (including the gunman) dead and four others wounded.

An $8.2 million Saddle Creek Records development opened in July 2007 featuring a 500-seat music venue/bar Slowdown, the two screen Film Streams’ Ruth Sokolof Theater, eating areas and apartments.

The Paxton building on the southwest corner of 14th and Farnam Streets reopened after its exterior and common areas were restored to its original 1929 grandeur. A hundred years ago, cattle barons frequented this former Paxton Hotel and the now demolished Castle Hotel at 16th and Leavenworth Streets.

**2008**

The Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge over the Missouri River is completed featuring a signature design: curved bridge suspended from two towers that resemble masts. Lighted at night, it links Nebraska and Iowa and its extensive bike trails. The $22 million price tag included $17 million in federal funds largely raised by then-U.S. Senator Bob Kerrey and the rest from private monies. In 2009 the American Public Works Association named it a “Project of the Year.”

**2011**

A new $128 million, 24,000-seat ballpark opened north of downtown to replace Rosenblatt Stadium which had been home to the College World Series since 1950. Omahan Joe Ricketts, founder of Ameritrade, an online brokerage firm, provide funding to have it named TD Ameritrade Park. It is now the home of the College World Series.

**2013**

Jean Stothert elected Omaha’s first female mayor.

**2015**

On October 1, ConAgra Foods (a Fortune 500 company) announced that it was moving its corporate headquarters from Omaha to Chicago, transferring at least 300 jobs and eliminating another 1,000.

**2016**

Cardinal Blase Joseph Cupich was born on March 19, 1949, in Omaha, Nebraska, to Blase and Mary (Mayhan) Cupich. He is one of nine children, with five sisters and three brothers, and the grandson of Croatian immigrant Blaz Cupich. Cardinal Cupich was ordained to the priesthood for the Archdiocese of Omaha on August 16, 1975. He was pastor of two parishes in Omaha. He was appointed Bishop of Rapid City, South Dakota by Pope John Paul II on July 7, 1998, and was ordained and installed on September 21, 1998. He was appointed by Pope Benedict XVI as the sixth Bishop of Spokane, Washington on June 30, 2010, and installed on September 3, 2010. Cardinal Cupich was appointed Archbishop of Chicago by Pope Francis on September 20, 2014 and installed as the ninth Archbishop of Chicago on November 18, 2014. On October 9, 2016, Pope Francis named him a Cardinal and he was elevated to the College of Cardinals in a consistory on November 19, 2016, at St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City.

**2020**

The coronavirus pandemic reaches Omaha. Nebraska Medicine helps passengers off a plane at Omaha’s Eppley Airfield after the passengers were exposed to the coronavirus and were to be quarantined at Nebraska Medicine and later in Ashland at the National Guard camp.

Union Omaha’s inaugural season. The Omaha Club finished runner-up in the USL League One.

Protests break out in Omaha and nationwide over the summer following the killing of a Black man, George Floyd, by a police officer in Minneapolis.

Hundreds of marchers walk east down Dodge Street toward Memorial Park to honor James Scurlock on June 7. Scurlock was fatally shot by bar owner Jacob Garner in an incident during a protest in downtown Omaha.

Around the start of the 21st century, several new downtown skyscrapers and cultural institutions were built.[76] One First National Center was completed in 2002, surpassing the Woodmen Tower as the tallest building in Omaha as well as in the state at 634 ft (193 m). The creation of the city's new North Downtown included the construction of the CenturyLink Center and the Slowdown/Film Streams development at North 14th and Webster Streets.[77] Construction of the new TD Ameritrade Park began in 2009 and was completed in 2011, also in the North Downtown area, near the CenturyLink Center. TD Ameritrade Park is now the home of the College World Series, an event tourists flock to each year.

New construction has occurred throughout the city since the start of the 21st century. Important retail and office developments have occurred in West Omaha such as the Village Pointe shopping center and several business parks including First National Business Park and parks for Bank of the West and C&A Industries, Inc and Morgan Stanley Smith Barney and several others.[78] Downtown and Midtown Omaha have both seen the development of a significant number of condominiums in recent years.[79][80] In Midtown Omaha significant mixed-use projects are underway. The site of the former Ak-Sar-Ben arena has been redeveloped into a mixed-use development Aksarben Village. In January 2009 Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska announced plans to build a new 10 story, $98 million headquarters, in the Aksarben Village, completed in Spring 2011.[81] Gordmans is also building their new corporate headquarters in Aksarben. The other major mixed-use development is Midtown Crossing at Turner Park. Developed by Mutual of Omaha, the development includes several condominium towers and retail businesses built around Omaha's Turner Park.[82][83]

The Holland Performing Arts Center opened in 2005 near the Gene Leahy Mall and the Union Pacific Center opened in 2004.

There have also been several developments along the Missouri River waterfront in downtown. The Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge was opened to foot and bicycle traffic on September 28, 2008.[84] Started in 2003,[85] RiverFront Place Condos first phase was completed in 2006 and is fully occupied and the second phase was opened in 2011. The development along Omaha's riverfront is attributed with prompting the City of Council Bluffs to move their own riverfront development time line forward.[86]

In the summers of 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2021 the United States Olympic Team swimming trials were held in Omaha, at the Qwest/Century Link Center.[87][88] These events were highlights in the city's sports community,[89] as well as a showcase for redevelopment in the downtown area.

On August 20, 2001, Nebraska Methodist Health Systems demolished the Indian Hills Theater, a "super-Cinerama" movie theater containing the largest indoor screen of its type in the world. The location of the Indian Hills Theater now serves as a parking lot.

The downtown area has experienced a resurgence in the late 1990s and early first decade of the 21st century, with several billion dollars of new construction. The new developments include the Qwest Center Omaha arena/convention center complex, the Holland Performing Arts Center, the Gallup University campus, The River City Star riverboat landing, National Park Service Midwest Region headquarters, new high-rise headquarters towers for First National Bank of Omaha, Union Pacific Railroad, TD Ameritrade Park, and hundreds of condominium units. The First National Bank of Omaha tower is the tallest building between Denver and Minneapolis, surpassing its tallest rival in Kansas City by one foot.

On Wednesday, December 5, 2007, a mass shooting occurred at the Von Maur department store in the Westroads Mall in Omaha. Nineteen-year-old Robert A. Hawkins killed nine people (including himself) and wounded four, two of them critically.[17] It was the deadliest mass murder in Nebraska since the rampage of Charles Starkweather in 1958.[18]

On Thursday, October 1, 2015, ConAgra Foods (a Fortune 500 company) announced that it was moving its corporate headquarters from Omaha to Chicago. ConAgra estimated that out of its 2,500 salaried workers within Omaha, 300 to 350 jobs would move to the Chicago area and another 1,000 would be eliminated.[19] It was initially unclear what would happen to ConAgra's downtown corporate campus.[20]

**Sources:**

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