

# LAWRENCE BUSINESS MAGAZINE

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**LONGEVITY & ADAPTABILITY**

# High Above the Golden Valley

The City of Lawrence and the University of Kansas are forever entwined because of the way the City and its early residents came together and created a state university in this town.

by Patricia A. Michaelis, Ph.D., Historical Research & Archival Consulting  
photos Douglas County Historical Society, Watkins Museum of History

On Sept. 12, 1866, Solon O. Thacher, a Kansas district court judge, gave an eloquent speech dedicating the first building, known as North College, at the State University in Lawrence. He opened his remarks with the following:

*Every enterprise has its epochs—resting points where the past with its triumph and defeat may be contemplated, and the future, bright or shadowy, may be dwelt upon. The completion of this building—the first fair edifice among more pretentious and commodious, but only visible today in the eye of faith—is such a point in the history of the State University. In whatever light we consider it, there can be but one feeling. We rejoice in so goodly a structure, so firm on its foundation, so solidly constructed that the fiercest storm that ever sweeps over Mount Oread fails to jar its walls, and so con-*

*spicuously located above the markets of trade, barter, commerce, as first to attract the eye of the visitor to our city—proclaiming by its exalted position the immeasurable height [sic] there is in the unfolding and expansion of the mind above the ordinary avocations of life, too often summed up in the scriptural language, wherewithal shall we eat, shall we drink, shall we clothed—and I may add, though not canonically, get money. The dimensions of the building are satisfactory, its proportions symmetrical, its outlines commanding, its workmanship and finish we believe to be unexcelled. Mechanics, faithful and trusty, have performed their part, working by the day, thus removing the encouragement to slight their work, which doing it by the job might have incited. No pains have been spared, as far as the labor has progressed, to make the building enduring. It has been constantly supervised by a mechanic of*

*intelligence and more than ordinary care.*

*To this statement of the fidelity of the workmen should be coupled the untiring watchfulness and assiduity of the building committee, consisting of Gen. G. W. Deitzler, E. M. Bartholow, Esq., and Gov. Charles Robinson; though in this case, as is usual in committees, the laboring oar has been held by its chairman. To these gentlemen, to their earnest and daily attention, we owe our warmest thanks.*

He continued talking about the contributions of the City of Lawrence and its residents in making the building and the university a reality. He also referenced the fact that women would be admitted on an equal basis to men, and that women should ultimately have the right to vote, the first state university in the United States to be coeducational. (In fact, the University of Kansas was the first state institution in the United States to enroll women.) Thacher closed his remarks with the following:

*These and kindred thoughts crowd upon the allotted hour. The Regents believe that in the character of the men they have chosen to conduct the institution, they have secured those who will fully meet the requirements of the age, and will carry the University from this humble yet broad and solid stepping stone, up the height of an enduring and beneficent*

*prosperity. And so we devote this building to the used of an impartial, patriotic, Christian education.*

However, securing the State University for the city of Lawrence was not an easy task. A great deal of political activity preceded the eventual decision to locate the State University in Lawrence. During the territorial period, the founders of Lawrence had expressed interest in establishing a private college. However, in 1858, Blue Mont Central College, a private Methodist institution, was founded in Manhattan. On Feb. 11, 1859, the territorial legislature passed an act to “incorporate a university at Lawrence,” but no action on establishing the university occurred.

In 1861, the directors of Blue Mont offered the school’s three-story building and 120 acres to the State of Kansas to become the state’s university. A bill accepting this offer easily passed the Kansas Legislature in 1861 but was vetoed by Gov. Charles L. Robinson, who supported the idea of a state university in his hometown of Lawrence. The legislature attempted to override the veto but failed by two votes. In 1862, another bill to accept the Manhattan offer failed by one vote.

At the end of the first session of the state legislature in 1861, several bills relating to higher education had been passed. One was to accept an act of Congress giving land for an agricultural college in Riley County, providing

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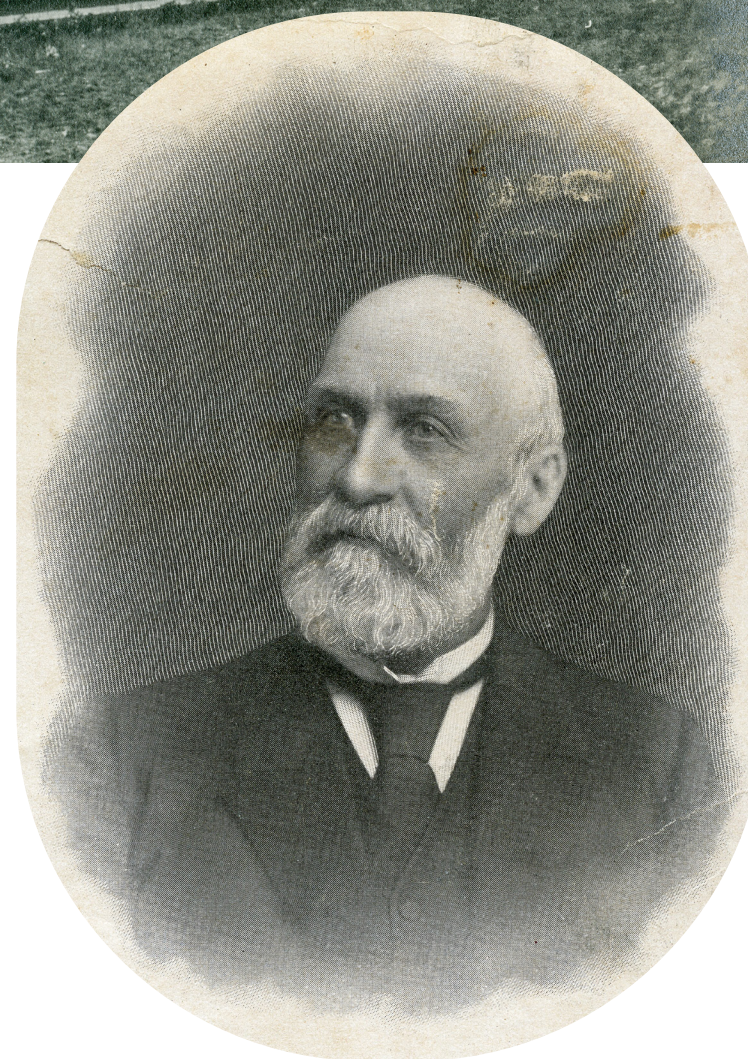
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North side of Old Fraser Hall



the trustees of Blue Mont College ceded its land to the state. It provided for a State Normal School in Emporia as well as a state university in Lawrence.

However, Lawrence met the conditions imposed by the legislature by donating 40 acres of land and \$10,000 in interest from a fund created by Amos Lawrence. With the dedication of North College on Sept. 12, 1866, the state university opened as a preparatory school with a total of 55 students—26 males and 29 females enrolled for the 1866-1867 school year. The tuition was \$331 per session. Only 39 of the 55 students paid this tuition; orphans of deceased soldiers and Quantrill's raid received free admission. The first faculty members included Elial J. Rice, chair of mental and moral science and belles lettres; David H. Robinson, chair of languages; and Frank F. Snow, chair of mathematics and natural sciences. These professors received a salary of \$1,600 per year. Albert Newman, M.D., was appointed lecturer on hygiene and medical science. The first Chancellor was the Rev. R. W. Oliver. The university soon needed more space, and Fraser Hall was constructed with an appropriation of \$50,000 from the 1872 state legislature, along with \$100,000 from the City of Lawrence. These funds were sufficient to plaster the rooms and to finish those in the north wing on the first and second floors. Equipment for heating the building with steam



Portrait of Charles Robinson



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Old North College



was also installed. Additional space was erected in 1877. The University of Kansas was off to a great start. By December 1873, the University had 239 students.

The connection between Lawrence and the university has and is mutually beneficial, and is part of the culture of the community. An example of this is the fact that University students celebrate the winning of a national championship by the men's basketball team by flooding Massachusetts Street in downtown Lawrence rather than on campus.

Going back to the dedicatory remarks by Solon Thacher, the University of Kansas was on a hill overlooking the Kansas River Valley and the city of Lawrence. Though he could not have anticipated the language of the school's alma mater, its initial lyrics—high above the golden valley / glorious to view / stands our noble alma mater / towering toward the blue—fulfill Thacher's vision for the State University in Lawrence. ▲

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