



No. 14

The State Capitol

The State Capitol

A *capitol* is the building where our elected state officials meet and work. A *capital* is the city where that building is located. Our state capitol building is located in Lincoln, our state capital.

Before Nebraska became a state in 1867, Omaha was the capital. The legislature of Nebraska Territory first met in January 1855 in a building donated by a local business. A new building (shown here), the second and last territorial capitol, was completed in 1858. This building was later torn down to make



room for Omaha's Central High School.

Remember the difference between **capital** and **capitol**:



"a" = a city

CAPITOL



and "o" = a building

Nebraska has had three state capitols!

When Nebraska became a state, a bitter dispute arose over the location of the new capital. Would it remain north of the Platte River in Omaha? Or would it be moved south of the river to a new town? A majority of legislators finally decided that the capital would be moved to newly founded Lincoln. Very few people lived in the area, and many people complained about the new location. A capitol building needed to be built before the first regular session of the state legislature. If the first state capitol had not been completed by January 1, 1869, the plan to make Lincoln the new capital might have failed.



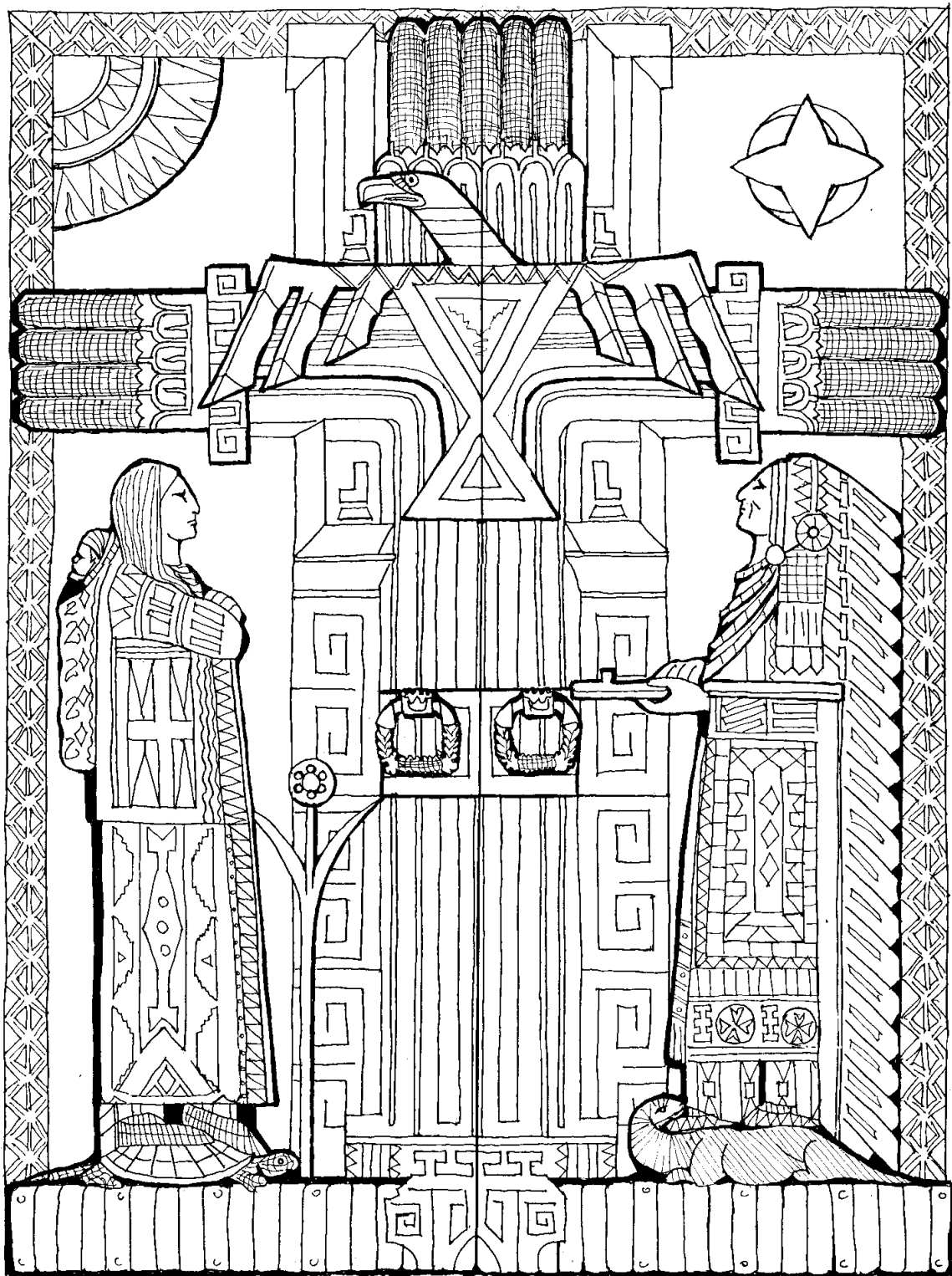
The view from the first state capitol shows how few people lived in Lincoln in the early 1870s. The large house across the street was the home of Thomas P. Kennard, Nebraska's first secretary of state. To inspire confidence in the new capital of Lincoln and to encourage others to move there, Kennard built this show-place.

Over 100 years later the Kennard House still stands, a reminder of Lincoln's "childhood." Today it is a museum of the Nebraska State Historical Society, and you may visit it.



Because the first capitol building was built so hurriedly and with poor materials, it soon fell into disrepair. A replacement was needed. A second state capitol was begun in 1879 and completed in stages over the next ten years. With the growth in the government and in the entire state, this larger building was too small almost as soon as it was finished.

In 1919 the people of Nebraska had decided to build a third capitol. Workers began clearing ground around the second capitol in 1922, when this photograph was taken.



The State Capitol contains many interesting features. This drawing is of the two carved wood doors to the former Senate chamber.

The figures of the man and woman represent the Indian tribes of Nebraska. A corn plant, which stands for the Indian "tree of life," is carved in the center. The door handles are in the shape of ears of corn.

The woman stands on a turtle, the symbol of a productive life. The man stands on an otter, an Indian symbol for medicine.

A thunderbird, a powerful figure of the heavens, flies above them.



The doors to the current Senate chamber show a couple planting a "tree of life." The woman holds a watering jar. They are dressed in an ancient style of the Middle East, one of the birthplaces of western civilization.

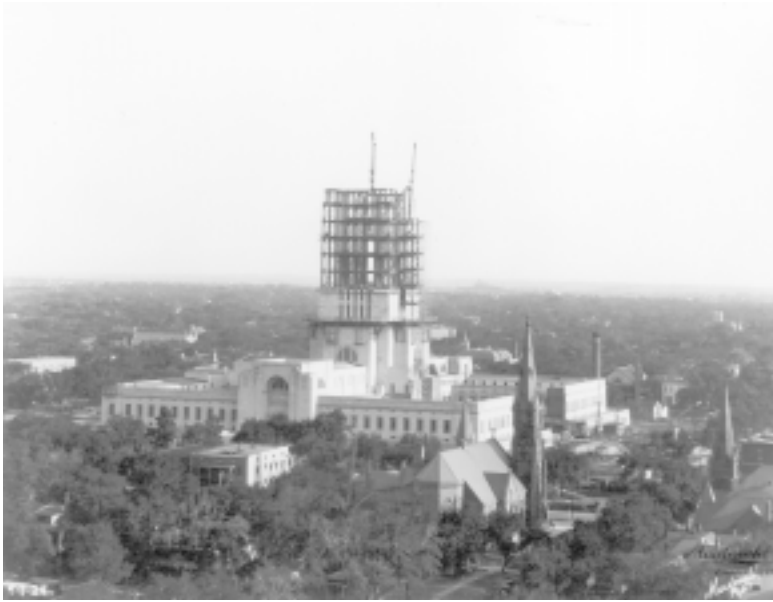
Building the "Tower on the Plains"



Building the new state capitol was no simple task. A railroad line had to be built to the site of the new capitol. The heavy building materials needed by the construction crew were hauled on this track.

The old building was left in place and the new one begun *around* it. After this stage was completed, the old capitol was gradually torn down and the center of the new building rose in its place.





After six years of work the central tower was not quite half built. This view was taken in 1928.



The capitol was finished in 1932. It remains the tallest building in Lincoln.



The capitol's crowning touch was this giant bronze statue placed on the top of the tower, 400 feet above the ground. How do you think this job was done? (Answer elsewhere in this *Nebraska Trailblazer*.)

The nineteen foot statue, called "The Sower," is taller than three adults. The figure, sowing – or scattering – seed during planting, represents the rich agricultural tradition of our state.

Three Branches of Government Under One Roof

The governor heads the executive branch. This person executes, or carries out, the laws that are made. The governor works in an office in the state capitol.

This sculpture is of Robert Furnas, who became governor in 1873. For this and other accomplishments, he is a member of the Nebraska Hall of Fame. His bust and those of other famous men and women are displayed at the State Capitol.



The branch of state government which makes our laws is the legislative branch. Nebraska is the only state which has a one-house legislature. The word for this system is *unicameral* (*uni* = one + *cameral* = chamber). Nebraskans adopted the unicameral system in 1934.

It took time to work out the details. The one-house legislature first met in 1937 (see photo at left). The builders of the new capitol had planned for a two-house legislature and had built two large rooms, or chambers, in which they could meet. Only one is needed now for our state senators.



The state supreme court is part of the judicial branch.

Seven judges hear legal cases involving people from across the state. Their judgments help explain the laws. Their courtroom is also in the state capitol.

You may take a free tour of your state capitol. One of the places you will see is the supreme court chamber – if the judges are not working that day!



As you walk through the north door of the capitol, you will see this carved in stone. The motto reads "The Salvation of the State Is Watchfulness in the Citizen." The sculpture is called "Spirit of the Pioneers." Oxen pull a covered wagon as a family walks west.

As a citizen of the state of Nebraska, you have a responsibility – like the pioneers before you – to take part in the workings of your government. Can you name ways in which this can be done?



Answer to the question
on a previous page.

NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
1500 R Street, Box 82554, Lincoln, NE 68501
www.nebraskahistory.org

Published by the Nebraska State Historical Society for
 Free Distribution to Nebraska Fourth Grade Children

Ongoing support for *Nebraska Trailblazer* is provided by
 The Dorothy Weyer Creigh Memorial Endowment,
 established with the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation
 through gifts from Thomas Creigh, Jr., in memory of his wife.

FIND THE CORRECT ANSWERS AMONG THE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS BELOW AND CIRCLE THE CORRECT ANSWER OR ANSWERS. RE-READ THE TEXT IF NECESSARY.

1. The first territorial capitol was built in a) **Bellevue** b) **Brownville**
c) **Council Bluffs** d) **Omaha**.
2. The territorial capital was a) **south of the Platte River** b) **north of the Platte River** c) **on a sandbar in the middle of the Platte River**.
3. Nebraska became the 37th state to join the Union in a) **1776** b) **1854**
c) **1862** d) **1867**.
4. The a) **first** b) **second** c) **third** state capitol was built around the previous capitol building.
5. The tallest building in Lincoln is a) **Bob Devaney Center** b) **the state capitol** c) **Cornhusker Hotel** d) **Memorial Stadium**.
6. The three branches of our state government are a) **the judicial branch** b) **the Long Branch** c) **the legislative branch** d) **the olive branch** e) **the executive branch**.
7. The 19-foot statue on top of the capitol is called a) **the grower** b) **the blower** c) **the sower** d) **the tower**.
8. It took a) **three years** b) **eight years** c) **ten years** d) **fifteen years** to build the third state capitol.
9. Nebraska's first secretary of state was a) **Thomas Osborne** b) **Thomas Kennard** c) **Thomas Jefferson** d) **Thomas Edison**.
10. The doors of the former Senate Chamber are made of a) **marble** b) **stone** c) **brick** d) **wood** on which Indian symbols are carved.
11. Our state a) **capitol** b) **capital** is located in Lincoln on Centennial Mall between 14th Street and 16th Street.
12. Lincoln is Nebraska's a) **capitol** b) **capital** city.