

Blue Earth County Historian

Blue Earth County Historical Society Quarterly Newsletter
Spring 1998

Rich history surrounds Mankato State

By Robert Russell

(This is a partial history of the beginnings of Mankato State University, written by Blue Earth County Historical Society intern Robert Russell, using resources from the Archive collections of the Historical Society.)

The founding of Mankato Normal School

The roots of Mankato Normal School can be traced back to the state legislature's Act of 1858, which authorized the founding of three normal schools within ten years. It was felt that these schools were needed to bring better trained teachers to the rural schools of the state.

Judge Daniel Buck was a leader in the drive to bring Minnesota's second normal school to Mankato. (The first normal school had been established in Winona). During the 1866 state legislature, it was proposed that the second normal school be established in Mankato, with the third to follow in St. Cloud. Following the same guidelines that governed the Winona school, it was up to the city of Mankato to come up with the required \$5,000 within three years, or forfeit the right to be home to the school.



The first Mankato Normal School.

Buck was a leader in both the push to get the plan through the legislature and as well as the fundraising campaign. Unfortunately, the funding campaign fell short of the goal, which made the school's future in Mankato questionable.

On February 18, 1867, Governor William Marshall signed an act authorizing Mankato to issue bonds to secure the money that the fund campaign failed to raise. In a meeting of the State Normal School Board in July 1868, Judge

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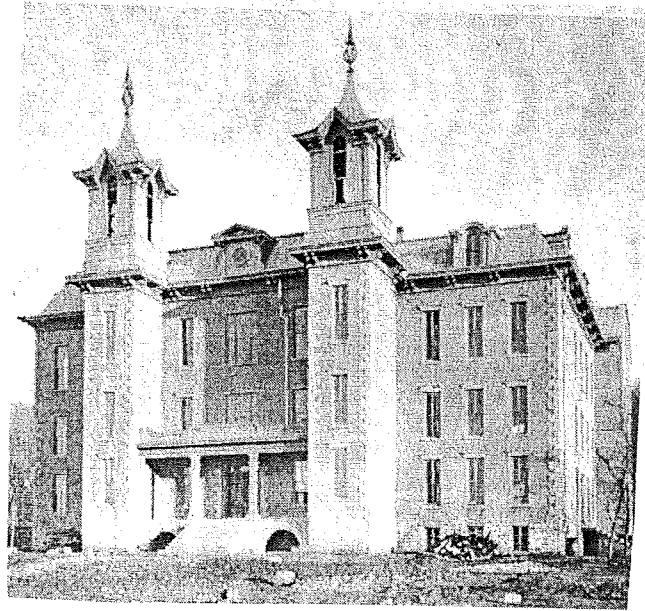
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Buck and community representatives presented the \$5,000, and the founding of the second State Normal School was authorized.

Early days of the normal school

Due to a delay in preparing the upstairs for a school, the first classes were held in the basement of the Methodist Church on October 7, 1868. Two weeks later the school of 27 students, and their principal George Gage moved into their home at the Shaubut building in downtown Mankato.

In 1869, state funding of \$30,000 was set aside for a new building for the Normal School. Land was purchased from the Methodist minister, David Lines, and dedication ceremonies



Above: The Mankato State Normal School building, c. 1871.

Below: Mankato State Normal School students, 1902.



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were held on June 21. Work began on the building immediately following.

Tuition was free in return for a promise to teach following graduation. A high school diploma was not required, and would have been relatively rare considering how few high schools that there were at the time. The students were told to bring a Bible, a dictionary, and "such school books as they have." Their studies were both in regular classroom subjects and in teaching methods.

The school began holding classes in the new building on Fifth Street in April 1870, before the building was actually finished. The three-story brick building eventually cost a total of more than \$45,000.

During its founding and early days, the principal of the Normal School was George Gage, who was originally from Farmington, Maine. Previously he had served as the principal of a normal school there. Gage remained principal until 1872, at which time he became the superintendent of St. Paul schools.

Following a turbulent 1870s (please see Page 4), a time of growth and prosperity occurred. This happened during the administrations of Edward Searing (1880-1898) and Charles Cooper (1899-1930).

Edward Searing had served as Wisconsin State Superintendent of Public Instruction before coming to Mankato Normal School. During this time many changes occurred at the school. In the 1880s, the intercollegiate sports began and in 1892, the school colors of purple and gold were

adopted. The library's collection grew to about 5,000 books.

Enrollment improved and continued to climb during the 1880s and 1890s. In 1889, because of this enrollment growth, a small addition was made to the building to create two more classrooms. A much more major addition was made in 1894, when two wings were added to the original building, which doubled the classroom capability.

By 1898, the faculty had increased from six to twenty-two, sixteen of which were women. Their teaching load was also adjusted from the three classes that they each used to teach to an average of about two for each teacher.

Searing himself was regarded as a disciplinary figure on the campus, but highly respected by the students. He was well-remembered for getting the students to sign pledges to give up smoking and for his calling in some of the football players for their "use of profanity".

From Normal School to Teachers College

Charles H. Cooper became president after Searing's death in 1898. Upon Cooper's arrival to Mankato, he received a one-year appointment as president, and these yearly appointments would continue until his resignation in 1930.

The first dormitory on the campus was named Daniel Buck Hall, Built in 1913, this served as the primary residence for women attending the school.

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The school's second dormitory was added in 1921 and named Cooper Hall.

A fire destroyed the Teachers College building in 1922. (Please see page 6).

Following the fire, life went on for the Teachers College. Within a week of the fire the *Peds* (from the Greek word *pedagogue*, meaning teacher) won a close basketball game at the Mankato Armory. This was just one illustration of the increasing importance of extracurricular activities, including the sports programs and the start of the school paper.

The conversion to a four-year program also continued following the fire, but the progress was slow. The credit hour system was instituted in 1924. The first graduate with a Bachelor of Education degree was in 1927.

Charles Cooper resigned in 1930, around his 75th birthday. His successor was Frank McElroy, who faced many great challenges during his tenure. One of his main problems was dealing with the effects of the Great Depression. Faculty salaries were reduced, and the students received assistance from the government. Student work-study money was received from the WPA funds, and some of the money used for construction of the new Physical Education building also came from WPA monies.

Another major stumbling block for McElroy was the outbreak of World War II. The men who were attending the college were dropping out at a rate of about three or four a day at the beginning of the war. Students who stayed behind

saw accelerated programs and reduced vacation times, as the schools looked to relieve the nationwide teacher shortage.

In July 1946, Frank McElroy retired from his post at the college. Clarence Crawford succeeded him in the position of president. Crawford faced problems of a different kind than McElroy saw. Following World War II, the enrollment of the Teachers College grew immensely. By 1950 it was at 2,854. The gender of those enrolled at the college was also changing. This was illustrated by the opening of the first men's dormitory, the Searing Center, in 1952.

The curriculum was also changing and becoming more diverse than just the teacher training courses. Also, the faculty was becoming better trained, as well. By the 1957-1958 school year, among the 157 faculty members, 51 had their doctorates.



Above: The State Normal School as it looked between 1893 and 1922.

Rebels

With A Cause

In the early 1870s, many factors came together to make this decade turbulent one for the Normal school. In addition to talks of closure, enrollment dipped, the Minnesota economy was faltering, and there was turmoil regarding the leadership of the school. The school's leadership problems came to a head in the September 1873 "Sears Rebellion."

Julia Sears had served as principal of the school for one year and was replaced in September 1873. She felt she was treated unfairly by her demotion to assistant to the principal. When she arrived to take the lesser job, she found it had been filled by another applicant due to her lack of response.

It seems a misunderstanding caused this situation. When Sears learned that she was being replaced as principal, she wrote a casual letter to George Gage (not knowing that he had recently accepted the position of director of the state's Normal Board) that he would not probably see her in Minnesota again. This was before she knew she would be offered the position of assistant to the principal. Gage received her letter and

instructed the board to offer the position of assistant to Cornelius Hyde.

Sears was left without a position, and the Normal board had also decided to dismiss Prof. Weigel, music instructor. According to the September 12 *Mankato Weekly Union*, the board made the "stupid arrangement" whereby penmanship would be taught only four weeks out of 20.

"All fell upon our citizens like a thunderbolt," reports the newspaper. "They were mortified, chagrined and indignant."

A petition was signed asking the board to reinstate Sears, but Gage proposed to do nothing. On September 9, 41 students left classes, and were given a three-day notice to return by the new principal, D.C. John. Thirty-two students who left that day did not return and were expelled.

After four months of deliberation, the board upheld its original decision, and John and Hyde remained in their positions. Sears left Mankato for Nashville, Tenn., where she served at the Peabody Normal School.

Historic Structure of State Teachers College Laid Waste By Flames; Loss Put at Over \$500,000

Headline from the February 6, 1922, *Mankato Free Press*

On February 5, 1922, fire ravaged the "Old Main" building at Mankato State Teachers College, causing \$500,000 in damage.

As Mankato residents were returning home from church that Sunday morning, they noticed smoke rising from the Teachers College building. The fire probably started in the basement of the building, where excess paper was baled. It spread quickly through the heating ducts. The main loss from the fire was to the teachers, who lost many personal belongings, including one professor who lost a nearly-finished manuscript for a book he was writing. Also lost in the fire were many volumes from the library (believed to be around 20,000), and many birds and other specimens which were part of the school's museum.

As the school viewed its future without use of its main building, offers poured in from the Mankato community. After missing only one day of classes, students returned to school. Classes were held at various locations around Mankato, including the Presbyterian, Methodist and

Episcopalian churches.

Walls of the building were the razed, and the students would return to classes in the remodeled building on April 8, 1924.

Fire uncovers hidden treasure

When the Teacher's College building was built 53 years before the fire destroyed it, a time capsule was placed in the cornerstone. When the fire burnt the building to the ground, the tin box was recovered.

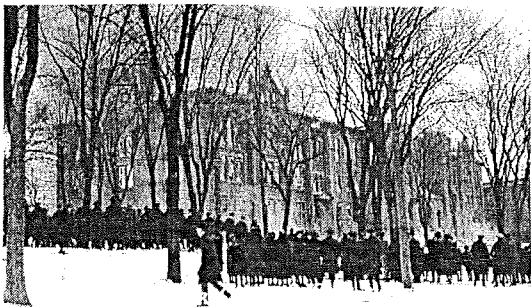
One of the papers stated the building was the second state normal school in Minnesota and that the building cost \$37,600. The contractors, architect and workmen who constructed the building were all listed.

The names of village officers from 1865 to 1867 were listed, as well as city officers from 1868 and 1869.

The first board of instruction of the normal school were listed as George M. Gage, principal; assistants, Miss Susie M. Dyer, Miss Emma H. Collings, Charles A. Boston, Miss E. L. Montgomery, and Professor Alexander Hatschek, teacher of vocal and instrumental music. According to the records, the first enrollment consisted of 48 women and 18 men.



The Teachers College after fire ravaged the building.

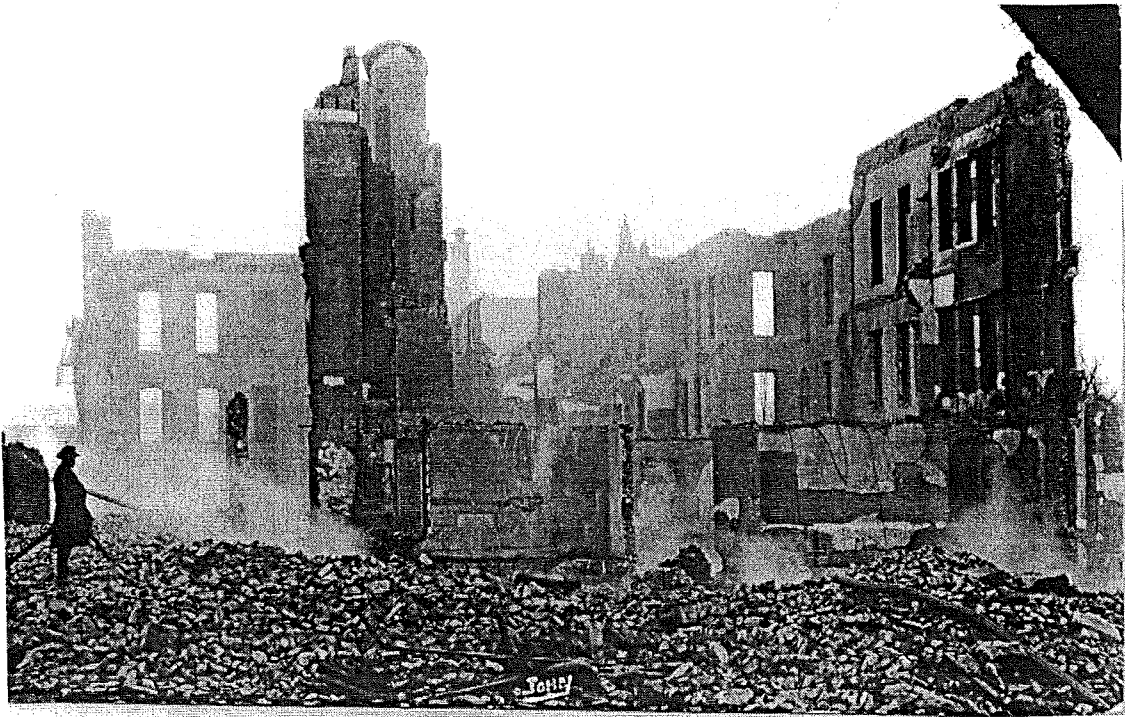


Onlookers watch as fire engulfs the college.

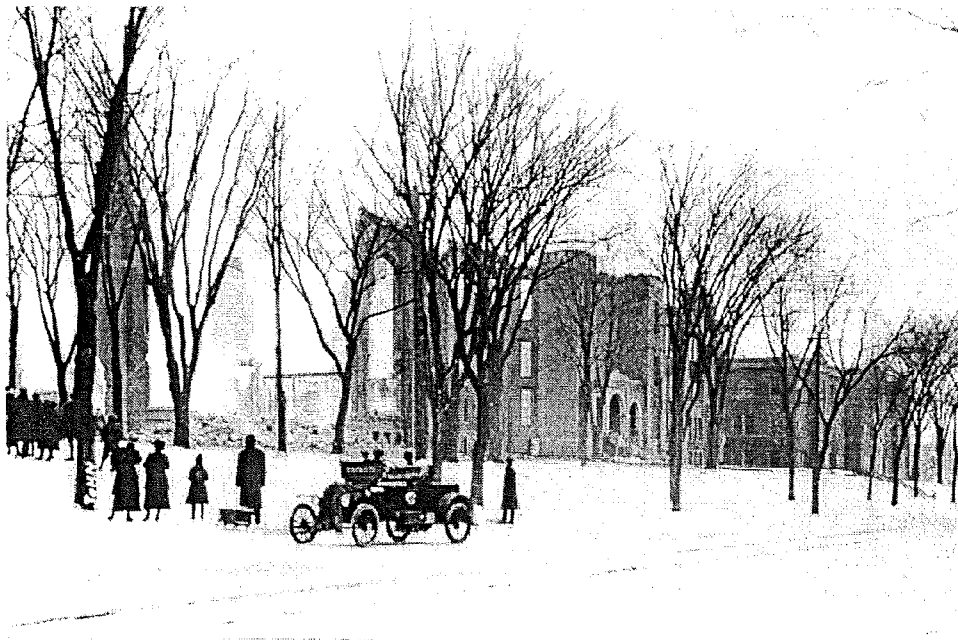


Smoke billows from the building.

Please see Page 8 for more pictures of the fire.



Firefighters work to douse the Teachers College Fire.



Onlookers look at the destroyed building.

"I want you to come help me"

(Copy of a letter from George Gage to Susie Dyer)

Oct. 3, 1868

Miss Susie M. Dyer

My Dear Friend,

I have the pleasure with the consent of the Presidential Committee of the Second State Normal School of Minnesota, to offer you the position of Head Assistant in that Institution, of which I am to be Principal, at a yearly salary of \$800.

The first time of the school will open, as you see from the above "calendar" in a few days, though on account of the unfinished condition of the rooms into which we are to go, and which, I may add, will be both pleasant and (undecipherable), we shall not begin on the 6th. This place situated at the south bend of the Minnesota River, is growing rapidly. It is now in connection with the East, by the way of the Minnesota Valley Railroad to St. Paul. It will have a double connection by another railroad before the end of another year.

The climate here, as you know, is remarkably healthy, and the population enterprising. Many of the people are from New England.

I shall have one or two assistant teachers in my model department; but only one at first with me in the Normal Department. I shall obtain (undecipherable) one to help me a few weeks in the Normal, and hope that you will come to fill permanently its place. Mrs. Gage, who will soon be here, will in all her power make your stay here agreeable, and you have no need to hesitate on any grounds of fear in respect to qualifications. I think I know you, and I want you to come and help me. Now don't fail to come. Let me know when you will start, if you accept, and come by the way of its rail route to St. Paul, thence by the Minnesota Valley Railroad to Mankato.

I hope to hear and favorably from you when you shall have received this letter.

Very truly yours,

Geo. M. Gage

Salaries varied between male and female teachers in the 1940s

When female students graduated with a teaching degree from the Teachers College in the 1940s, they could expect a monthly salary between \$78 and \$155, according to the July 5, 1940, issue of the *Mankato Free Press*.

In rural school districts, female teachers averaged \$78 per month. Teachers on the Mankato staff were paid an average of \$155 per month.

However, the average salary for male teachers was considerably higher. In rural schools, they averaged \$102 per month, and in the Mankato district they averaged \$220 per month.

The article also reported that schools in Blue Earth County employed four times as many women as men.

The Lake Crystal school district paid the second-highest rate for women in the county, averaging \$115 per month and \$132 per month for men.

Average monthly pay in other Blue Earth County School Districts:

(Figures taken from an article in the July 5, 1940, *Mankato Free Press*)

Garden City		
Women		\$102
Men		\$143
Pemberton		
Women		\$88
Men		\$124
Rapidan		
Women		\$97
Men		\$116
Good Thunder		
Women		\$94
Men		\$157
Mapleton		
Women		\$101
Men		\$159
Amboy		
Women		\$101
Men		\$137
St. Clair		
Women		\$103
Men		\$125

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Coming in the next issue of the *Historian*

A history of Blue Earth County parks (July)

Also,

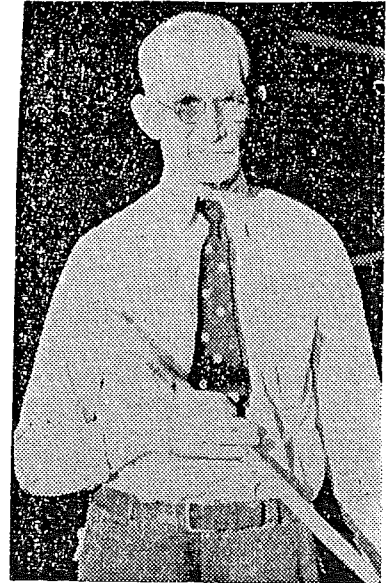
Watch for a special issue this summer highlighting the history of firefighting in Blue Earth County

One employee's point of view

To record history, it's best to have an eyewitness to events that shape an institution. For Mankato Teachers College, that eyewitness was Andrew H. Carlson, custodian at the college for 45 years and the college's "unofficial historian."

On July 1, 1944, at the age of 70, Carlson retired from the college. He had served as custodian through two world wars, the Depression, and the fire that destroyed the building in 1922.

According to an article in the March 23, 1944, *Mankato Free Press*: "When Carlson started his new job on that cold December day in 1898, the matter which concerned him most was not the institution's lack of presidential authority but its abundance of hot air furnaces — all 18 of them — located throughout the building. It was the task of the new janitor along with two fellow laborers, John Peterson, still living, and the late Henry Holman, to cart in enough wood to keep the hungry burners fed with a cord and a half of wood each day."



ANDREW CARLSON

Carlson recounted that during World War I, "...if I remember correctly we had but one male student during the war — and he was badly crippled."

Carlson also recalled the day of Feb. 5, 1922 — the day fire struck the college. He was home eating breakfast when the milkman informed him that the whistles blowing meant the main building was burning down. The janitor rushed to the fire, only to find the flames already engulfing the building.

"There wasn't anything I could do, but to this day I think that I could have salvaged a number of books from the library, which was the last portion of the building to catch fire," Carlson recounted in the March 23 article. The fire didn't keep him from his work, as he went to his job the next day at President Charles H. Cooper's temporary offices located next to the Presbyterian church.

In 1923, when faculty and students moved into the new main building, Carlson was assigned his new territory, which included the third floor, auditorium, and any other work that he might be asked to do. He also made two trips daily to the post office.

In the article, Carlson attributed his record of no serious illnesses since joining the college janitorial staff to a personal health program of "eating good, substantial food, exercising daily and sleeping like a log." However, he was absent one week when a typhoid epidemic raged through Mankato.

Carlson hung up his broom to "make way for younger blood."