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**ROBERT W. FURNAS
PAPERS
1844-1905**

NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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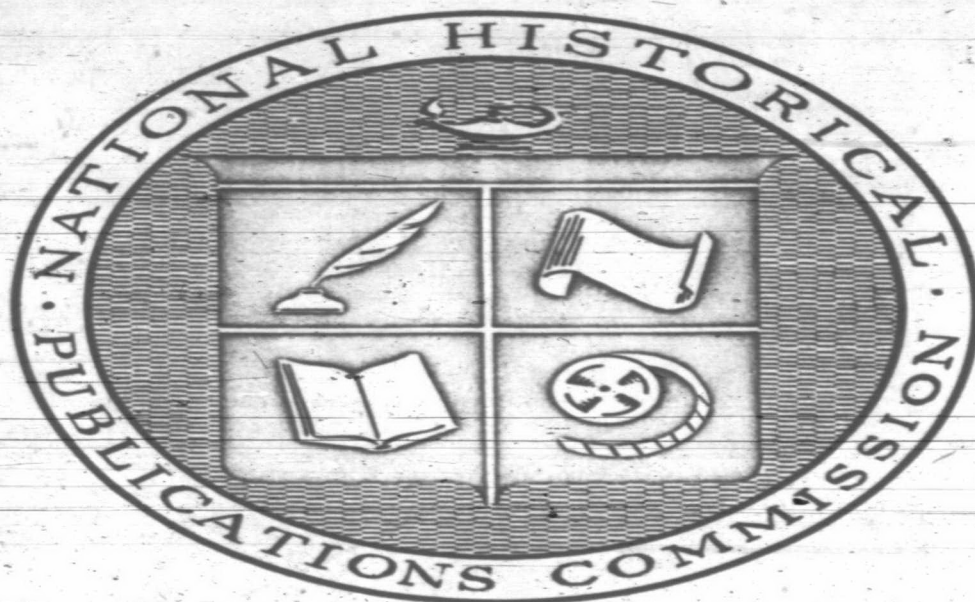
ROLL N. 1

ROBERT W. FURNAS PAPERS

**Edited by
Douglas A. Bakken**

**Manuscript Supervisor
Richard E. Booker**

**Microfilm Technician
Elizabeth M. Arnold**



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COLLECTION NOTES

Robert Wilkinson Furnas was born on May 5, 1824, to William and Martha (Jenkins) Furnas near Troy, Miami County, Ohio. His parents were of English Quaker stock and were natives of South Carolina. Robert was orphaned in 1832 when his parents died from cholera, and he went to live with his paternal grandparents in Troy. Later while still a youth, he left this home and worked as a tin and printing apprentice. In the late 1840's he became engaged in a number of business enterprises in the southern Ohio-northern Kentucky region, including book and job printing, publishing a newspaper in Troy, and various positions as a railroader, including station agent, conductor and engineer. In 1852, while still living in Ohio, he became involved in the insurance business which he continued until he moved to Nebraska Territory in April 1856.

Furnas established the Nebraska Advertiser in Brownville and it soon became a newspaper of note, primarily because of his frank comments on contemporary issues. He participated actively in promoting the Territory, and wrote a number of pamphlets advertising the region to prospective settlers. He was also extremely interested in developing the full agricultural potential of the land and to this end founded the Nebraska Farmer, Nebraska's first agricultural periodical.

Furnas attempted to be politically neutral when he arrived in the Territory, although he had been a Whig in Ohio. He soon found himself, however, aligned with the newly organized Republican Party. He served in the 3rd-6th Territorial Councils which met during 1857-1860, and was a member of the Agriculture, Education and Horticulture committees.

Furnas was an officer in the Territorial Militia when the Civil War started, and was soon appointed a colonel in the U. S. Army. He organized several Indian regiments prior to commanding the Second Nebraska Cavalry

which participated in campaigns against the Plains Indians, most notably in the battle of White Stone Hill. He returned to civilian life after the Civil War and served from 1864-1866 as Agent for the Omaha Indians. He returned to Brownville in 1867, where he became actively engaged in a nursery business in which he had purchased half interest. Although he was owner and editor of the Nebraska Advertiser in 1870-1871, his main vocation after his term as Indian Agent was the operation of his nursery business located on the outskirts of Brownville, where he resided until his death on June 1, 1905.

In 1872 Furnas was elected governor of Nebraska on the Republican ticket even though prior to the election he was involved in a controversy when it was charged that he had accepted a bribe in voting against the removal of the capital from Omaha in 1857. His two years as governor were clouded with a number of problems including administrative questions and economic hardship, originating from Nebraskans being plagued by grasshoppers which necessitated various relief measures. Furnas did not seek re-election in 1874 and he never again held an elective public office. Later, he was interested in a number of appointive positions, particularly that of Commissioner of Agriculture.

Furnas's career after his one term as governor centered on the promotion of agriculture and the preservation of Nebraska's history. He was instrumental in creating the State Board of Agriculture and served as its first president and later as its secretary for approximately two decades. The latter position consisted almost entirely of planning and arranging for the Nebraska State Fair held annually in September. Furnas was active in the development of agriculture in numerous other ways, such as advocating the adaptation of irrigation, and introducing new plant varieties. In addition, he served as a commissioner to several national and international expositions,

including those held in New Orleans in 1884-85, Paris in 1889, and Mexico in 1898. He was an active participant in several agriculture, horticulture and other related organizations and served as president of the International Fairs and Expositions and the American Fair Association. Furnas was one of the organizers of the Nebraska State Historical Society, and for many years served as president before relinquishing the position to J. Sterling Morton. Furnas wrote a number of historical addresses, biographical sketches, and was one of the first persons to deposit his papers in the Society's archives.

Furnas married Mary Elizabeth McComas on October 29, 1845, and they were the parents of eight children. Mrs. Furnas died on April 1, 1897, and Furnas was married for a second time on December 25, 1899 to Susannah Emswiler Jameson.

EDITORIAL NOTES

The Robert Wilkinson Furnas Papers were given to the Nebraska State Historical Society by Furnas. The papers consist of approximately 14,000 letters, twelve archival boxes of scrapbooks and fifteen boxes of records, clippings, printed matter and other miscellaneous material relating to Furnas's life. The majority of the papers concern the promotion of agriculture. Specifically, the material relates to Furnas's activities as Secretary of the State Board of Agriculture and his subsequent management of the Nebraska State Fairs from 1884 to 1904. In addition the papers reveal his responsibilities as Nebraska Commissioner for various national and international fairs and expositions during the late 19th Century, and his duties as Governor of Nebraska from 1873 to 1875. Other broad topics of interest include his early business career in Ohio and later in Nebraska, his duties as commander of the Second Nebraska Cavalry during the Civil War and his administration of the Omaha Indian Agency during the 1860's.

The papers are divided into eight subgroups, the largest of which is incoming letters found in boxes one through ten and on the first ten rolls of microfilm. A partial calendar of letters received by Furnas during the period February 1881 to February 1905 was in the papers and was microfilmed on Roll 1. Roll 11 consists of outgoing correspondence and constitutes the second subgroup. Approximately a dozen bound volumes relating to Furnas's career in printing and publishing, military duties, Indian Agency administration, and later business ventures were microfilmed on Roll 12. The concluding roll is composed of treaties and reports, warrants and deeds, bills and speeches, agreements and resolutions, petitions, and miscellaneous items.

The last three subgroups consist of material which was not microfilmed. Subgroup five consists of boxes sixteen to twenty-seven, and is composed of

scrapbooks. These books are described in detail in the Society's Manuscript Record and include a variety of mounted clippings, many of them undated, relating to agricultural development, Nebraska and national affairs, and political campaigns, issues and parties. Subgroup six is composed of records, invoices, warrants, bills, receipts, accounts books, tax statements, newspaper clippings and some printed matter. This material is described in more detail in the Manuscript Record and is in archival boxes twenty-eight to forty-one. Subgroup seven consists of about 130 newspapers, primarily out of state, from New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, San Francisco, and other large cities dating from 1832-1892. These are identified individually and are located in the archives.

The physical preparation of the documents and actual microfilming of the papers was conducted on the basis of simplicity of arrangement and minimum utilization of editorial comments and microfilm targets. All dated incoming letters are in chronological order. Undated and complete or incomplete letters were placed at the conclusion of the dated material. Letters where only the month and/or year were indicated were inserted at the end of the particular month, or year, as appropriate. Dates, which were supplied by the project staff are enclosed in brackets. Letters which are obviously torn or in some way altered from their original appearance were microfilmed without any target noting their condition. Targets were utilized to indicate where endorsements were filmed before a letter or enclosures after a document. A number of enclosures and/or endorsements have become separated or are missing from their original letters; this fact has not been noted when it occurs.

Some of the papers have the notation of "Ans" or a check mark, which apparently indicates that a letter was answered. There are also some letters which have a number on them, either in blue or black ink, some of which appear to have been placed there by Furnas. There are drafts or complete letters interspersed throughout the papers which the Society has transcribed and these were microfilmed without any specific explanatory note.

In order to facilitate viewing the documents, only one page of a letter appears on a frame. Thus a four page letter is on four frames. The partial calendar of incoming Furnas letters are microfilmed one page per frame; however, the bound volumes of his business, military and Indian Agency affairs were microfilmed two pages per frame. Every exposure, including targets inserted in the correspondence noting the appropriate years, was given a number by the automatic numbering device located in the lower right hand corner of each frame.

The outgoing correspondence on Roll 11 has three small groups of press copy letters. The first group consists of letters marked 1 to 65 which were microfilmed; pages 66 to 201 were blank and not filmed. A bound, indexed, volume of letters numbered from 98 to 495, not all inclusive, was also microfilmed. The roll concludes with unbound press copy letters numbered from 1 to 92.