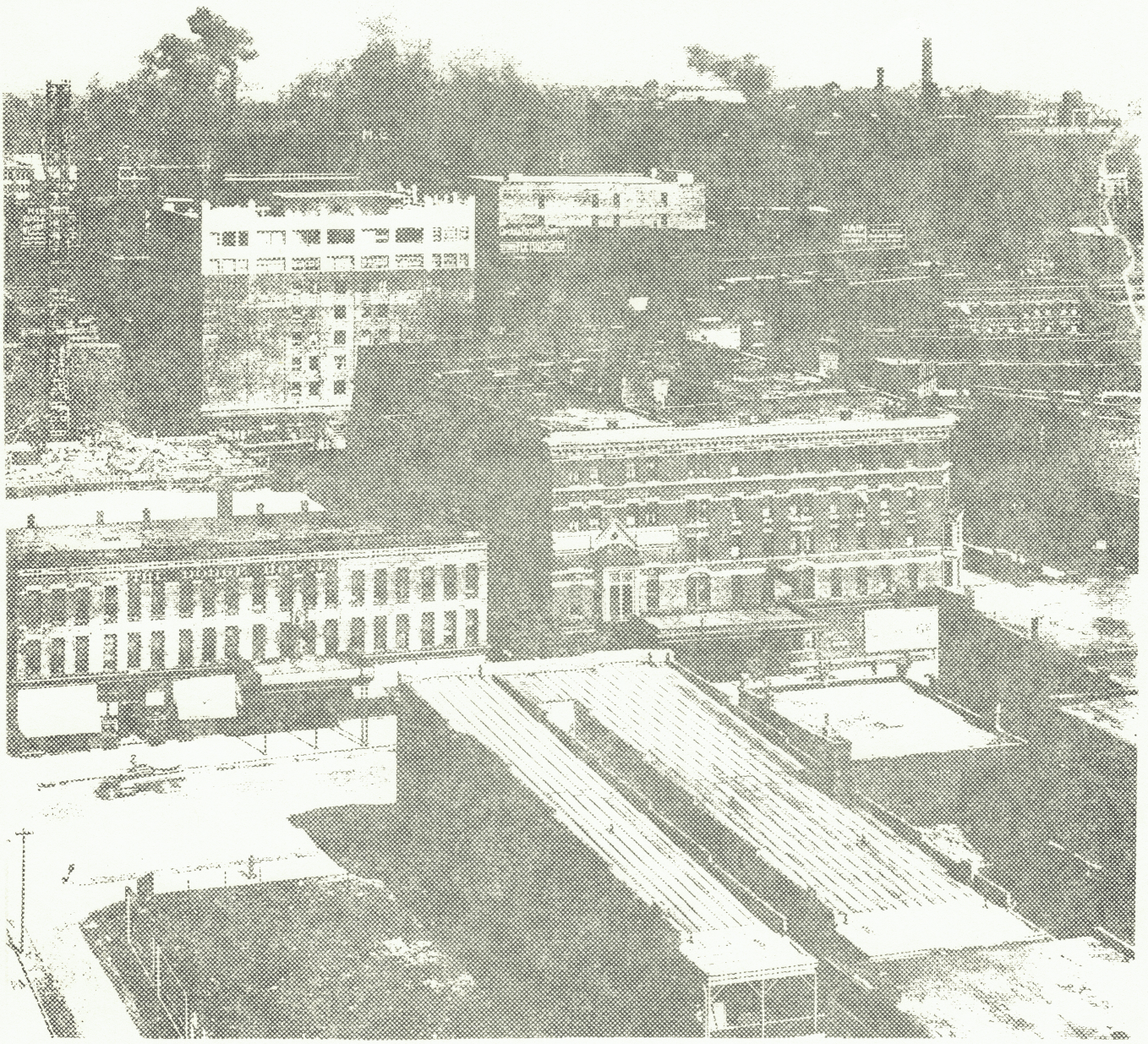
1900 — 1919



1900 — 1919

1900 — 1919:
A Period Of Transition

The early 1900s were a busy period of time for real estate men in Omaha. The Real Estate Exchange began to gain prominence in local civic matters; members of the Exchange also helped to establish the National Association of Real Estate Exchanges during these two decades.

Involvement In City Projects

Real Estate Exchange members worked to shift a large part of taxation from real estate to public service corporations in 1902; led a campaign for proper assessment of railway property; in 1908 members worked with the South West Improvement Association to build the 24th Street Viaduct, which served as the main connecting link between Omaha and South Omaha. A group of real estate men headed by Byron R. Hastings and Fred Bailey waged a strenuous campaign to pave Ames Avenue, bringing praise from residents of the North Side. The Exchange also acted as mediator to settle differences between the Union Pacific Railroad and striking employees. In 1915, Omaha became the third city in the United States to adopt a zoning plan. George T. Morton, an Exchange member, was the first City Planning Board Chairman; the Real Estate Exchange was one of the first advocates of the Planning Board.

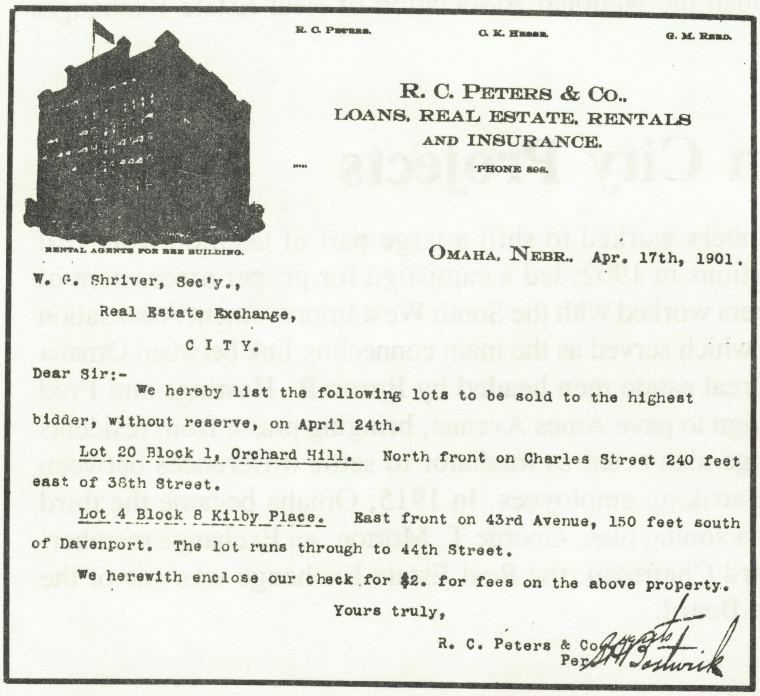
In 1917, members and citizens were embroiled in controversy. A bill sponsored in great part by the Omaha Real Estate Board was passed by the Nebraska Legislature which authorized the consolidation of Benson, Florence, Dundee, and South Omaha with Omaha. The joining of the separate municipalities became effective after a city-wide vote. The fight between biased groups was bitter. The Board was badly split over the issue — so much so that many thought the fight would permanently divide the Board. However, once the consolidation became fact, the warring factions made their peace.



This view of Omaha was photographed between 1912 and 1920. The original Woodmen of the World Building, dedicated in 1912, was the tallest building in Omaha — also the tallest between Chicago and the Pacific Coast at the time.

Real Estate Exchange Changes And Developments

In February, 1903, Real Estate Exchange members voted to appoint a committee to select a location for a building to house the Exchange. The committee included C.F. Harrison, W.H. Green, W.H. Thomas, D.C. Patterson, A.P. Tukey, W.R. Homan, and W.T. Graham. An article in the World-Herald reported, "Within another year the Omaha Real Estate Exchange will be preparing to move into its own building... The building is to cost in the neighborhood of $200,000, be perhaps six stories high and amply large enough to afford office accommodations for all of the real estate dealers in the city... 'We are getting tired of being pushed about from pillar to post,' said a member of the exchange, 'and there is no good reason why we should not have a permanent home of our own.'"



R. C. PETERS. C. K. HESSE. C. M. REED.

R. C. PETERS & CO.
LOANS, REAL ESTATE, RENTALS
AND INSURANCE.
'PHONE 808.

RENTAL AGENTS FOR BEE BUILDING.

OMAHA, NEBR., Apr. 17th, 1901.

W. C. Shriver, Sec'y.,
Real Estate Exchange,
C I T Y.

Dear Sir:-
We hereby list the following lots to be sold to the highest bidder, without reserve, on April 24th.

Lot 20 Block 1, Orchard Hill. North front on Charles Street 240 feet east of 38th Street.

Lot 4 Block 8 Kilby Place. East front on 43rd Avenue, 150 feet south of Davenport. The lot runs through to 44th Street.

We herewith enclose our check for $2. for fees on the above property.

Yours truly,
R. C. Peters & Co.
Per

Pictured above is a listing from April, 1901. Listings were submitted daily to the Exchange's elected Secretary for distribution to members. Below: an example of the shares purchased by members of the Omaha Real Estate Board for $25.00.



On May 12, 1908, 120 men representing 18 boards from 13 states (and including representatives of the Omaha Real Estate Exchange) met in Chicago for the stated objective: To unite the real estate men of America for the purpose of effectively exerting a combined influence upon matters affecting real estate interests.

The result was the formation of the National Association of Real Estate Exchanges. An Executive secretary was employed, along with general counsel and office staff, and several standing committees were formed (including Code of Ethics, Taxation, and State & Municipal Legislation).

In 1916, the national organization's name was changed to the National Association of Real Estate Boards. In the same year, the Omaha Real Estate Exchange was reorganized as the Omaha Real Estate Board. The Board was capitalized at $2,500 and sold at $25.00 par value, one share to a member, non-transferable.



1916 also marks the year in which the term REALTOR was coined to describe those real estate men who belonged to the National Association of Real Estate Boards, subscribing to the Association's strict Code of Ethics.

The Omaha Real Estate Board hired its first Executive Secretary in 1918. Mr. Leo B. Bozell had among his duties that of Publicity Campaign Manager of the Board. The "Omaha REALTOR" newsletter began publication in that year. A major project of the Board was the "Own Your Home" campaign; 3,000 essays were received from school children. The records indicate an annual excursion to Benson and Carmichael by trolley as well as an annual Real Estate Men's Picnic featuring "Fat Boys" vs. "Lean Boys" in a ball game.

Above: The first Executive Secretary of the Board, Leo B. Bozell. Mr. Bozell resigned from his position in 1926; he went on to found the Bozell & Jacobs advertising and public relations firm. Below: Omahans marched in a parade supporting U.S. involvement in World War I. Banners urged citizens to buy Liberty bonds; the Board raised over $40,000 for Bonds.



World Events

World War I, of course, was a major event during this period of time. Gilbert Hitchcock, founder of the Omaha World-Herald and head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, announced to the Senate on behalf of President Woodrow Wilson, "We are going to war, as the President stated, in defense of humanity."

Cost of Living

A new bungalow could be purchased for $1,805. Apartments at 29th and Harney rented for $40—$50 per month.

Average values on Farnam (from 20th to 24th Street) were $150-$200 per front foot with the north side more valuable; and $200—$300 per front foot on Capitol Avenue. A 9.32 acre lot in Keystone Park (just west of the Benson city limits) was priced at $300 per acre, and featured "the only oiled drives in Nebraska."



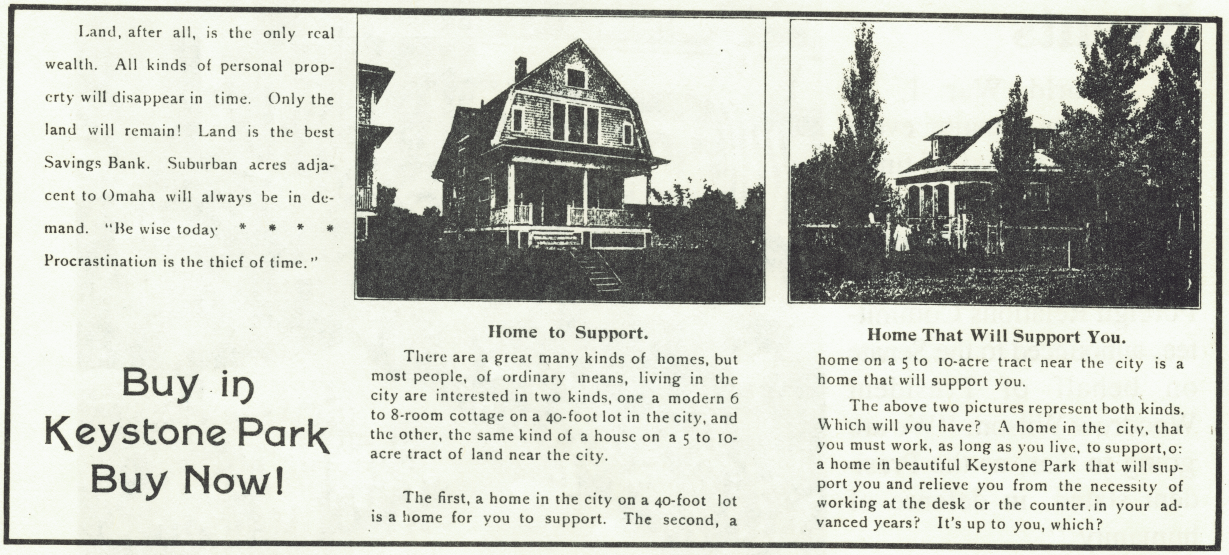
Financing

Real estate transfers totaled $7,363,689.00 in 1904; building permits in that year totaled $2,166,050.00.

Membership Figures

Membership in 1900 consisted of 31 members; that figure had grown to 95 by 1919. Dues in 1901 were $6.00 per member. Dues in 1919

Above: An ad in a 1908 issue of the World-Herald asked people to submit their choices for street names in Ralston. "Labor points his golden finger at Ralston", the ad reads; "A Home for Mills and Factories." The grand prize in the street-naming contest was one lot in the city. Below: A circular advertising lots in Keystone Park shows two examples of home styles from the years just before the war. The ad states in part: "All kinds of personal property will disappear in time. Only the land will remain! Land is the best Savings Bank. Suburban acres adjacent to Omaha will always be in demand."



were $20.00 per annum, payable quarterly. The OREB budget in 1919 was $16,200.00.

A 1911 OREB roster lists 76 member firms; at least two have withstood the rigors of time, and are still in existence in 1986: Byron Reed Company and NP Dodge Company.

BENAWA & CO.,
Real Estate and Rental Agency,
FIRE INSURANCE,
108 North Fifteenth Street.

REFERENCES.
Union National Bank, Omaha.
McCague Investment Company, Omaha.
Wharton & Baird, Attorneys, Omaha.
Phœnix Loan Association, St. Joseph, Mo.
The Fidelity Trust Company, Kansas City, Mo.

Omaha, Neb., June 5, 1901.

Omaha Real Estate Exchange,
Omaha, Nebr.

Gentlemen:--

Your Committee, which was appointed at the last regular meeting, to arrange for the Annual Picnic, beg leave to report as follows:

The Committee have arranged for the Annual Picnic to take place, Thursday, June 20th., at Arlington, Nebr., and the following Committees have been appointed to act for same.

Committee on Base Ball and all Running Races- Byron Hastings and John Frenzer.

Committee on Dancing and Music- C. R. Glouver and S. A. Broadwell.

" " Specialties- W. H. W. Gates and B. R. Ball.

" in charge of ground- W. T. Graham and Ed. Garvin.

" on Sale of Tickets- F. J. Fitzgerald, C. F. Harrison, G. W. Holbrook, Chas. Saunders, H. B. Payne, S. P. Bothwick, R. S. Berlin, Harry G. Jordan, J. W. Robbins, Ernest Ewert. and W. H. Thomas.

Respectfully,

G. S. Benawa
F. D. Wead.
H. T. Davis

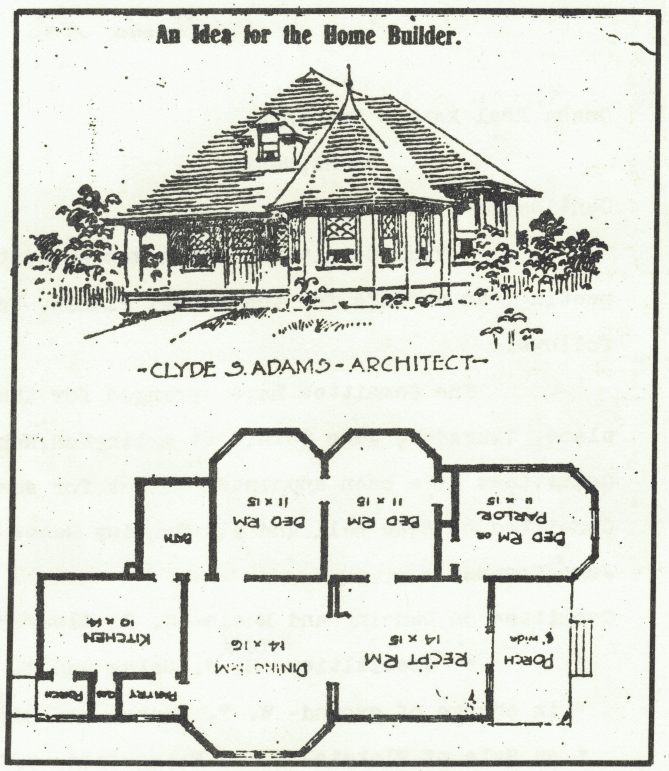
Above: In the early 1900s, the Annual Real Estate Exchange Picnic was quite an elaborate affair! A number of the committee members listed above went on to become Presidents of the Board.

Population

Omaha's population had reached 102,555 in 1900; by 1910, the census figure had increased to 124,096.

Architecture

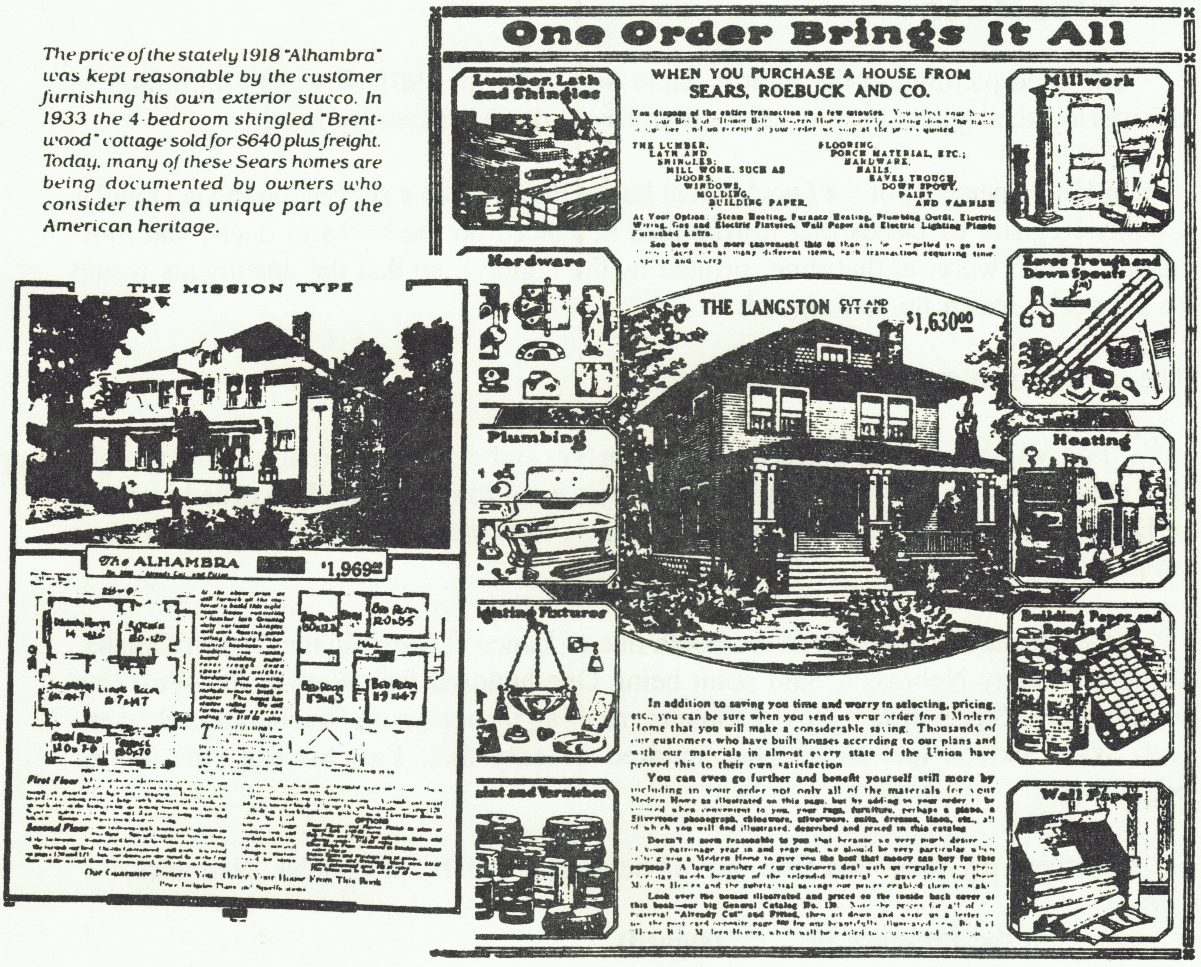
Single family homes of the period were mainly of two stories, with a wood frame or built of brick. The bungalow at right cost $1,803 to build; the design was pictured in the Omaha World-Herald in May, 1908. Among the estimated costs (which, the Herald noted, had been figured in the east): Excavating—$100; Brickwork—$130; Lumber—$300. Although the house plan shown does not seem to agree with the drawing of the house, they are presented here as the ad appeared in the Herald.



Another option available to those who wished to own a home during this era was the Sears Mail-Order House. Prospective homeowners selected the model which appealed to them from the Sears Catalog; it was then a matter of waiting until the boxcars arrived at the train depot, filled with lumber, lath, shingles, millwork, nails — even paint and varnish were supplied. The models available ranged from a six-room cottage (priced at $595.00) to a Southern-style mansion with servants quarters (offered for $5,000.00). The price also included the instructions for putting all the pieces together; most of the mail-order homes were built by the owners themselves. The company also encouraged customers to order furnishings for the homes: "You can go even further and benefit yourself still more by including in your order... your rugs, furniture, perhaps a piano, a Silvertone phonograph, chinaware..."

Sears was forced to discontinue its mail-order homes department during the Great Depression in 1937. The company was put in the uncomfortable position of having to foreclose on some of the homes it had sold — Sears had written mortgages for buyers who later lost their jobs in the economic crisis.

The price of the stately 1918 "Alhambra" was kept reasonable by the customer furnishing his own exterior stucco. In 1933 the 4-bedroom shingled "Brentwood" cottage sold for $640 plus freight. Today, many of these Sears homes are being documented by owners who consider them a unique part of the American heritage.



Typical of a Sears mail-order house sale during the 1908-37 promotion, all a customer needed to provide in buying the 1919 "Langston" was a lot and foundation. Of 37,500 homes delivered by 1927, about 25,000 were erected by the owners themselves.

Quotes From Old Coots

"I recall attending Board Meetings with my father, William H. Thomas, in the summer of 1905 while I was still in school. He was President in 1916."

Clay H. Thomas
Written in 1985

Contracts

The deed pictured at the right is dated September 5, 1901. It wasn't until later in this period that typewritten deeds outnumbered those written by hand.

In 1917, members of the Omaha Real Estate Board made a suggestion to the Douglas County Register of Deeds that instructions be placed on the backs of deeds and mortgages (which were, at that time, printed by the county), so that the documents would be properly drawn up and signed.

The deed shown reads as follows:

"For Value received I hereby sell, transfer, and set over to (name) all my right title and interest in and to the right of way conveyed to me by deed recorded in Book of Deeds at page 477, records of Douglas County, Nebraska over the following described property:

"Commencing at a point in the South line of Bancroft Street in the City of Omaha, Douglas County Nebraska, Said point being One hundred feet West of the West line of (unknown) Street in said City of Omaha, running thence South One hundred Seventy feet, West Sixteen feet North One hundred Seventy feet, East Sixteen (16) feet to beginning.

"Witness my hand this fifth day of September, 1901, at Omaha, Nebraska.

In the Presence of (signed)
G.M. Reed

"On this 5th day of September in the year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and One (1901) before me, the Subscribed, a Notary Public duly commissioned and (illegible) for, and residing in the Said County, personally came Ole C. Olsen to me (illegible) to be the Identical person described in and who executed the foregoing instrument as grantor, and acknowledges the Said instrument to be his Voluntary act and deed.

"In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal at Omaha in Said County, the Day and year above Written.

Geo. M. Reed, Notary Public

1. Ole C. Olsen
To:
Edward Emil Christiansen

For Value received I hereby sell, transfer, and set over to Edward Christiansen all my right title and interest in and to the right of way conveyed to me by deed recorded in Book of Deeds at page 477, records of Douglas County, Nebraska over the following described property:

Commencing at a point on the South line Bancroft Street in the City of Omaha Douglas County Nebr said point being One hundred feet West of the West line of street in said City of Omaha, running thence South One hundred Seventy feet, West Sixteen feet North One hundred Seventy feet, East Sixteen (16) feet to beginning

Witness my hand this fifth day of September, 1901 at Omaha, Nebraska.

In the Presence of
G. M. Reed.

Ole C. Olsen

The State of Nebraska
Douglas County

On this 5th day of September in the year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and One (1901) before me, the subscribed, a Notary Public duly commissioned and qualified for, and residing in said County, personally came Ole C. Olsen to me known to be the identical person described in and who executed the foregoing instrument as grantor, and acknowledges the said instrument to be his voluntary act and deed.

In Witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal at Omaha in said County, the day and year above written

Geo. M. Reed
Notary Public
My commission Expires

Geo. M. Reed
Notary Public
Dec. 13th 1903
NOTARIAL SEAL

The State of Nebraska
Douglas County } ss.
Entered on Numerical Index and filed for record in the Register of Deeds Office of said County the 9th day of October 1901 at 10 o'clock A. M.
THOMAS E. CROCKER
Register of Deeds.

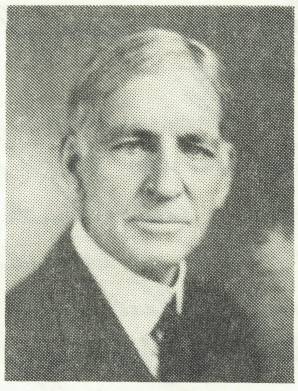
Presidents Of The Omaha Real Estate Exchange and Omaha Real Estate Board 1900-1919



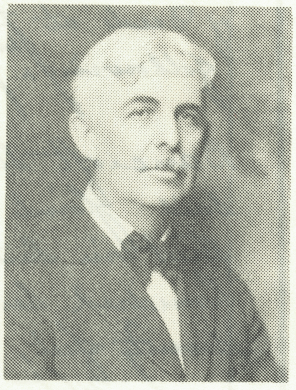
A. P. Tukey
1900



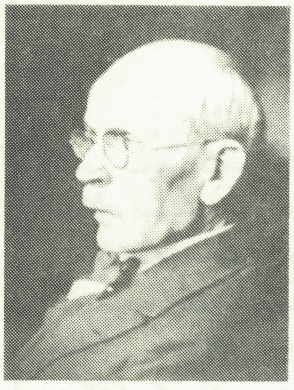
A. H. Green
1901-1902



C. F. Harrison
1903, 1915



George B. Wallace
1904-1905



Walter L. Selby
1906



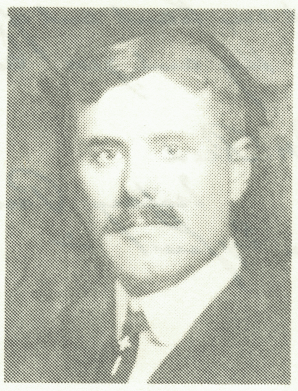
S. P. Bostwick
1907



W. T. Graham
1908



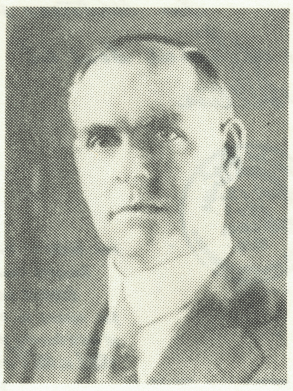
John W. Robbins
1909



Fred Wead
1910



Charles George
1911



George Morton
1912



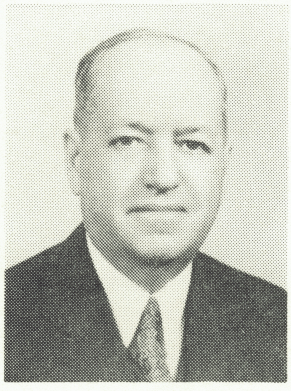
B. R. Hastings
1913



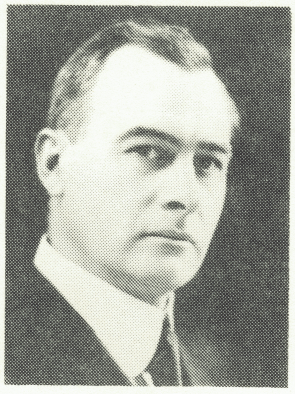
F. H. Myers
1914



W. H. Thomas
1916



E. M. Slater
1917



William
McFarland
1918



H. M. Christie
1919

There have been seven sets of Board Presidents who have been father and son:

E. A. Benson (1889-91, 1896-99) and Grant A. Benson (1933)
Walter L. Selby (1906) and Wayne C. Selby (1946)
B. R. Hastings (1913) and Robert C. Hastings (1949)
W. H. Thomas (1916) and Clay H. Thomas (1938)
R. R. Otis (1940) and William L. Otis (1961)
Theodore H. Maenner (1928) and John R. Maenner (1967)
Harold J. Grove (1948) and H. James Grove (1972)

Two brothers have also each served a term as President : Lloyd M. Peterson (1952) and Harold L. Peterson (1963). Leonard Geschwender (1979) and Arlyne E. Geschwender (1986) are the first husband and wife both elected President.