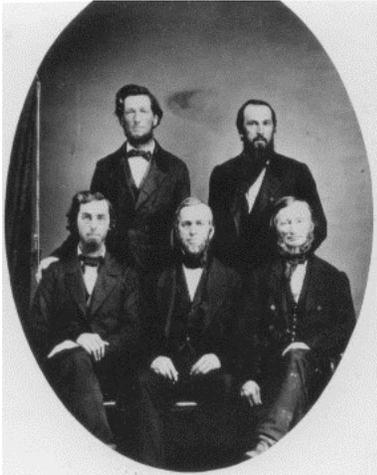


Birth of a College

10th in the Keepsakes series, originally published March 1, 2007

Founded in 1863, Kansas State University celebrated its birthday on February 16; however, the early inhabitants of Manhattan had a college prior to that date! The first settlers arrived in the area as early as 1854. Isaac T. Goodnow, and other members of the New England Emigrant Aid Company, reached the vicinity in 1855, looking for a place to settle and promote Kansas Territory as a “free state.” Once they viewed the beautiful surroundings, they looked no further for a town



College Promoters
Top: Harford, Schenbly
Bottom: Marlatt, Denison,
Goodnow

site! When others arrived they adopted

Manhattan as the name for their town as a compromise between those who migrated from Boston and Cincinnati.

Many of the settlers were well educated and, after discussing the importance of establishing a college, they obtained a charter for the Bluemont Central College Association from the Territory’s legislative assembly in 1858 to create a school. The incorporators of the college were Goodnow, Washington Marlatt, S. D. Houston, C. E. Blood, George S. Park, S. C. Popmeroy, W. A. McCollom, and T. H. Webb.

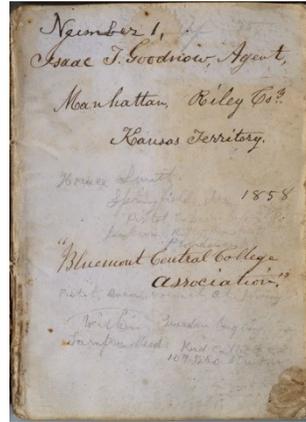
Early Manhattanites contributed funds for the erection of Bluemont Central College but financial support was obtained largely by solicitation in the East, primarily through the efforts of Isaac Goodnow. As a result, a cornerstone for the building was laid on May 10, 1859, with approximately 300 people witnessing the ceremony. Located at what is now the northwest corner of Claflin Rd. and College Ave., construction proceeded quickly and by the end of the year the building was ready for occupancy. The three story limestone structure measured 44 x 66 feet and opened its doors to students on January 9, 1860.

Out of necessity, the college was actually a primary and preparatory school because students were not prepared to obtain a college degree. Washington Marlatt served as principal and 53 students were enrolled that winter, but only 15 the next fall.



Bluemont Central College,
painting by C.E. Holroyd

On January 29, 1861, Kansas was admitted as the 34th state. The trustees of Bluemont College soon lobbied for the “State University at Manhattan.” A bill passed by the legislature authorizing this to

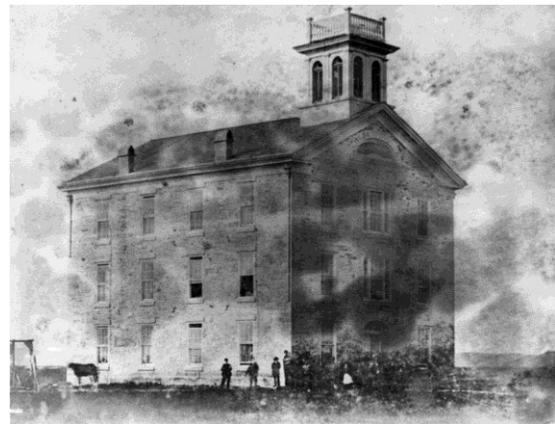


From the Account Books of Isaac Goodnow

happen was vetoed by Governor Charles Robinson, who happened to be from Lawrence and preferred that location! Without this blockage, it is safe to say that the college in Manhattan would have been known as the University of Kansas (KU was not established in Lawrence until November of 1863)!

Nonetheless, the citizens of Manhattan were not to be denied! On February 3, 1863, the State of Kansas accepted the provisions of the [Morrill Act](#) and the trustees of Bluemont College offered it to the State of Kansas because of the financial difficulties they were experiencing with the College.

With its 100 acres, building, library, and furnishings, it was an offer the legislature could not refuse! On February 16, 1863, a bill was passed transferring the College's assets to the state, making that date K-State's Founders' Day! An act passed on March 3rd designating the institution as Kansas State Agricultural College.



Bluemont Central College

To the states that accepted its terms, the Morrill Act provided 30,000 acres of land for each member of the House and the Senate. With its two senators and one representative, Kansas received 90,000 acres, the sale of which was to be used for:

...the endowment, support, and maintenance of at least one college where the leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the states may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.

It is from this act that Kansas State University became a “land grant college.”

On September 2, 1863, the college opened with 52 students, 26 male and 26 female. Joseph Denison was appointed president and taught mental and moral science, and ancient languages. Other teachers that fall included: J. G. Schnebly, mathematics and natural science; Belle M. Haines, preparatory department; and Eliza C. Beckwith, music on [melodeon](#) and piano. The first graduating class was in 1867 when five students received degrees.



Farm Machinery Hall

The first building on the present K-State campus was a stone barn, constructed in 1872. It was remodeled and in 1875 classes were relocated from Bluemont College. The Bluemont College building was destroyed in 1883 while the original

barn, Farm Machinery Hall (located in the area of Cardwell Hall), was razed in 1963.

Today, with approximately 190,000 graduates and an enrollment exceeding 23,000, the people of Kansas have every reason to be proud of the oldest public institution of higher learning in the state, Kansas State University!



**1863/64
Catalog
Illustration**

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Sources: History of the Kansas State College for Agriculture and Applied Science by Julius T. Willard, and Photograph Collection, University Archives; the photograph of Bluemont College is courtesy the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.