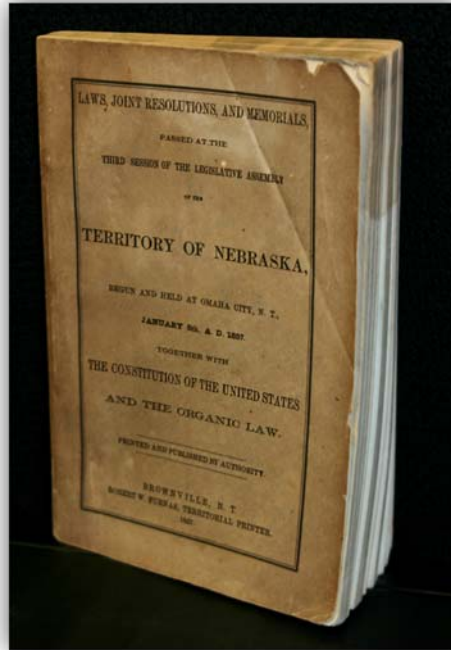


CLINE WILLIAMS

The Run-up to Statehood

“So you can see that I ran twice for Congress in four months.”
Turner Marquett, *Speech Commemorating Nebraska’s Silver Anniversary*,
Lincoln, 1892



This year our firm celebrates 160 years of practice and March 1 is the 150th anniversary of Nebraska’s statehood. Our founder, Turner Marquett was twice elected to Congress in four months—once in the provisional 1866 election, and again in 1867.

Nebraska’s admission to the Union was delayed for nearly three years by reconstruction politics, local opposition to statehood, and a presidential veto. In a provisional election on June 2nd, 1866, Nebraska voters narrowly approved a state constitution and elected a Republican slate of state officers, including Turner Marquett as United States Representative. Statehood then bogged down in President Johnson’s pocket veto of the initial statehood resolution and Republican opposition to the white-only suffrage provision in Nebraska’s Constitution. The Enabling Act required Nebraska to hold another election in October, 1866. Marquett’s close friend John Taffe was elected as U.S. Representative in the event of Nebraska’s admission. Marquett defeated J. Sterling Morton for the office of Congressional delegate if the territory was not admitted.

Marquett spent the winter in Washington lobbying for statehood and waiting to take his seat on short notice. Congress passed a second statehood resolution in January 1867. President Johnson vetoed the resolution but both houses of Congress voted overwhelmingly to override the President. Nebraska changed the offensive constitutional provision. On March 1, 1867, the President reluctantly signed the statehood proclamation.

The term of the 39th Congress ended three days later on March 4. To protect their full terms, Nebraska’s senators declined to take their seats. Turner Marquett, the man who had won election to the House of Representatives twice in four months, took his oath of office and traded a term of two years for two days.