

CLINE WILLIAMS

Higher education, The University and Governor Butler's impeachment

In 1871, the Nebraska House voted to impeach the state's first governor, David Butler. Our founder Turner Marquett defended Governor Butler in the impeachment trial before the Nebraska Senate.

One of the major grievances of the governor's political opponents was his push to construct University Hall in Lincoln and open the doors of the University of Nebraska before the deadline expired to receive gifts of public lands under the federal Morrill Act of 1862. The articles of impeachment alleged several acts of financial misconduct relating to the University Hall project, including alleged mismanagement of funds and extortion. Following a lengthy trial, the state Senate acquitted Butler on ten charges and convicted him of a single misdemeanor. The state Supreme Court then removed Governor Butler from office.

The Legislature nullified Governor Butler's conviction in 1877. The following year a Lincoln citizens' committee solicited subscriptions "to enable the University of Nebraska to repair and make safe the University Building." Political agitation to condemn University Hall and move the University to another community prompted this fund drive. Marquett and his law partner Amasa Cobb pledged two of the highest individual subscriptions for the restoration project.

Governor Butler's impeachment trial is part of a long history between the University of Nebraska and the law practice founded by Turner Marquett. The famous American legal scholar Roscoe Pound became a partner in the Firm while serving as Dean of the Nebraska Law School. Marquett's partner Frank Hall endowed what is now the Sheldon Art Museum and donated its original art collection. Earl Cline served eleven years on the Board of Regents, including a term as president. The Firm serves not only the University, but also many other institutions of higher education across the state on a wide variety of matters. Its attorneys also serve as adjunct faculty, guest lecturers, and volunteers, including at both of the law schools within Nebraska.

