



FIRST GRADUATES

The 150th Anniversary of the Class of 1867



On June 26, 1867, Emma Haines gave the valedictory address at the first graduation ceremony for Kansas State Agricultural College—known today as Kansas State University. As this 18-year-old woman spoke, she reflected on the relationships that had developed during K-State's first four years. Her words affected many. One newspaper reported that "when she spoke of parting with her school-mates the teardrops stole down many cheeks."

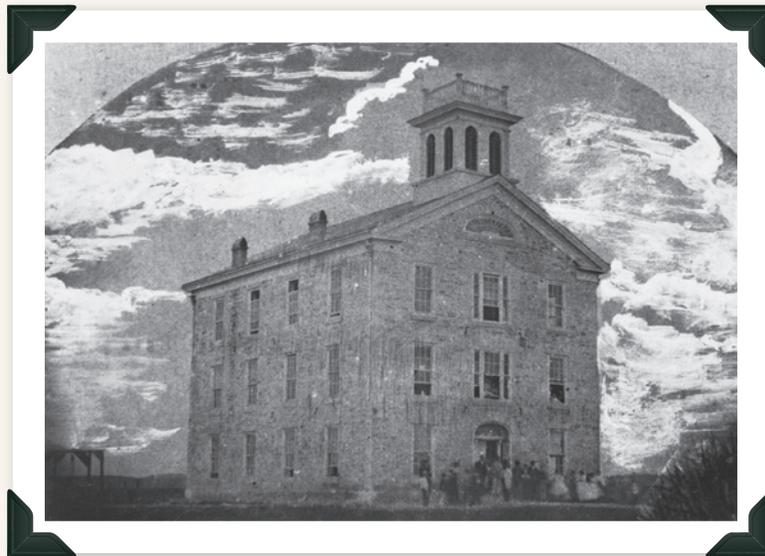
This year is the sesquicentennial of that inaugural graduating class. Their journey began when K-State's doors first opened in September 1863 to 52 students, equally divided between men and women. Starting just two years after statehood, K-State's curricula in the early years included courses such as Latin, mathematics, biology, philosophy, geology, agronomy, horticulture, and agricultural chemistry. This academic

foundation allowed Isaac Goodnow, the Kansas superintendent of public instruction, to boast: "The necessity no longer exists to send away to other States our young men and women to [be] educated. Intelligent

L. Emma Haines, John J. Points, and Martha A. White. Emma Haines was the valedictorian and Points was the salutatorian, and the three women were the first females to graduate from a land-grant college.

These inaugural graduates were very capable. For example, Belle Haines ran the preparatory department in 1863–1864 to prepare students for the college curriculum. She became a college student herself in 1864 and graduated in three years. As noted earlier, her sister, Emma, graduated at the age of 18. White taught three courses as a

resident graduate for an ill professor during the fall 1867 term. All could speak Latin, and some proved it during the graduation ceremony. One report commended the first five by stating, "In thorough scholarship, it is believed they will compare favorably with the graduates of any other institution in the country."



The Bluemont Central College building was donated to the state in 1863 to become part of Kansas State Agricultural College.

emigrants can now come, with the assurance that their educational wants are to be provided for."

Of the hundreds of students attending K-State during its first four years, the five graduates of 1867 were Henry L. Denison, Belle M. Haines,



Belle Haines



Isaac Goodnow



Emma Haines' diploma

Services were held in the chapel of the Bluemont Central College building that stood on the northwest corner of College Avenue and Claflin Road. The three-story stone building included instructional rooms, apartments for college officers, and a library on the first and second floors, with the chapel on the third floor. The exercises lasted parts of four days, with sermons and examinations of all students before concluding with a five-hour graduation program on Wednesday, June 26.

Concerning graduation, the *Manhattan Independent* reported, "We have never seen so many persons assembled in our town upon any occasion. We were especially gratified to see so much interest manifested in our noble and rapidly improving College, and to see so many distinguished persons, and friends of education from abroad."

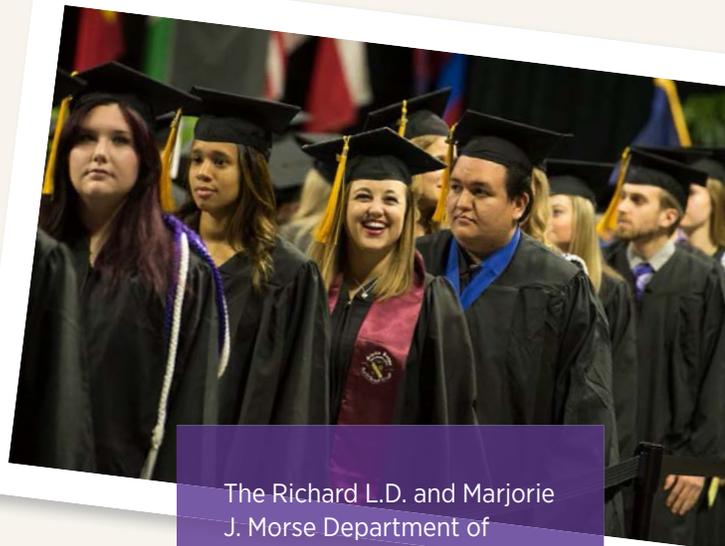
A trending topic was a state suffrage referendum scheduled for November 1867, and Points and White commented on it in their addresses. A newspaper reported that Points, the first graduate to speak, "alluded to the fact that three

of his classmates not one whit below in scholarship or in genius, would go forth into the world disqualified and debarred by legal enactments from exercising fully all the powers with which nature has endowed them and which with patient study they have so sedulously cultivated. ... [Points'] remarks were greeted with prolonged applause." Unfortunately, the referendum failed among the white male electorate, and it was 1912 before a state constitutional amendment granted women voting rights in state elections.

Emma Haines was the final graduate to speak, and in addition to her emotional tribute to her classmates, she concluded with "brave words of hopefulness for the future, of courage and patience" to inspire the audience and her colleagues in their future endeavors. Although the next graduation did not occur for four more years—when four

women and one man earned degrees in 1871—the first alumni stand as examples of the land-grant mission to provide practical education to all.

Spring College of Arts & Sciences graduates make their way into the auditorium. May 2017 marked 150 years since the university's first commencement.



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