



Entering Howard County

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE HOWARD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 304 / St. Paul, Nebraska / 68873

www.cornhusker.net/~minefchbs.htm

Summer Issue 2001

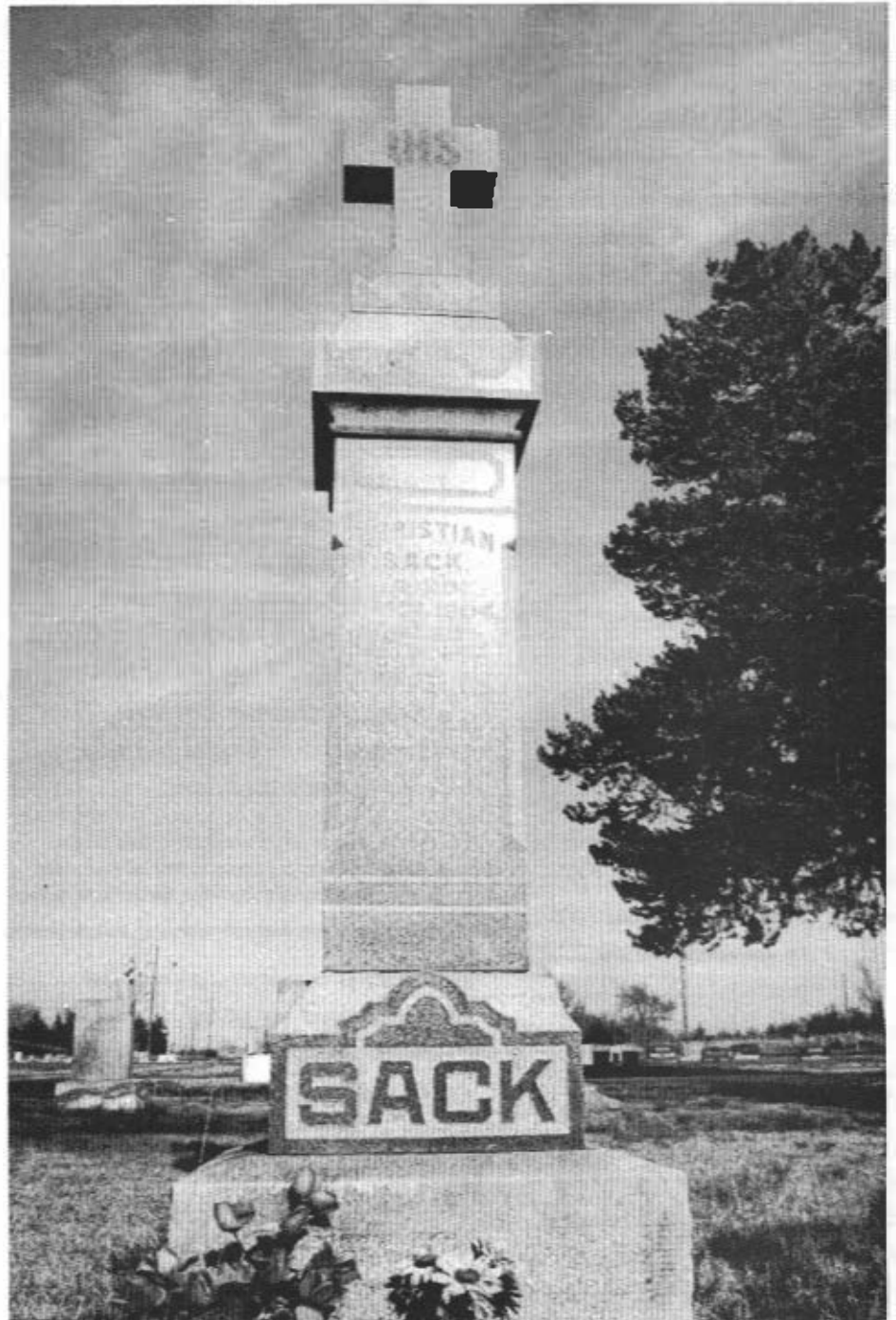
My FAVORITE Places IN HOWARD County

By
Ron W. Sack

Part two in a series of four.

What started out as a simple trip to the Elmwood Cemetery, with my grandmother, evolved into a lifelong love affair with Howard County, family history, and the prairie of Nebraska. It was during this time alone with me that she started handing down to me, bit by bit, the history of our family. I was just a boy; only six. It goes like this...

Look for stories on Vanis' Store of St. Libory and Leth's IGA of St. Paul in future issues of *Entering Howard County*.



The Sack family plot at Elmwood Cemetery in St. Paul, Nebraska. Annual visits made every Memorial Day for over twenty years with my grandmother, Pauline Sack, formed my relationship with Howard County family history and the prairie. Photo courtesy of Ron W. Sack.

"Ron, would you go to the basement and get the cemetery flowers and wicker baskets hanging in the northeast corner," she asked.

Of course I would get them. I would also venture to her garage and grab the hoe, spade, bushel baskets and rake.

For her, the preparation was just as important as the deed. She made going to the cemetery an EVENT.

My grandmother came from an era which I never knew. She was one of those strong women whom the great photographer and writer Dorothea Lange said "carried us through the Great Depression." Determined and independent, grandmother guided the family through the tough times, always remembering that certain traditions had their place. Back in the 1930s individuals, not the city of St. Paul, took care and maintained family plots. Thus, the hoe, spade, rake, and bushel basket became necessities for her annual rituals.

Even though the city maintained the cemetery in the years that followed, grandmother still said it needed her touch. Besides all of her grooming tools and artificial flowers, she would sometimes bring freshly picked irises, mums, and peonies. The scent of the peonies would fill the car and linger the entire trip back to town.

Most considered gloves a necessity—but nor grandmother. She wanted to feel the earth; and to let the earth feel her.

When we arrived at the cemetery, we'd step out of the car and walk to the family plots. We then made the sign of the cross and prayed, meditated, and reflected. The wind responded by whispering into our ears. This was our moment with the prairie.

After our quiet time, we then raked, clipped, weeded, and cleaned the family plots.



Graduation day 1934 for Pauline Sidel Sack from St. Paul High. She would have a strong influence in my life to preserve our family, town, and county history. Photo courtesy of Ron W. Sack.

These are women of the American soil. They are a hardy stock. They are of the roots of our country. These women represent a different mode of life. They are of themselves a very great American style. They live with courage and purpose, a part of our tradition.

—Great American photographer and writer Dorothea Lange, speaking of the women who carried America through the Great Depression.

Grandmother would not forget anyone. After my grandfather's grave site was manicured, we would walk over to my aunt Darlene's plot and repeat the process. After that, it was over to grandmother's parents—William and Anna Sidel.

There was also Jack Smolczek, a distant family cousin who never married. "We must not forget good old Jack," she said. She also remembered another bachelor, Paul Palacz, who worked for us on the farm. And of course we couldn't forget Father Gleason. Rarely did anyone put a

flower on his grave—but grandmother did. Perhaps her most powerful reason as to why she did this was, "Someone needs to remember them."

For me it was my first lesson in family and county history. It first started out as "Who died when," and "Who married so-and-so." But, as I grew, so did the questions. I later asked "What were they like," "How did it feel," and "What did it mean." I wanted emotional roots in a history which only my grandmother could give.

Our event wasn't complete until we arrived home and our from the fridge came an ice-cold soda and from the oven came a freshly baked pastry. We'd sit and talk about how the times have changed and how we have changed. Those days at the kitchen table with my grandmother were the best therapy a young boy could ask for.

She and I would continue this ritual together for over twenty years. On Memorial Day weekend 1997, I stopped by to gather the flowers, the wicker baskets, the rake, the hoe, and the bushel basket. But grandmother didn't want to come. "I'm not feeling well," she stated. "You go, and I'll see it tomorrow." I would take her out there the next day, but it was our last visit together at the cemetery. She died 15 months later on August 6, 1998.

For me, I always seem to go back to one moment on Memorial Day weekend 1984. She and I are at the cemetery, and we begin to reflect. She looks over and points to my grandfather's grave. I then begin to recite his history...his life. At the end of reciting, I proudly exclaimed, "I remember, grandmother, I remember." And she leans over and says ever so gently, "I know, Ron, that is what I am hoping for."

Royal Coachmen Car Club to restore historic Farmers' Union gas station in St. Paul.

By Ron W. Sack

Cheers to the Royal Coachmen of St. Paul for their plan to preserve the old Farmers' Union gas station. Located on the corner of two brick streets—Seventh and Indian—the building was one of the first gas stations constructed in the Loup River Valley. When finished, it will be a tribute to the rich history of the Farmers' Union as well as a salute to our agricultural heritage. The Coachmen have long supported the restoration of the automobile and have brought many people to the city to see their classic car shows.

This preservation project by the Coachmen joins these others in helping St. Paul establish itself as “a historic town”: Gruber House; Historical Village, courtyard, and the soon-to-be-completed transportation museum in the Union Pacific depot; continued preservation of the Howard County courthouse and grounds; baseball mural on the historic Cushman building; and the developing baseball museum in the historic Masonic Temple building. Also impressive are the efforts of several business owners on Howard Avenue who have painted and restored their building's exterior over the past three years. All of this is a form of economic development.

The Coachmen need your help. Anyone wishing to donate money, historic photographs, and artifacts is encouraged to contact their group. For additional information, please contact Jerzy Sack, 1024 Liberty Road, St. Paul, NE 68873, 308 754-4072; or Baird Sautter, Hwy. 92, Palmer, NE 68864, 308 894-9406.

St. Paul has long supported sports and athletic activities, which is fine. It's great to see a growing interest by



groups, businesses, and individuals to preserve and promote our architecture, art and history.

Well done, Coachmen, for putting St. Paul on the map again!

Remembering St. Paul.

By Elma ●Neill

Did you know that in the mid 1930s, there was a business in the old NAPA building (Taylor Block) where people could bring their old pillows and mattresses and have them made like new again? It was operated by the county agent, Mr. Krueger. There was a charge for this service, but it was very minimal, since it was during the Great Depression. WPA employees worked in

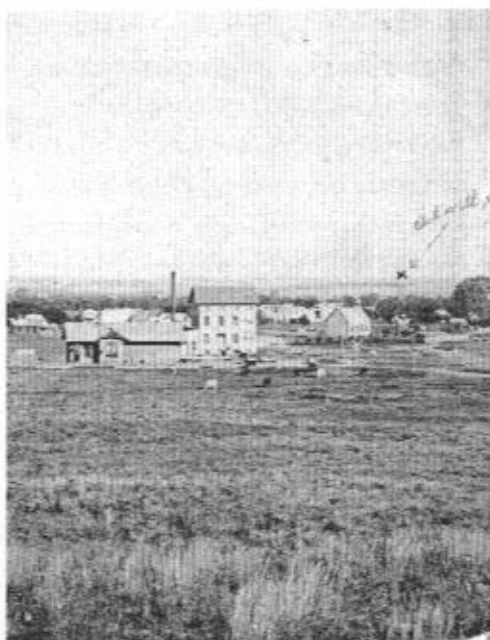
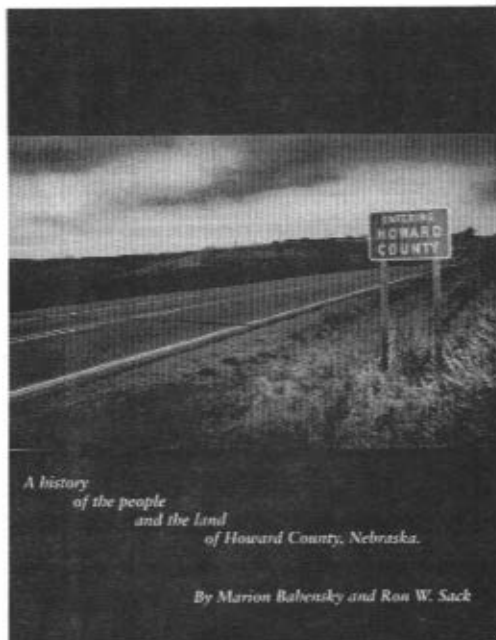
this building. Also, when the REA arrived during this time, Krueger also purchased/sold supplies for wiring homes; again at a very low cost. This business was in what is now the Office Bar. People could come in and purchase supplies at a very low cost.

I worked for Mr Krueger from 1932-41. There never was a nicer man.



Building has historic ties to Howard County; restoration donor needed.

A year ago, the HCCHS located the original Union Pacific depot coal shed and outhouse from St. Paul. Marian Odabasi, the owner, has recently donated it to the Society for use as a much-needed storage shed. The Society is in need of an individual, family, or group to donate money for its restoration. If donors come forward, they will have the option of having the building named in memory of whomever they wish.



“Entering Howard County” book review.

By Richard E. Jensen

The Howard County Historical Society should be commended for producing the history book *Entering Howard County*. This history gathers together in one publication a wide range of historical data concerning the development of the county. A unique approach is used by making extensive use of early histories and reminiscences to cover the days of white settlement. Recent history is not overlooked. “Growing Pains” provides an overview of the years from 1972 to 1999.

People from differing European backgrounds settled the county. Among the first and perhaps the largest group were Danish Americans and many directly from Denmark. Their struggles and successes in the county are detailed.

Many other topics are included to give a full account of the county.

Agriculture was, and still is, the backbone of the county’s economy, and a chapter on the subject is especially interesting. The chapter titled “Our Family’s Melon Patch” provides an insight into one aspect of agriculture rarely found in history books.

Other chapters discuss various businesses, civic organizations, governmental units, and other organizations. A lengthy section devoted to family histories will be a boon to genealogists.

Good illustrations can enhance the quality of a history book, not to mention its sales. Excellent photographs abound in *Entering Howard County* to depict people and places from the past. Local residents provided nearly all of these. Scattered throughout the book are some superb modern photos of significant sites and buildings.

History books of this kind are sometimes produced by a small committee who some people might view as elitist. Production of *Entering Howard County* was the opposite. Individual family members authored about 180

family histories. Their discussions with relatives and friends about the past heightened countless peoples’ interest in history. The impact of the book had reached many people months before its publication.

I have seen more than a few counties and local historical societies undertake a variety of projects during my tenure of thirty years with the Nebraska State Historical Society as senior anthropologist and formerly as State Historic Preservation Officer. *Entering Howard County* is one of the most successful both as a history and for the positive impact it had on so many residents, past and present.

Richard E. Jensen is a Senior Research Anthropologist with the Nebraska State Historical Society and former Nebraska State Historic Preservation Officer.

Photos above: *Entering Howard County* dust jacket and spread titled “Our Cities, Towns, Villages and Settlements.”

Veterans' exhibit history.

The Howard County Historical Society's veterans' exhibit is important to Howard County because of the rich military history dating back to 1871. During this time two companies, one infantry and one of cavalry, camped here for summer duty on the Loup River near the Larry Kiser farm. Some units made it as far as the Cotesfield Halfway House on their way to Fort Hartsuff north of Ord, Nebraska.

Information secured from the GAR records tell of members patrolling the streets of St. Paul on Saturday nights, due to the rowdiness of the railroad workers and cattle drivers. This was another factor of the history of the military in Howard County.

Members of the Society, after observing the many military artifacts available and learning of the military history of Howard County, decided to have an exhibit in the small room available in the Gruber House.

In 1995 a few members thought there should be some way to recognize all of the Howard County veterans. A committee was formed consisting of Ray and Virginia Leth, Jerry and Janet Hruza, and Evelyn Dvorak. Money was needed for the project so the idea was presented to the members of the American Legion at their meeting in St. Paul. They dug into their pockets and thirty-one members donated a total of \$51 to get the exhibit started. The committee put together a form for veterans to complete and return for filing. The forms are then retyped, placed in plastic sleeves, and filed in three-ring notebooks.

In 1998 we applied for a grant from the Sonderup Trust and received \$550



A partial display of the veterans' exhibit in the lower level of the Gruber House.

to construct a display case for guns. Ben Weiser designed and built the case which was completed for the 1999 opening. Later, two small display cases were donated and needed repair. Thanks to Mike Schmidt and Ray Rubesh for refinishing the cases of which we are quite proud. Wilma Poss also purchased styrofoam for the making of mannequins to display uniforms.

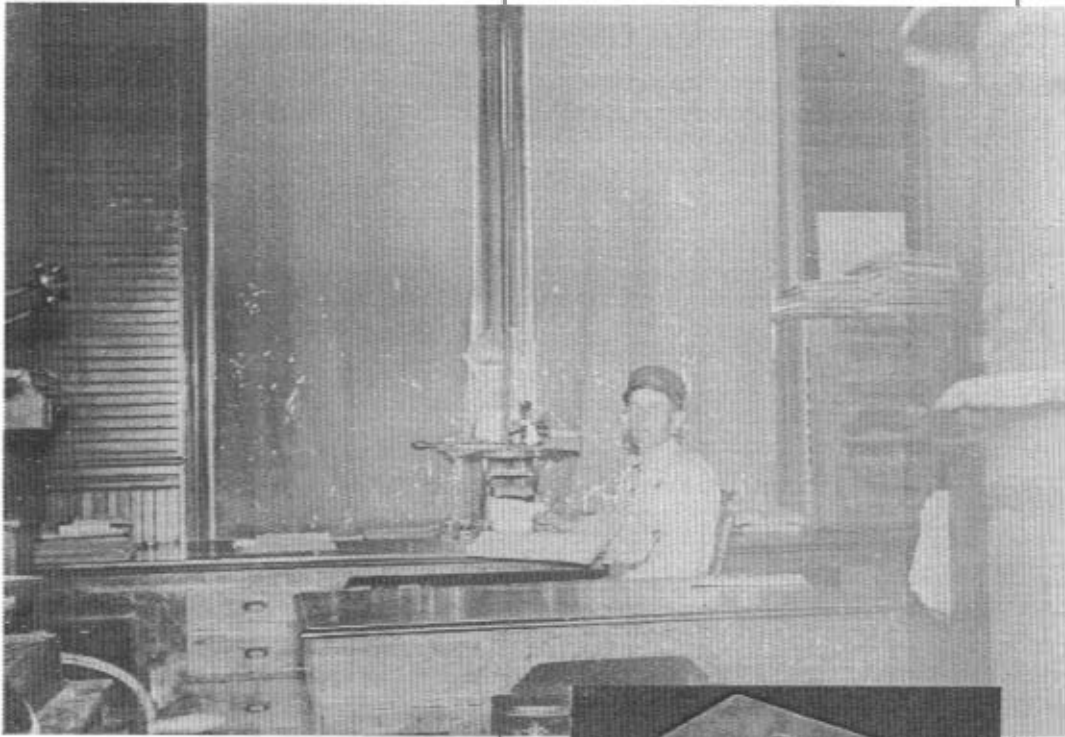
Early in 2000 the Baseball Museum moved from the Gruber House lower level and into a renovated building on St. Paul's historic Howard Avenue. The Howard County Historical Society Board voted to allow the veterans to occupy this now open and prime exhibit space in the Gruber House. Many volunteer hours were spent by the five committee members, Ray Rubesh, Mike Schmidt, Leo Blaha and Donald Jares in preparation for the Memorial Day opening. The mannequins were finally made, walls painted, border designs stenciled, and wall displays hung. The garage walls were replastered and repainted as well as carpet laid and a sign was placed above the garage door.

At the present time, we have approx-

imately 500 entries of Howard County veterans in our war books. The entries are from the Spanish-American War to the present, but we need everyone's cooperation to get all of our veterans recognized. We are also interested in getting stories of the wars by anyone who wishes to share them. These will be made available in another book for future generations to read. Virginia Leth has volunteered many hours of research, filing, and typing to make it possible for anyone to access the many Howard County veterans.

The committee wishes to thank everyone for their support, but we still need your help in sending entries for the books, any war stories, and memorabilia from the Korean, Vietnam and Persian Gulf War era. The stories and artifacts we collect now are another chapter in the military history of Howard County.

Ray and Virginia Leth, Jerry and Janet Hruza, and Evelyn Dvorak
Committee Members

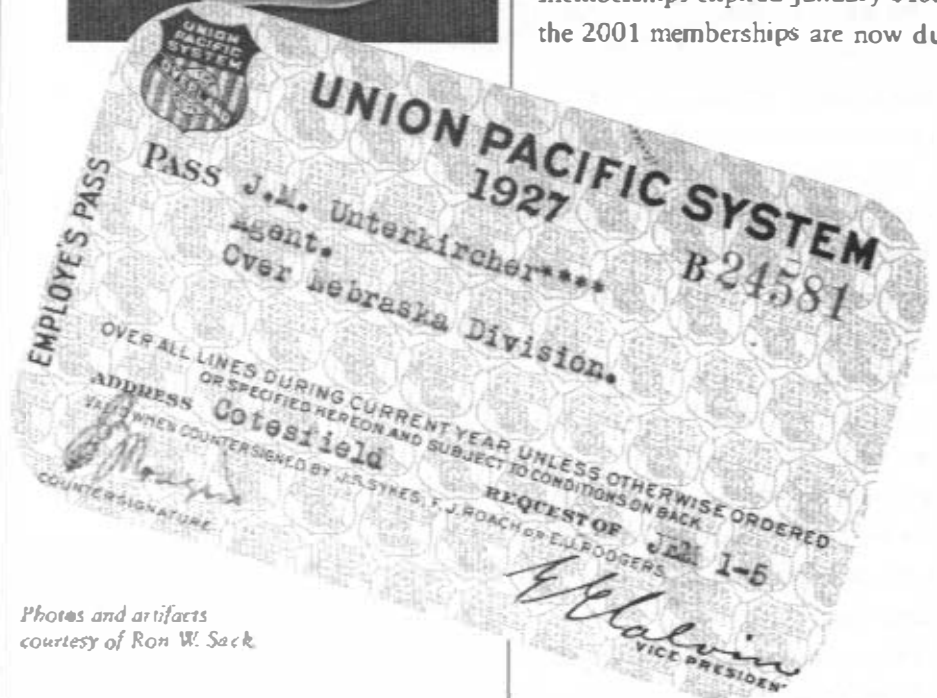


Cotesfield's Union Pacific depot remembered.

By Ron W. Sack

Union Pacific's roots in Cotesfield date back to 1882. That's when the railroad arrived in Cotesfield and continued north to Burwell. Records indicate the U.P. Railroad would operate passenger service to Cotesfield until the 1940s. The depot was then dismantled.

Pictured above is J.M. Unterkircher, agent for the Union Pacific depot in Cotesfield. The photo is circa 1920 and is believed to be the only known photo of the depot's interior. Also shown are his watch fob which proudly states "Cotesfield, Nebr." and Unterkircher's employee's pass. Copies of these artifacts will be donated to the Howard County Historical Society and displayed in the transportation museum in the Union Pacific depot.



Photos and artifacts courtesy of Ron W. Sack

From the President.

By Mena Sprague

Time is going by much too fast, although I do love spring and summer.

Last newsletter I thanked the members who helped with our Howard County History book *Entering Howard County* I forgot to mention Carl Huebner, who also did a lot of work on the book. Carl is always willing to help and we do appreciate him.

Marvin Webb, the architect working on the depot, spoke at the Rotary Club in St. Paul last week. The meeting was well attended by Rotary members and our society board of directors. Marvin gave an interesting and informative talk. And yes, we also liked your engineer's hat. Hope you all have an enjoyable summer.

One quick reminder that all 2000 memberships expired January 31st and the 2001 memberships are now due.

What people are saying about our 544 page history book "Entering Howard County."



"...an impressive county history."

Dr. John Mark Nielsen, Professor of Literature at Dana College

"The Howard County Historical Society should be commended for producing *Entering Howard County*...I have seen more than a few counties and local historical societies undertake a variety of projects during my tenure of thirty years with the Nebraska State Historical Society as senior anthropologist and formerly as State Historic Preservation Officer. *Entering Howard County* is one of the most successful..."

Senior Research Anthropologist Richard E. Jensen with the Nebraska State Historical Society

"All in all this is the best county history book of the many I have read. It sets a remarkably high standard for county histories of the future, not just in Nebraska, but the entire nation."

Lincoln Historian, Lincoln Journal-Star columnist, and bookstore owner James L. McKee

Photocopy or cut along dotted line and send in.

Yes, please send _____ copies of the 544 page history book *Entering Howard County* for me.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

1.) Number of History Books: _____ x \$75.00 = _____

2.) Shipping and Handling (\$5.00 per book, if desired): _____ x \$ 5.00 = _____

3.) Tax:

5% Nebraska Sales Tax (\$3.75 per book, if purchased in state): _____ x \$ 3.75 = _____

OR 6% St. Paul City Sales Tax (\$4.50, if purchased in St. Paul): _____ x \$ 4.50 = _____

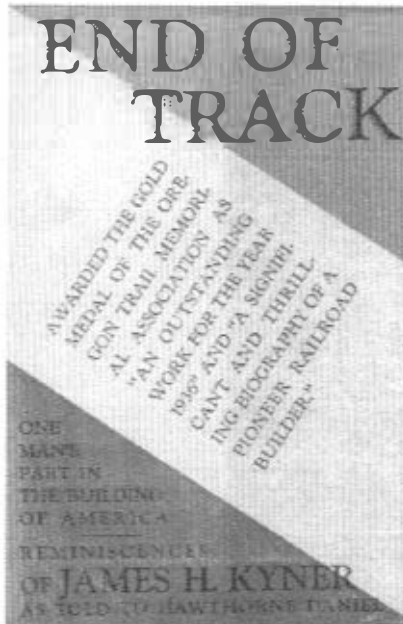
Make checks payable to the Howard County Historical Society

P.O. Box 304, St. Paul, Nebraska 68573

Total: \$ = _____

Entering Howard County

Historical Society in search of book.



James H. Kyner helped build the railroad in Howard County in the late 1800s. Kyner remembered stories and events of St. Paul and Howard County in his book titled *End of Track*. The stories prove to be a valuable account of life in Howard County and the creation of the railroad. Currently, the Society is seeking a copy for its archives. If anyone wishes to donate a copy, please contact the Historical Society.

Entering Howard County

PUBLISHER:
Howard County Historical Society

EDITOR:
Ron W. Sack

LAYOUT AND DESIGN:
Ron W. Sack

CIRCULATION:
300+

MAILING ADDRESS:
P.O. Box 304, St. Paul, NE 68873

**MEMBERSHIP (INCLUDING NEWSLETTER
SUBSCRIPTION & MAILINGS):**
\$10 per person

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