

Historically Speaking

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Take a Gander Into the Past

By Julie Spilinek

During the 1930s to the late 1980s various businesses would give customers green stamps with their purchases as an enticement to patronize them. The stamps were placed in booklets or folders which could then be traded for merchandise.

Sperry and Hutchinson began offering these stamps to U.S. retailers in 1896, such as supermarkets, gasoline filling stations and various shops. These retailers bought the stamps from S&H and then gave them as a bonus to shoppers—based on the dollar amount of purchases.

According to Leo Blaha the businesses in St. Paul that gave green stamps at one time were the Fashionette, the St. Paul Co-op, and the Farmer's Union. The Model Grocery gave King Korn stamps,

another type of trading stamp. The patrons of the Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic School saved enough of the green stamps to purchase an organ (see picture). If anyone knows of other businesses that gave “bonuses” for purchases or if anyone acquired a unique item using stamps or other incentives, I will include this information in the next issue.



Left, Green Stamp representative, Sister M. Hedwig, Altar Society President Evelyn Dvorak, and Father Figlerski with the organ purchased with green stamps.

The Gander That 'Goosed' The Ladies

Evelyn Dvorak received two newspaper clippings about a goose that made life interesting for the residents of Elba during the 1950s. The clippings were sent by Mark Hartnett of St. Paul, Minnesota, a descendant of Alex's

owner. In addition to the original articles, Mark added the following:

A Message From the President *Jessie Kiser*

I want to thank the Danish Immigrant Museum for loaning the Howard County Historical Society the Danish Exhibit.

Thanks to all the Society members for their help with the BRAN (Bicycle Ride Across Nebraska) day and for GCA Days, too. Your help is greatly appreciated.

The Historical Society is open every weekend until Labor Day weekend from 1 to 4 p.m.

“One autumn in the 1940s or early 1950s while John still lived and worked on the farm with Alex, the hunting party was finished for the day. The men were around the cars and were getting ready to clean their guns. One of the guests, Mr. Art Callahan, jokingly took a bead on Alex who was waddling across the yard.

“Thinking his shotgun was empty, he pulled the trigger. It was not empty! The blast surprised everyone, including Alex. He took off around the chicken coop. Dad says there was silence as everyone presumed the bird would go off to die. Instead, he came back, tearing around the coop, honking and mad as hell. The hunters got in the cars until he calmed down.”

Elba's Old Alex Solves Home Problem

By Jack Bailey

ELBA—Old Alex knows what it means to be deserted and left to rustle for himself. He knows also what it means to be booted out of a new-found home, lock, stock and barrel. But he holds no grudge and goes on about his way

Two easy ways to redeem:
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S&H Green stamps, such as the ones above, were used to buy many items for families in the area for many years.

until he finds a new home where he feels he is wanted.

Old Alex is a 27-year-old African tame goose, and 27 years is a long while in a tame goose's life. Old Alex was born and raised on the John Hartneck place at the outskirts of Elba. He lived there until he was 26 years old, then his master, who also had grown old with the years, was taken to a rest home and Old Alex was left alone to rustle for himself, something he hadn't been accustomed to doing.

He spent several weeks alone, then decided he didn't like this lonesome life. He started down the road one morning hunting for a new



Old Alex went in search of a home after his original owner died. He took up residence for a time at the Farmers Grain and Supply Elevator in Elba, then eventually became a permanent resident at the John C. Johnson home. Alex's picture accompanied newspaper stories on his escapades, including the one with Johnson and his grandchildren.

home. He arrived at the Farmers Grain and Supply Elevator at Elba and spotted Henry (Hank) Svoboda, who operates the elevator. He looked the place over, then sauntered back home. Hank said that he did this for about a week before finally deciding that he'd move to the elevator and take up his abode there.

Hank felt sorry for Alex. He welcomed the goose and made things comfortable for him. He saw that Old Alex had plenty of corn, oats and milo, and plenty of fresh water.

It didn't take Alex long to get acquainted in

his new home and it wasn't long until he was talking and visiting with anyone who pulled into the elevator. He talked so much, in fact, that Hank had a hard time carrying on a conversation over the telephone in the office.

It wasn't long until Alex decided if Hank could go into the office, he could too, and he began following Hank into the office.

Then Old Alex decided he'd become a little frivolous in his old age. He'd wait until Hank or a customer wasn't looking and then he'd slip up behind them and take a nip at their leg.



Old Alex ruled the roost in Elba for a number of years in the 1950s.

This didn't go over so well, not with the customers nor with Hank. Old Alex wasn't too careful about his toilet, either. One morning a couple of weeks ago Old Alex went on one of his frivolous sprees. He nipped Hank's leg. His new master booted him out and told him

to move on and find himself a new home. Old Alex understood and left without wasting any time.

He started down the road, cocky as always, strolled across the railroad tracks, and headed for the John C. Johnson home. He saw some children in the yard and decided to move in. He has been living there ever since. The Johnsons, so far, are happy with Old Alex. So are the four Johnson grandchildren—Wayne, Sheila, Karen and Carl.

They get a great kick out of playing with Old Alex, and calling him and having him chase them around the house and yard. But even there it didn't take him long to learn to walk into the house when the door was open. Mrs. Johnson let him know in no uncertain terms that he wasn't welcome in the house, so now he spends most of his time in the back yard or in the garage waiting for the children to come home from school so he can play with them.

"I never saw a goose like Old Alex," Hank related. "He was very choosy about his food. You could give him com, oats and milo and he'd eat the latter two and leave the corn go. Evidently his digestive organs aren't as good as they once were and he settled for small kernels which evidently are more digestible than the corn. I would have liked to kept Old Alex around, because he was interesting, but he got to be too much of a nuisance and it was too big of a job to clean up after him. He seemed to like men much better than he did women. Whenever a woman would come around, he'd wait for the first opportunity and then nip her on the back of the leg. He had sent several women scurrying and yelling after he's taken a nip at their legs."

Hank said it was amusing to watch him when he first started coming down from the Hartneck place to explore the Farmers

Elevator. Hank said they could look for him about the same time each day. He would walk down the block-long road, turn into the elevator, and then make a complete circle of the grounds looking furtively first one way and then the other as he made the tour of inspection. Once completed, he would head for home and they would not see him again until the following day at the same hour.

Old Alex Learns a Lesson **28-Year-Old Goose No Longer** **Abuses Privileges as a Guest**

By Robert Houston

Elba, Nebr.—Alex, a goose known to all residents of Elba, may have learned a lesson in behavior, although at the time he was old enough to know better.

The moral of Alex's story is that when you're a guest, you shouldn't take advantage of the host's hospitality.

Of course, a disinterested observer might point out that the African gander shouldn't be blamed too much. Life had gone on serenely for him for 27 years or so, and then all of a sudden he was forced to make a difficult adjustment.

Alex now is 28 years old, and maybe even 30, say some Elba residents. As a youngster, he was on the farm of John Hartneck a few blocks north of Elba in 1920.

He and Mr. Hartneck, a bachelor, understood each other and got along famously together. Mr. Hartneck retired and moved into town about 15 years ago, taking Alex with him.

But last fall, Mr. Hartneck moved to a rest home in nearby St. Paul, and old Alex was homeless.

"You could tell that he was lonesome," says Hank Svoboda, who operates the Farmers Grain and Supply. "He came to the elevator several mornings in a row, looked around the

place, then went back to the empty Hartneck house.

"One morning Alex stayed on. I felt sorry for him, and fed him corn, oats and milo and fresh water. He slept outside the office."

No Love for Women

As winter came on and the temperature dropped below freezing, one of Mr. Svoboda's regular chores was breaking up the ice in Alex's water bucket so that the old gander wouldn't go thirsty.

It was obvious that Alex regarded the elevator as his home. He was soon honking monotonously whenever there was a visitor. In fact, there were times when he honked so loud and fast that Mr. Svoboda couldn't hear what people were saying to him over the telephone.

He felt so much at home that he began walking into Mr. Svoboda's office. And it was here that he abused his privileges as a guest.

When Hank or a customer wasn't looking, old Alex would sneak up and take a nip at a leg. Hank didn't relish this any more than the customers.

"He had no love for women," Mr. Svoboda says. He took after several feminine visitors, and they scurried from the office screaming. It got so that when my wife came down to the elevator she had to stay away from Alex. All his life he had been around men."

Last spring, Alex finally nipped Mr. Svoboda's leg once too often. He started shutting the door on the gander, and Alex took the hint.

He Minds Better

He began meandering across the railroad tracks to the John C. Johnson home a block away. Mr. Johnson, a retired railroad man who had known Mr. Hartneck well, was an old friend.

"I took him back to the elevator three times," says Mr. Johnson, "but I finally took him in."

Mr. Johnson likes Alex, and the gander knows it. He says that the goose minds pretty well.

He'd like to move into the house just as he moved into the elevator office, but when either Mr. or Mrs. Johnson tell him to scat when they're opening the door, he pays attention.

All that Alex requires is a bucket of water and an ear of corn every two days. He eats grass and helps keep the lawn mowed. The Johnsons have four grandchildren living with them, and the goose doesn't nip their legs unless they tease him.

"He's a good watchdog," Mr. Johnson says. "Nobody can step on our lot without getting a noisy reaction from Alex."

Mr. Johnson says that although Alex is a nuisance, he's a good companion. Mr. John sleeps in a first floor bedroom, and every morning at 5:30 o'clock, Alex saunters over to the window and starts honking.

"I tell him I'm here and I'm all right," says Mr. Johnson, "and he walks away satisfied."

So it looks as if Alex has learned his lesson.

Thank You

The Howard County Historical Society would like to thank all those who furnished pies for their pie selling fund raiser during GCA Days and those who purchased pie. Also, a thank you to those who were building attendants during the event. There were several visitors who toured the village and were thoroughly impressed with the collection of items that are on display. If anyone reading this has not yet taken advantage of Howard County's rich historical past, a stroll through the village would be time well spent. If you are under 50 you may see things you never knew existed; if you are 50 and older, it may be a walk down memory lane. The museum is open Saturdays and Sundays from 1 to 4 p.m. or by special appointment by calling the

Chamber Office or Gary Peterson at 750-4060, Evelyn Dvorak at 754-4977 or Gary Spilger at 754-6371.

Meet the President

Jesse Kiser of Dannebrog is the present president of the Howard County Historical Society board of directors. She is a lifelong resident of Dannebrog and, in addition to her volunteer work with the Society, she has been a volunteer with the Veterans Home in Grand Island over 25 years.

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The next issue of *Historically Speaking* will feature businesses that used to occupy Main Street during the last 50 to 60 years. Any information, especially human interest stories, would be greatly appreciated. Send them to Julie Spilinek, P.O. Box 68, Elba, NE 68835 or call 308-863-2275.

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If you are thinking about Christmas and something for someone special, the Society is offering the book "Entering Howard County" for the reduced price of \$25 plus tax and shipping, if applicable. The original price was \$75. The book is 544 pages in length with 40 pages of family histories.

"Entering Howard County"

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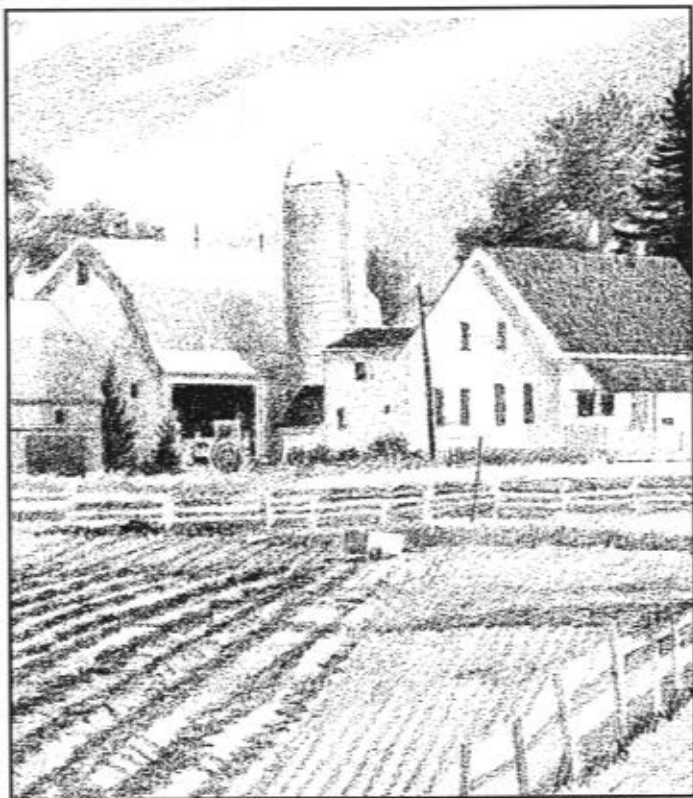
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Back to the Past

*(Written by Julie Spilinek
as part of a college*

Nebraska Geography class in 1972.)

Clink, clink, clink.

The windmill wheel rotates with the wind.

Plink, plink, plink.

Cherries drop into the pail as my daughter and I pluck the fruit from the trees.

Suddenly I am transported back in time. I am 10 years old. My mother and I are plucking cherries from our lone tree in the corner of the farmyard.

The windmill clinks in the background with each rotation of the wheel.

Looking to the west through the branches, I see the large three-story brick house that shelters my parents, my brothers and me.

North of it and a bit to the east stands the traditional stately red barn that comes to life twice a day at milking time. At other times it becomes a play parlor as we romp among the dusty bales of hay. The spacious haymow beckons when there is nothing else to do.

Just west of the house stands an unusual octagonal shaped building; namely, the brooder house. It annually becomes home to hundreds of baby chicks each spring. Its steamy interior feels warm and cozy.

North of it stands two hen houses full of cackling hens where we gather their produce once each day. A few old roosters add variety to the flock with their aristocratic antics and their daily pre-dawn wake up calls.

— Just north of me I see an old brick shop and beyond it the car shed as it was known to us. Across the driveway, also to the north, a large granary stands ready to store the wheat that is waving in the wind behind me. I still swing on the rope swing dad hung from its rafters years before.

Almost hidden from my view beyond the main buildings stands an old tumble-down barn where the hogs find shelter. A mother cat recently gave birth to four kittens there, thinking she had complete privacy.

Numerous trees surround the yard. Their branches supporting nests where countless birds find comfort. Their varied songs combine with the cats, cows and kids; their resulting sum equaling country.

The wind has stopped. The windmill is silent. The pail is full and I have returned to adulthood.



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