

Historically Speaking

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Where Have All the Places Gone?



St. Paul's business district has changed over the years. This picture of the north side of Howard Avenue came from Ray Leth.

By Julie Spilinek

I am assuming that most of you reading this have lived or are living in Howard County and that you have driven through Howard Avenue in St. Paul—the main street of the City. If you have been a regular visitor through the years, you are aware of the changes that have taken place, and there have been many. One of those occurred this past summer as Jim and Lorraine Swinarski discontinued their pharmacy due to declining health. Sadly, Lorraine passed away a few weeks later. The couple purchased the business in

1969 from Jack Duffy who was the previous owner. He took over Polanski's Drug who had a drugstore on the southwest corner of 6th and Howard. Prior to being a drug store the Duffy and Swinarski premises was the location of the post office.

Next to this now vacant building is the long lived men's clothing store known as Bryan Jensen Clothing. He was the successor to the Shanstrom Clothing Company, which was located in the Masonic building across the street. Bryan Jensen began operating his business in 1921 and continued until 1965 when Ed

Nevrivy, a long time employee, and Otto Malmgren, another employee, purchased it. In 1971, Ed and his wife, Mary Ann, bought Otto's interest and expanded the store. On June 1, 1988, Loren Studley purchased it and continues to operate the business today.

The business adjacent to Bryan Jensen Clothing is now called Love It Salon, owned by Tracy Mahrt, which is a full service spa and provides massages and facials. Formerly, this building was the location of the Fashionette, a women's clothing store, for many years. During its initial existence, it was only half the size it later became.

During the years the mid section of this block was occupied by numerous businesses. Bars and eating places were prominent plus other speciality shops. One of these was a grocery store owned by Ladislav Havlik, who served the community for many years. He actually started with a meat market toward the east end of the same block. Martha Havlik remembers how rings of bologna and sausages would hang from racks near the ceiling. Later this family purchased Anderson's Locker and operated it for many years.

Today this mid-section is occupied—from west to east—by the County Cage (a bar and grill), The Gathering Place used for small receptions and an empty one used for storage by John McClellan.

As we continue east we reach Brehm's Pharmacy, which has also been a part of Main Street for many years—since 1953 when Bob and Dorothy Brehm bought the former Dillard's Drug Store located in the same building. The Brehms renamed it Brehm Rexall Drug and was initially open seven days a week, including evenings. One of my memories of this business was the annual Rexall 1¢ sales; I restocked my

medicine cabinet at this time.

In 1985 the store became affiliated with the Healthmart and a year later Bob and Dorothy's son, Dave, and his wife, Marilyn, purchased it. In 1993 they acquired the other half of their building, and added more items to their inventory.

The theater is the next building in line. It was originally called the Elite, later the Riviera, and provided quality entertainment to citizens in and around Howard County. The increasing popularity of television and the trend to travel further from home for greater shopping and entertainment opportunities led to the theater's closing in the early 1970's. It did reopen for a short time in 1981 showing X-rated movies, but eventually closed as a theater. It was purchased in 1983 by the Happy Church, which was established by Gary Karoly. It discontinued services in the mid-2000's and in 2009 Loren Studley purchased it and now allows theater groups and individual groups to perform there. Nebraska's own Elvis Presley, Joseph Hall, has presented his rendition of the King of Rock 'n Roll to sell out crowds. The local theater group has performed there as well.

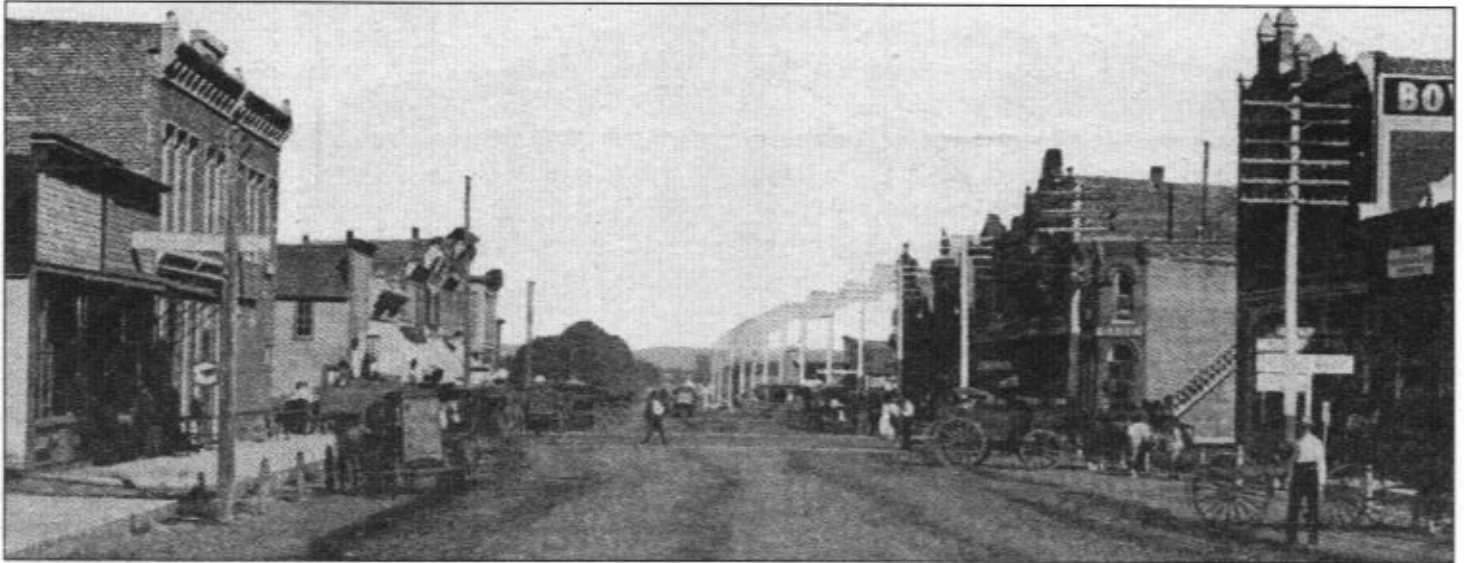
The final stop on this block is Mick McDowell's building in which he had his realty business; it is now located at his Miletta Vista Winery and the building on Howard Avenue is for sale. At one time the St. Paul National Bank was located on this corner. Davolt Jewelry, which closed in 1977, was also located there.

Other businesses that occupied the north side of this block between 6th and 7th were Coast-to-Coast, Gambles, even Dr. Stine's first Eye Care office and Dr. Krejci's dentist office. Robert Nowak sold propane products toward the west end for a time.



A business that has been on the north side of Howard Avenue since 1921 is Bryan Jensen Clothing. Above, in the early 1950s are, left, Ed Nevrvy, David Bydalek, Bryan Jensen, Alvin Johnson and Otto Malmgren.

These pictures show the changes in transportation over the years.





This early picture of St. Paul was of the north side of Howard Avenue at the corner of 7th and Howard. The most recent business in that building was Swinarski Pharmacy. In this photo the Post Office occupied the bottom floor and dentist Dr. J.J. Bisgard has his office on the second floor. To the east of the Post Office was St. Paul Bakery.



ABOVE: The north side of St. Paul's main street on "Sale Day." The Starkey family, who resided east of St. Paul in the Gage Valley precinct, were among those who came to down for the big sales. The picture is from Jerrod Hood of Lincoln. The woman in the large black hat is Emma (Scott) Starkey, Hood's grandmother, and the small girl in front of Emma is Hood's mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Hood. RIGHT: This picture of the interior of a St. Paul business was donated to the Historical Society by Emma Svolaner.



In 1915 the First State Bank, later St. Paul National Bank, was located on the north side of Howard Avenue at 6th and Howard.





The view of the south side of Howard Avenue at 7th and Howard in 1908 shows St. Paul State Bank on the corner with a dentist office on the second floor (the name of the dentist is not legible). There appears to be a mercantile store on the first floor of the Masonic Temple Building, then Hoover Grocery.



Among the businesses located on the south side of the Howard Avenue was Hoover's Store (above). Mr. Hoover is the man behind the counter.



This photograph is of the south side of the St. Paul business district in February of 1915. Polansky's Drug Store is at the east end of the block (left) with Johnson & Sons Hardware next to it. Another drug store is located in the middle of the block.

Let's move across the street to the south—east to west. Ellen Partsch in her "History of Howard County" mentions that in 1879 "McComber sold his drug store to Fletcher and Polansky, and it remained in the Polansky family until 1958" when (I assume) Harold and Annabelle Wieser purchased it. Ellen also noted "Fletcher and Polansky installed an Edison Phonograph in their drug store, and the paper stated, 'if you drop a nickel in the slot you will hear fine music in return'."

The Wiesers then operated an appliance, paint and wall covering business from this location. They later discontinued the sale of appliances, but added a variety of home decor. They continued for almost 40 years. This building later became the location of Rita's Photography and a beauty shop for a time. Now Finderz Koepertz is located there.

Next door was the St. Paul Hardware, owned by Harvey Nielsen and his wife. This establishment was in business since 1928, but I'm not sure if it was in the Nielsen family during that time. When it closed it became the location of a private school sponsored by the Happy Church. Since 2006 it has been occupied by the River of Life Church.

Next is the former Bartles Store, now occupied by the Sweet Shoppe. The store began in 1885 by Frank Bartle who previously worked at Wolbach's in Grand

Island. His wife, Veronica, and son, Edward, took over when Frank died in 1902. In an article from the *Grand Island Independent* of 1954, Ed recalled that muslin sold for 5¢ a yard and overalls, 98¢ a pair. In 1954 the muslin was 37¢ a yard and overalls \$4 a pair. The Bartles families allowed customers to buy on credit and would reward them with a sack of candy when the monthly bill was paid. Ed had a son, also called Ed, but known as Bud. He and his wife continued to operate it until 1974.

All three of the Bartle generations were very active in the community and served on many civic organizations' boards. They sold both groceries and dry goods originally, but handled only the dry goods during the later years. Many seamstresses purchased their fabric there.

Prior to the Sweet Shoppe and following the closing of Bartles this space was occupied by a craft store managed by JoAnn Switzer Jons on one side and Harold Obermiller's insurance business on the other.

Another recent vacancy occurred when Great Western Bank (formerly Tier One) left town. I do not remember what occupied that space prior to the bank. The present Brick Street Mall features numerous vendors that sell antiques and party supplies. It is located where Tom and Leona Pflipsen had their Gambles business for many years. Tom was another business



One business on the south side of Howard Avenue was owned and operated by the same family for several generations—Bartles Store

owner that was very involved in the community. He also collected railroad memorabilia.

Although barber shops as such are fading from the scene, St. Paul has had a variety through the years. Before St. Paul had a city water supply, some barber shops featured bath rooms where men could get a bath as well as a shave and a haircut. I don't have a lot of information on the barbers that once served St. Paul, but during the 60's, 70's and 80's two were located along the south side. Doc Ziemba had one where Tabitha's Pet Salon is now located. On the west corner "Pinky" Stalnaker had one which he inherited from his dad. Today Deb Meyer owns and operates the Corner Barbershop. This address was the first location of the State Bank.

Next to the former Ziemba Barber shop there is an empty building that I understand once housed a cafe.

Barb Wroblewski and her partners have their law office in what was once Clarence and Mamie Leth's IGA grocery store, which they owned for 31 years from the early 50's to the early 80's. A couple of doors down was the Model Grocery owned and operated by Ed Dvoracek; when Ed retired the Leths took it over.

Another long time resident was Johnson's Variety Store, previously known as the dime store or 10¢ to \$1.00 store. Bert and Mildred Johnson were the proprietors from the late 50's/early 60's until it closed in 1999. Now it is the home of the baseball museum/hall of fame and the Chamber Office. Bert's dad, Levi, began the business after leaving his partnership with Ed Dvoracek in the Model Grocery, one of the two grocery stores located on the south side of the block.

Then there is the Source Gas building that was the former Kansas-Nebraska business.

Next month we'll "tour" the remaining business

es—past and present. (From Main Street east to Highway 281, at least one block south, north and west). If anyone remembers or has knowledge of these, please let me know. Any pictures or newspaper articles would be appreciated. If any information in this issue is incorrect or incomplete, please let me know as well.

Businesses that had Christmas greetings published in a local newspaper in 1940 included: French Barber and Beauty Shop, Riviera Theater, Clark's Cafe and Garage, Robinson's 5-1.00, St. Paul Cash Hardware, Bryan Jensen, Jake's Shoe Shop, Dillard Drugs, Stewart's Bar and Barber Shop, plus others.



Barber shops were located on the south side of Howard Avenue. The above photograph came from Charlie Van Berg, but it is not known which barber shop it is or when the picture was taken.



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