

historically speaking

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE HOWARD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

Spring/Summer Issue 1997

Caution: Post Office Coming Through!

By Ron W Sack

The Howard County Historical Society is in the process of recreating an authentic run of the century main street. One key building in the recreated main street will be the addition of the Cotesfield Post Office. The post office was one way the world entered the town and one way the town entered the world.

April 19, 1996 marked the final day of business for the post office. The closing was part of a national downsizing effort by the United States government. It served the Cotesfield area for nearly 125 years.

The building owned by Maxine and Joe Coufal of Cotesfield, will be donated to the Howard County Historical Society for use in the historical village.



Cotesfield/Elba Post Office photos courtesy: Ron W. Sack

As we continue to research the Cotesfield Post Office, we find it has quite a history to it -- and an old one at that. According to *Perkey's Nebraska Place Names*, a post office was established in Cotesfield on December 1, 1871. In the four counties of Greeley, Howard, Sherman, and Valley, 98 different post offices were established. Of the 98, the

Cotesfield location is the second oldest -- second only to the one established in St. Paul on July 12, 1871. This history alone is reason enough to save this building.

The current building that we are planning to move and restore was built in 1920 by Jess Sautter. This building contains the original postmaster's counter, as well as a safe, a desk and several other items. With the exception of the front, the building's exterior is in original condition. The front will require restoration to bring it back to its 1920's

glory. The inside will need the care and hours of dedicated volunteers to restore it so the society can display their valuable post office and government collections.

Phase one consisted of the fund drive and community awareness about historic preservation. Knowing that funds for 1997 were limited, a fund drive was started on November 3, 1996. The drive consisted of



Mystery
writer's life
solved.

Photo courtesy: Venus Barhnowe



Record-setting
attendance set by
encampment.



Society receives
\$3,000 grant
for brochure.

Cotesfield Post Office, continued

a direct mail piece, a series of posters placed around town and several newspaper articles.

Phase two is the move to the Howard County Historical Village in St. Paul and structural restoration. The cost of moving the post office will be donated by family and historical society volunteers. Bill Sack and Mike Markvick, local residents and preservation supporters, will volunteer their time and services to help with the move. Cotesfield and Howard County Historical Society members will also volunteer.

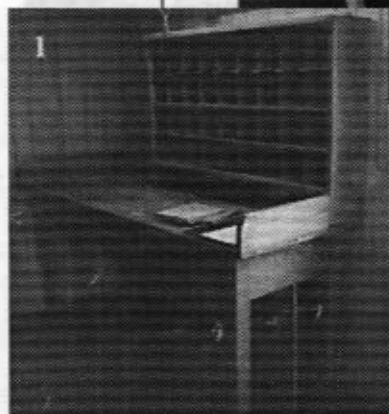
The preservation campaign enabled the group to get the new foundation placed and the necessary steps in place by the front door. The front portion of the building will also require funds on restoration, as will the inside

customer service area. Dry wall, siding, painting, sanding and other materials are just some of the items that require funds. Most of this expense has been raised

Phase three will consist of exhibits and

displays for the inside of the post office.

"We are fortunate that the Elba Post Office had been contacted in time about our plan," said Ron Sack, project coordinator. "They are moving into their new building, and many items will be donated,



once the proper paper work has been done," stated Sack.

"The National Trust For Historic Preservation, Mountains/Plains office has been contacted for consultation,"

concluded Sack. "They are very interested in this project, and want us to document our progress and send our report to them when the restoration is complete." (A story in their national publication seems likely.)

"We couldn't have done this without the support of this preservation group," stated Marion Bahensky, another project coordinator. "We still have a ways to go, but we are dedicated to preserving Howard County's history."

Liz King, President of the Howard County Historical followed by saying, "Two Lutheran Groups (Aid Association for Lutherans and Lutheran Brotherhood) are

helping us with sizable grants for supplies and labor, and Howard County has responded tremendously with financial backing: nearly \$2,600 has been given for this preservation project"

Board members volunteering time and composing the Cotesfield Post Office Preservation Group are: Marion Bahensky, Janet Hruza, Liz King, Dave Sprague, Meta Sprague and Ron Sack.

Elba postal items to be donated to the Howard County Historical Society

(Once Postmaster Judy Porter gets confirmation from the Postal Director in Grand Island)

Photo #1 Postal sorting rack and counter: dated 1929 by the US Postal Department. Original condition.

Photo #2 Postal dumping station: date unknown, probably 1940s. Once the postal bags were received, the bags were opened and the mail was dumped into this "station" to sort the mail. Original (painted) condition.

Photo #3 A nice collection of smaller postal-related items: metal postal rubber stamp eraser (1920s); wooden Elba Post Office "Hours Open" sign with removable letters (1930s); metal cash/receipt boxes (old, dates unknown); wooden postal files (old, dates unknown); circular fan (1940s; need to check patent dates); various forms; binders; rubber stamps; presidential photographs; etc. (The approximate dates of these last pieces vary from the 1940s to the 1970s.) All are in excellent condition.

This is a nice collection of materials and I feel we are very lucky the Society acted on getting this material. Judy has been great to work with, and is pleased Elba will be recognized with a display in the post office. If we didn't act now, it would have been sold or disposed of. Once we receive confirmation from Judy, we will properly record and sort inventory on these pieces. One important artifact which is needed is a series of post office boxes. If anyone has information on where some can be found, please contact the Society.



Encampment sets attendance record.

By Liz King

The Howard County Historical Society hosted a Civil War Encampment on June 6-8. This event was a three-day reenactment of civilian and soldier lifestyles of the 1860s was between the states. In addition, a medical tent and an embalmers tent were set up as displays, with open invitations for all guests to learn about the hardships of war. An infantry of canons and artillery were also on hand for the living history event.

The 9th Texas Battalion represented

themselves professionally and with courtesy toward all the curious visitors, not only was the encampment a "first" for the Howard County Historical Society, but broke all attendance records for any event, with crowds estimated at 550-600 people for the entire weekend.

Also adding to the weekends popularity was the Prairie Blacksmith Association, with board members Dave and Mena Sprague acting as hosts to the state-wide organization. The group continually showed off their blacksmithing skills to a most appreciative audience.

The most exciting and highly viewed portion was the "night firing" in which the men in "gray" proudly showed off their artillery, marching and firing skills at dusk. The canons also rang out over the village grounds and could be heard across town.

The bells of the historic Fairwell Danish Lutheran Church rang out the invitation for the 9:00 a.m. Sunday worship services, which were open to the public. A full house brought memories as

the church was used for its original purpose -- a house of worship.

The group "Plain Label" entertained with sounds of the past. This trio performed in vintage clothing and serenaded the strolling visitors with songs and instruments of another day and time. The threesome were a delight and brought back some long forgotten songs.

The event was a huge success! So many expressed their gratitude to the Society for bringing this event to the area!

"I really enjoyed and appreciated your efforts to get them. It was so enlightening and very meaningful to me as a direct descendent of a Civil War soldier."

A letter from Vivian Berggren
St. Paul



This photograph was taken from the third-story window of the Howard County Courthouse. It shows Sunday's activity of the encampment. The three-day encampment held for the event was estimated at 550-600 people. Photo courtesy: HCHS.

*Next
stop...
St. Paul*

By Ron W. Sack

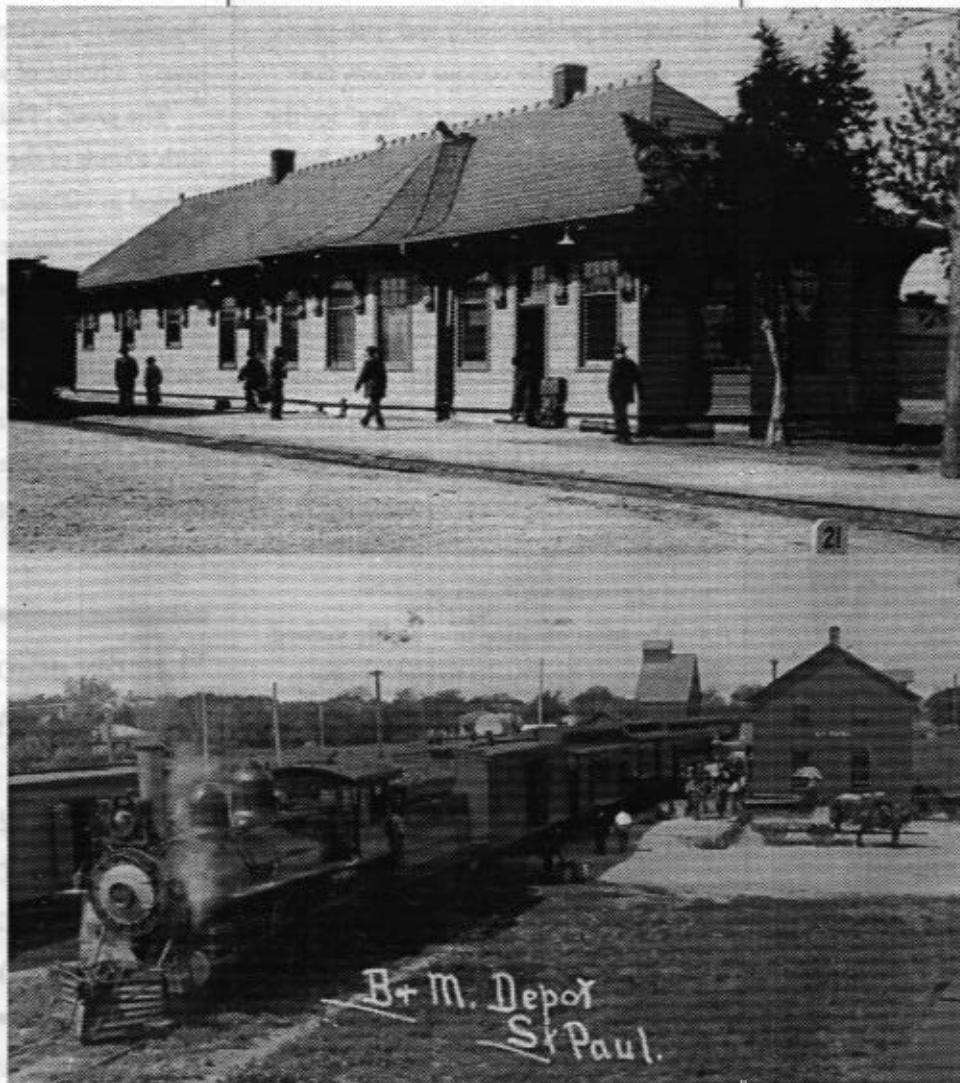
To know a county's architecture is to know its past and present. At one time, Howard County had nine depots which sprouted up in nearly every section of the county.

Depots were present in the following communities: Boelus (U.P. depot built in 1886); Cotesfield (U.P. depot built in 1906, retired Jan. 1959); Cushing (Burlington depot, dates unknown);

Dannebrog (U.P. depot built in 1886 and rebuilt after a 1909 fire in 1910); Elba (U.P. depot built in 1883); Farwell (Burlington depot built in the late 1880s); St. Libory (U.P. depot built in 1885, retired Aug. 30, 1963); and St. Paul (2 depots: U.P. depot built in 1885, Burlington depot dates unknown).

Pictured above are two of St. Paul's finest monuments to early transportation: Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Depots.

Several points along the lines also offered places for passengers to board,



some of which were: Dublin (between St. Paul and St. Libory), Kenyon (between Dannebrog and Boelus) and Warsaw (near Midway). The Dublin Station was a wooden building moved in from Ord in April of 1914 and retired in May of 1934. Anyone with photographs and information on its whereabouts is encouraged to contact the Howard County Historical Society at P.O. Box 304, St. Paul, NE 68873.

Of the nine depots once thriving in Howard County, three remain standing: Elba (moved from its original location), St. Libory (moved from its original

location and part of the Union Grain Elevator), and Boelus (moved onto a new location near the highway).

Howard County has yet to save and preserve one of these last monuments, a monument which was largely responsible for the county's tremendous growth in the early years.

Source material provided by the Nebraska State Historical Society, Union Pacific Railroad and Albert Schwenk.

Photos courtesy: Marie Iwanski and Ron W. Sack

*About the
newsletter...*

This newsletter is published quarterly by the Howard County Historical Society in St. Paul, Nebraska. Its mission is to promote a greater awareness for the rich history of Howard County and to promote continued support for preservation projects. This issue was prepared by Ron W. Sack. All ideas for improving the newsletter are welcome.



Historical architecture quiz.

How smart are you on Howard County's architecture? Take a few minutes to see if you can identify some of Howard County's monuments to prosperity, transportation, religion and education. Answers appear at the bottom of the page. These photographs appear courtesy of Ron W. Sack and are part of his extensive personal collection (200+) on Howard County architecture.

Note: unfortunately all these structures no longer exist.

1. Coatesfield High School; 2. Farwell-Burkington Depot; 3. Queen's Bank; St. Paul; 4. North Long River Bridge; St. Paul; 5. Methodist Church; St. Paul; 6. St. Paul High School; 7. Nysted Folk School; St. Paul; 8. St. Paul Catholic Church; St. Paul.

From the President

By Liz King

I had originally intended this column to be a moment to pause and reflect on the last six months but, instead, it's an opportunity to catch my breath! The Howard County Historical Society has had a banner year, and it is only half over!

I am truly blessed to be associated with some real winners - the Board of Directors and members of the Society who generously donate their time and endless talents to preserve and promote the precious history of the county. Since January, the Society has sponsored several programs, both entertaining and educational, which have brought large local crowds as well as appreciative visitors from Grand Island, Omaha, Greeley, Fullerton, and Scotia. They filled our rooms to capacity.

This is the first year the Society has sponsored four major events -- two down, and two to go! The amount of time and energy that is put forth in such a detailed-oriented project is immeasurable, but well worth it. The "City and County Garden Tour," even with the rain, was very well received.

The three day "Civil War Encampment," a living history event, was truly a historic weekend, breaking all attendance records: 550 to 600 people attended. Yet to come this year is the "Gruber Grandstand Gala," a live entertainment resounding from the veranda of the historic home and the ever-popular "Annual Holiday Tour of Homes."

The Society continues to improve upon and maintain the integrity of our Howard County Historical Village, Gruber House and Museum of Nebraska a Baseball Greats. We are listening to your wants by bringing in the Cotesfield Post Office. Nearly 80 people have sent in donations on this project and two Lutheran groups are providing major funding. Rumor has it that the other buildings can't wait to meet their new friend and neighbor.

Research is being done on the lives of Jean Potts and Earl Kimber.

The military exhibit has grown and has been recently revamped.

All of these wonderful happenings could not continue without the generosity and support of the citizens and business owners of the area, who selflessly donate time, food, newspaper space, as well as the monetary contributions that continue to come in and inspire our efforts. Yes, our children and our children's children will learn and remember where we came from.

Donations are up.

Publicity:

radio/tv/newspaper coverage is up.

Attendance is up.

Research is up.

Community awareness is up.

Grant approval is up (big money).

We must be doing something right! Congratulations everyone!

Veterans exhibit attracts large audiences.



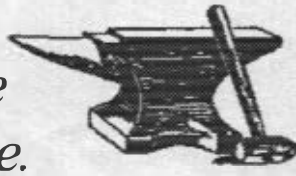
One of the more popular attractions this summer has been the exhibit honoring Howard County's veterans. The Learnder Heron display, veteran books/records as well as the veteran artifacts give one the feeling of how important an exhibit of this caliber is needed. Many appreciate the hard work and hours of research needed to produce an exhibit of this quality.

Signature Quilt on display.



A quilt honoring Howard County families, businesses and organizations is now on display at the Gruber House in the east bedroom. Please check out this incredible work of art. A brief guide to the quilt is also available at the Gruber House.

Kudos to Dave Sprague.



A rarity among Nebraska County Museums is a living history demonstration. Howard County Historical Village continues to be honored by having Dave give blacksmithing demonstrations. We are so fortunate to have someone share his talents so unselfishly.



Jean Potts, from the chest jacket of her novel *My Brother's Keeper*, published in 1975.

Photo courtesy: Charles Scribner's Sons, New York

Mystery writer's life solved.

Jean Potts left St. Paul in the 1930s with hopes and dreams of achieving greatness with her writing talents in New York City. She fulfilled many of those dreams. For a brief outline of Jean's writing career, please read the enclosed brochure.

Earl Kimber's life being researched.

Board member Mick McDowell is in the process of researching the life of Earl Kimber. If you have any information on Earl Kimber, please call Mick, or send the information to the Howard County Historical Society.

\$3,000 grant received from Department of Tourism.

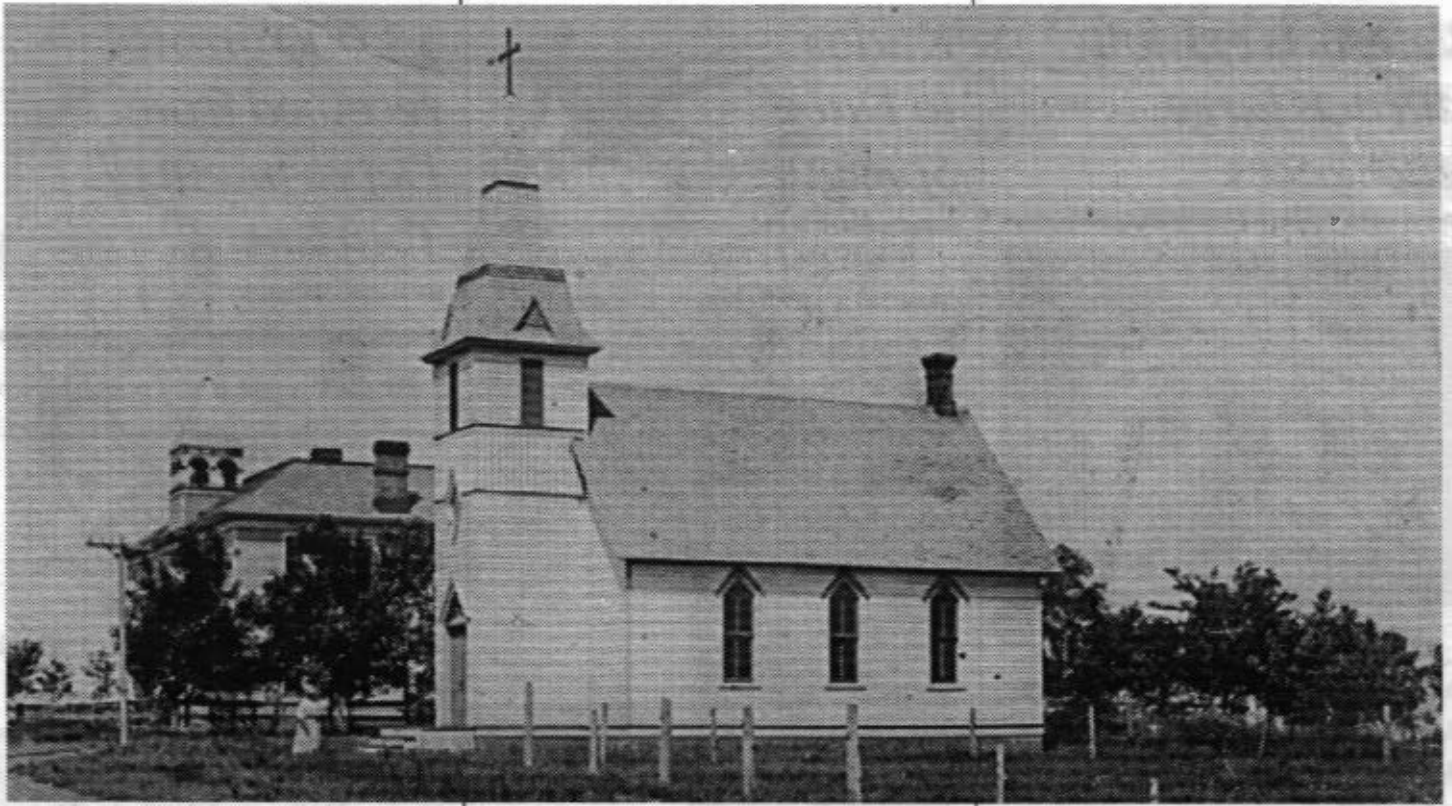
By Marion Bahensky

For the first time ever, a grant has been awarded to the Howard County Historical Society by the Nebraska Department of Tourism. (This signifies that the Department of Tourism is finally taking a serious look at the Howard County Historical Village and Museum of Nebraska Baseball Greats.)

The grant, for \$3,000, is for the production of a promotional brochure for the Historical Village and the Gruber House. Donations of labor, which will match the cash given, were promised by Liz King, Ron Sack and another of Ron's professional allies, Robert Ervin. Ervin helped Sack produce the award-winning photographic series on Howard County entitled "Silent in the Land." Donations by such proven talents and support letters from the city, Dannebrog Boosters, RC&D, St. Paul Chamber, St. Paul Retail Committee, St. Paul Development Corporation, and the GCA Committee were the reasons for the success. There were applications asking for \$261,000 and only \$75,000 to be granted.

We made a good case to the Sonderup Trustees last year and they gave us \$2,500 to make the Gruber House basement more waterproof. Mick McDowell has recently taken on this as a project.

Marion Bahensky wrote both grant applications. Both required hours of paper work. More power to us!



Farwell Danish Lutheran Church
Photo Courtesy: Ron W. Sack

Life in Howard County a.k.a. Denmark.

By Ron W. Sack

To know a county's architecture is to know its past and present. Howard County stands as the county which had the most Danish Lutheran Churches in the state. History defines the "Danish Era" of Danish born immigrants between 1860 and 1930. During that era, there were more Danes in Howard County than in any other county in the state (with the exception of Douglas County). In Howard County alone, 11 Danish Lutheran Churches were present in various communities.

Such churches were: Immanuel Lutheran in the South Logan Township

(first built in 1906 and again in 1914), St. Peter's Lutheran in the North Logan Township (built between 1910-11), Dry Creek Lutheran in the Loup Fork Township (built in 1902), Dannebrog Lutheran (built in 1890), Farwell Danish Lutheran (built in 1898), Kunsmore Scandinavian Lutheran in the St. Libory Township (built in 1887), St. John's Lutheran in Cushing (built in 1906), St. Peder's Lutheran in Nysted (first built in 1887 and again in 1921), Scandinavian Lutheran in Elba (built in 1908), Dannevirke Lutheran (built in 1906) and St. Mark's Lutheran in St. Paul (built in 1956). Fortunately, several of these churches remain.

The photograph above shows the Farwell Danish Lutheran Church (notice Farwell Public School to the left). It found a new life and home when Henry and

Doris Rasmussen had the vision to donate it to the citizens of Howard County for use in the Howard County Historical Village. Of special note, research indicates the building will be celebrating its 100th birthday next year. Dedication services were held on September 18, 1898.

On a personal note, this German/Polish/Austrian descendant is very proud of the rich Danish heritage that exists in Howard County.

Suggested reading: *Life in an American Denmark*, which is available at the St. Paul Public Library.

Source material provided by the Nebraska State Historical Society and *Blossoms on the Prairie: A History of the Danish Lutheran Churches in Nebraska*, by Edith and Jean Matteson.