



Entering Howard County

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE HOWARD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

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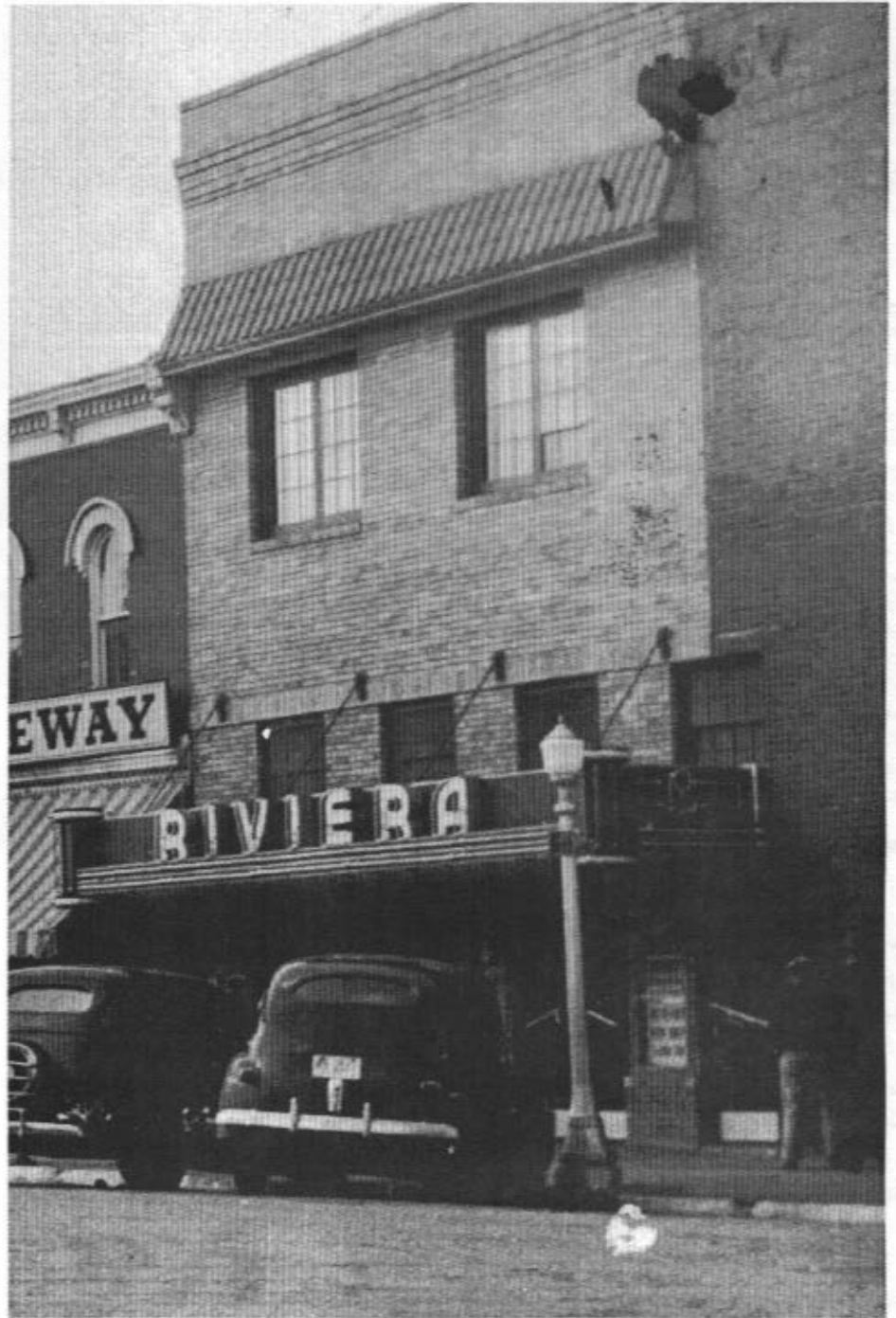
Spring Issue 2001

My FAVORITE Places IN HOWARD County

By
Ron W. Sack

Part one in a series of four.

I remember places in Howard County which ignited my senses: the brilliant colors of the stained glass windows in St. Peter and Paul's Catholic Church, the emotional feeling of entering another world at St. Paul's Union Pacific depot, the "tastes" of the candy counter at Leth's IGA in St. Paul, the creaking of the wooden floor at Vanis' General Store in St. Libory, and the aroma of buttered popcorn at the Riviera Theatre in St. Paul.



St. Paul's majestic Riviera Theatre in the 1940s. In 1939, owner Mons Thompson made the claim the theatre had the largest use of neon in the area—over 210 feet of neon was used to illuminate the letters and graphics of the theatre's sign. H.C.H.S. photo donated by Richard P. Hill

Entering Howard County



Photo above: The first building in St. Paul established for public culture and entertainment was an opera house built by Nicholas J. Paul in 1886, it was formally called the St. Paul Opera House. Following its completion, traveling troupes put on shows regularly, including opera, melodrama, comedies, and plays for public entertainment. For a brief period, it was also called the Elise. The first movies in St. Paul were shown in the Opera House. The St. Paul schools used this building for their plays and programs before the present high school was built in the early 1920s. The building was purchased by the American Legion in 1927. Unfortunately its ornamental trim and details were removed and the building refaced. Photo courtesy of Ron W. Sack.



Left photo: The Elite Theatre changed its location in the 1920s. Benefits of the move included a larger screen and expanded seating area. In the 1930s, the Elite's name changed to the Riviera. Owner Mons Thompson also added a new neon sign and enhanced the exterior. Photo courtesy of Ron W. Sack.

Photo below: St. Paul's Ideal Cafe and barber shop building on the south side of Howard Avenue. A tour I took of this building three years ago still shows evidence of the Elite Theatre being on the north side of Howard Avenue. Some patrons would use the parking lot behind the Ideal Cafe and eat at the cafe before seeing a movie. Still present and painted on an interior wall of the former cafe are the words "Elite Parking." Photo courtesy of Liz King.



For me, the Riviera was yet another way the world entered St. Paul Hollywood and all of its stars entranced us at the Riviera. I remember seeing "The Call of the Wild" and "True Grit" with my parents and sister in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Riviera was one of the few places in town where we could escape our world for a couple of hours and reenter our world fully energized.

In 1945, Riviera Theatre owner Mons Thompson made additional improvements to the building. He installed a RCA deluxe photophone sound system, a new RCA sound screen, and new coated lens equipment. It was

touted as the finest movie house in the state. On the theatre's thirteenth anniversary in 1945, a full week of films were shown. Moviegoers had the opportunity to see stars such as Fred MacMurray, Henry Fonda, Dorothy Lamar, Bob Hope, and Barbara Stanwyck in a variety of films. Cecil B. DeMille's film "Union Pacific" headlined the week. The cost: 12 cents and 25 cents.

In the early 1970s, our little movie palace closed its doors. It reopened in 1981 as a theatre for pornographic movies. In an effort to appeal to the people of St. Paul, the owner had showings of free cartoons for the youth on

Saturdays. I was one of the youngsters who took advantage of the free popcorn and cartoons. The owner's gesture of goodwill didn't calm matters. Protests by Citizens for Decency occurred, and the theatre finally closed for lack of business. It was purchased by the Happy Church in 1984.

I am pleased to see adaptive reuse of the building by the Happy Church, but long for the day when a local group (performance theatre or film group) has the dream and vision to purchase the building and restore it to the glory of yesterday and bring additional life and culture to St. Paul's historic Howard Avenue.

RA THEATRE ST. PAUL, NEBR.

ANNIVERSARY WEEK SEPT. 23 to 30th
COMPLETE CHANGE OF PROGRAM DAILY----
SELECTED SEVEN OF THE BEST FOR RETURN SHOWING

TUES. SEPT. 25th

**THE GREATEST AMERICAN
 EPIC OF
 THEM
 ALL!**



Cecil B. DeMilles
**UNION
 PACIFIC**

A Paramount Picture starring
Barbara Stanwyck
 and **Joel McCrea** with
 Akro Tammill - Robert Preston
 Lyman Williams - Bruce Beeby
 Produced and Directed by Cecil B. DeMille

WED. SEPT. 26th

*Swinging
 Adventure
 Flaming
 Romance*



FRED **MACMURRAY** GODDARD
 PAULETTE
 DEAN **HAYWARD**
**"THE
 FOREST
 RANGERS"**

STORY BY **OVERMAN - DENKER - PALLETTE**
 Directed by **CLARK BROWNE** - Screen Play by **ROBERT SWAN**
 From a story by **John Stone** - A Paramount Picture

PLUS
NEWS & SHORTS

THU. SEPT. 27th

Billy Lee
 Snowflake

OR
**"THE BISCUIT
 EATER"**

The Love Story
 of a Boy and
 His Dog

PLUS
SHORT SUBJECTS

FRI. SEPT. 28th



THERE'S A LOT OF EVERY
 WOMAN IN **MRS. WIGGS**
 A story of love and laughs
 and heart-throbs in her famous
 story!

**"Mrs. WIGGS
 of the
 Cabbage
 Patch"**

From Alice Hegan Rice's
 world-adored novel!

A Paramount Picture starring
**FAY BAINTER
 HUGH HERBERT
 VERA VAGUE
 CAROLYN LEE**

PLUS - SHORTS

SAT. SEPT. 29th

**MADELINE'S G
 BOB ON THE W
 ...AND AS LONG
 AS SHE HAS NOT
 ...YOU HAVE
 FUN**



BOB HOPE
 and **MADELINE
 CARROLL**

**"MY
 FAVORITE
 BLOND"**

A Paramount Picture with
Bob Montgomery
George Zucco
 Directed by
SEELY LASKER
 Screen play by
Don Aronson
 and
Frank Butler

PLUS
SHORT SUBJECTS

**PRICES DAILY
 12 & 25c Two Each**

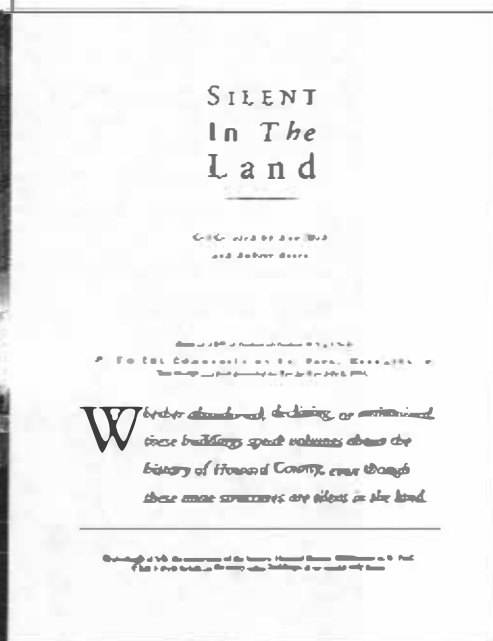
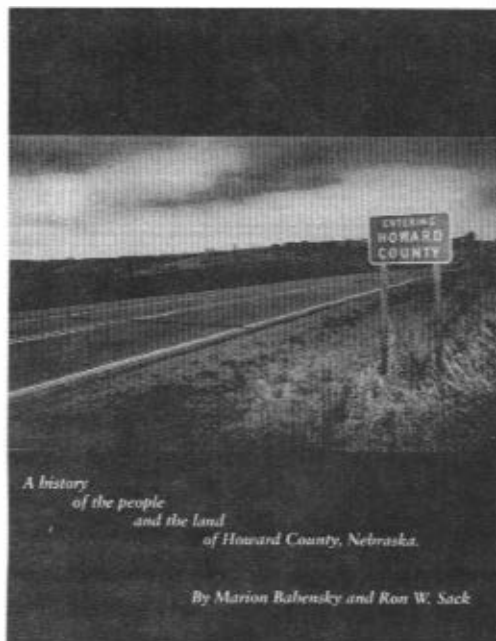
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 IS TO MAKE
 PEOPLE HAPPY**

The Management takes
 This Opportunity
 to thank you for your
 past Patronage and
 assure you of our con-
 tinued Policy of offer-
 ing you the best in
 entertainment.

Photo above: A portion of a promotional ad for the Riviera Theatre's thirteenth anniversary in 1945 which appeared in Lorkosky's Howard County Herald. H.C.H.S. document donated by the St. Paul Phonograph-Herald.



“Entering Howard County” book review.

By James L. McKee

As Nebraska’s towns and counties celebrated their centennial years in the 1960s and 70s, histories began to be published. Howard County’s 1985 example is now long out of print and, like many other areas, the county is now experiencing another entry.

When one reads Sack’s opening three sentence note, it is obvious he is writing about a subject he is passionately familiar with and, though credit is given to many volunteers and contributors, his collections and editorial hand are obvious throughout the text.

Bahensky’s examination of the recent history of Howard County is a valuable addition, often lacking in many local histories.

The first ten chapters are reprints from diaries, interviews and previously published articles and papers which provide excellent overviews and per-

sonal anecdotes from pioneers and observers. Virtually all county histories furnish family biographies and anecdotes, but Sack and Bahensky have painstakingly vetted and edited the personal stories so that they offer a consistent format without appearing sterile or all written in the same hand.

One of the most striking sections in the book is a photographic essay by Sack dedicated to his grandmother Pauline Sidel Sack entitled “Silent in the Land.” The 14 black and white photographs offer starkly handsome, head-on illustrations often reminiscent of Wright Morris, which are complemented by brief comments on facing pages. Turning to the tiny cottage in Dannebrog, I was tempted to hop in the car and get a firsthand look.

The next section begins with a concise listing of Howard County’s place names which are identified on a detailed map, coverage often omitted from county histories and sorely missed. After each settlement is noted with location and coordinates, post

office dates and population figures, the major villages and towns are treated in detail by individual by individuals from the community. Town photographs follow in a separate section in alphabetical order. Churches, education and county life sections are then offered.

Sack comes off as a canny observer, collector, author, and layout designer who obviously loves history, photography, and above all Howard County. The layout is strikingly professional, particularly in the treatment of the photographs and initial chapter pages.

Although a complete index would have been a plus, particularly for researchers, there is a good “contents” section. All in all this is the best county history 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.

James L. McKee is the History Columnist for the *Lincoln Journal-Star*, serves on the Board of Directors of the Nebraska State Historical Society, is the Historian for the City of Lincoln, and owner of Lee Booksellers.

Entering Howard County

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From the President.

By Mena Sprague

We begin an exciting new year at the Howard County Historical Society. We have a good group of board members listed on the back page of the newsletter. We will miss Diana and Carl Christensen, but both have promised to remain active society members. Our first meeting had to be postponed, due to weather, to Sunday afternoon and we had a good attendance. We have an exciting year ahead of us, beginning work on the depot and fundraising to keep up with the increased costs incurred while waiting for the architect to work on our project. On the same vein our thanks go to Marion Bahensky for compiling and displaying on main street the Depot Donor List. We are receiving rave reviews on our county history book *Entering Howard County* from state officials. Editors, writers, researchers, bookkeepers, and designers include Marion Bahensky, Ron Sack, Virginia Leth, Doris Leth, Ken Leth, Setha Zimbelman and the *Phonograph-Herald*.

We had a successful Holiday Tour of Homes. We were assisted by and received matching funds from the Modern Woodsmen Insurance Group. It was an extremely cold and inclement night and we're grateful for those brave ones who attended. The homes were beautiful and thanks to the homeowners who invited us to visit them. Marion chaired the committee and she and Roderick Burkhardt took the pictures for publicity. Donors for some of the raffle items were Marion Bahensky

and Mary Jane Lamberson.

Our board meetings are held the second Friday of the month at the City Library at 7:30 P.M. We welcome all to our meetings and appreciate volunteers in all aspects of our work. Thanks to President Edna Petersen and the Danish Brotherhood for volunteering to watch our village four Sundays this coming summer. Any other organizations willing to match the Danish Brotherhood? All memberships expired January 31, 2001, if you haven't renewed for 2001, now is a good time to do it. Please send in your renewal, new, or gift membership to P. O. Box 304, St. Paul, NE 68873. Thanks to all who have sent renewals and donations. We appreciate it.

Improving the County, City, and Historical Village.

By Marion Bahensky

Hopes and dreams for 2001 and 2002 are to complete the entire Historical Village complex, with the Depot Museum open and the exterior repairs and platform done, a charming new historic storage building added, and landscaping completed. These dreams include, of course, good luck with grants, donations, and volunteers. Our luck (and achievements) have been excellent, so far. Dreams don't cost a dime. Sometimes they come true.

We are making progress on the depot and possibly a storage building. Until we get the grounds in shape, we can't be taken very seriously as the City park and major attraction we think we are. Our historic crop of puncture

vines (Texas sandburs to me) is abated by Carl Christensen's labor and donation of herbicide. Unfortunately, the remaining crops on our grounds are weeds, weeds, and more weeds. Weeds that look ugly from a distance and weeds that look ugly close up. Sandy soil and a serious slope create additional problems, but nothing that our powerful dreams/determination can't fix.

We can't afford (and I don't want) an expensive sprinkler system to nurture bluegrass that requires fertilizing, weed-killing, and lots of mowing. In fact, I hope to hatch a good patch of Buffalo grass that will multiply and spread over the entire half-block. Buffalo grass is historic and native and attractive. It may green up later and brown up sooner than the non-native grasses, but our forebears would approve of the appearance and economy of Buffalo grass.

I had a good crop of bluegrass on my terrace two years ago. I did not water it last summer and back came the Buffalo Grass that had been tilled under and was dormant when my bluegrass was thriving. I've talked to Doug Anderson, extension agent, and Craig Beck, who is planting native grasses on his place near Cotesfield. I am told that Buffalo grass seed is expensive and hard to start. We can do it. The Rhodes, Kalbers, Andersons, and Cranes (descendants of the DeVrys who owned all that property in early days) believe in us and send donations in honor of Anna and Frank DeVry as well as Lillian Louise DeVry Rhodes. We all have forebears we are proud of and want to live up to. We owe it to all of them to finish up the Historical Village in a way to make them proud.

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

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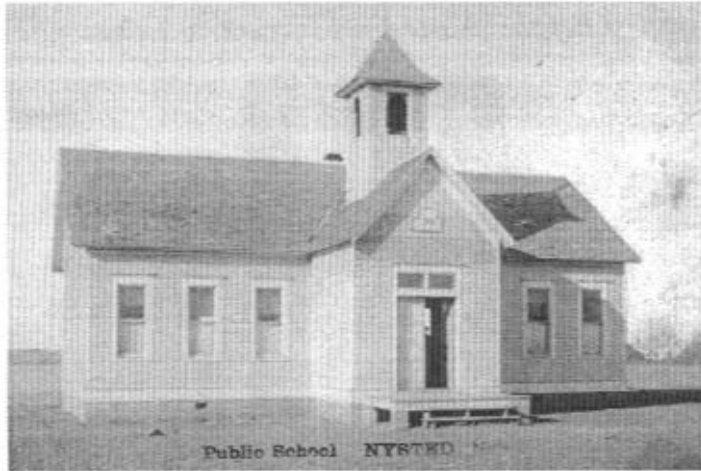
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Remembering Nysted's District 17. Above is a rare 1903 photograph of District 17 located in Nysted. The school district was formed in July of 1873 and closed in April of 1968. The building was one of the more attractive rural school buildings in Howard County. Photo courtesy of Ron W. Sack.

Entering Howard County

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