

Historically Speaking

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Larsen Lumber Company in St. Paul was located where the present City Offices are located. It was started by Lars Larsen and Frank Rogers around 1901.

Looking Back

By Julie Spilinek

Shortly after the issue featuring Main Street was published, someone suggested I contact Maren Larsen Palmer for additional information on Larsen's Lumberyard. I did and her contribution is below.

The Larsen Lumber Company was started by my grandfather and Frank Rogers around 1901. Lars Larsen came to the US when he was 17. He came to Hampton where he worked on a farm. He

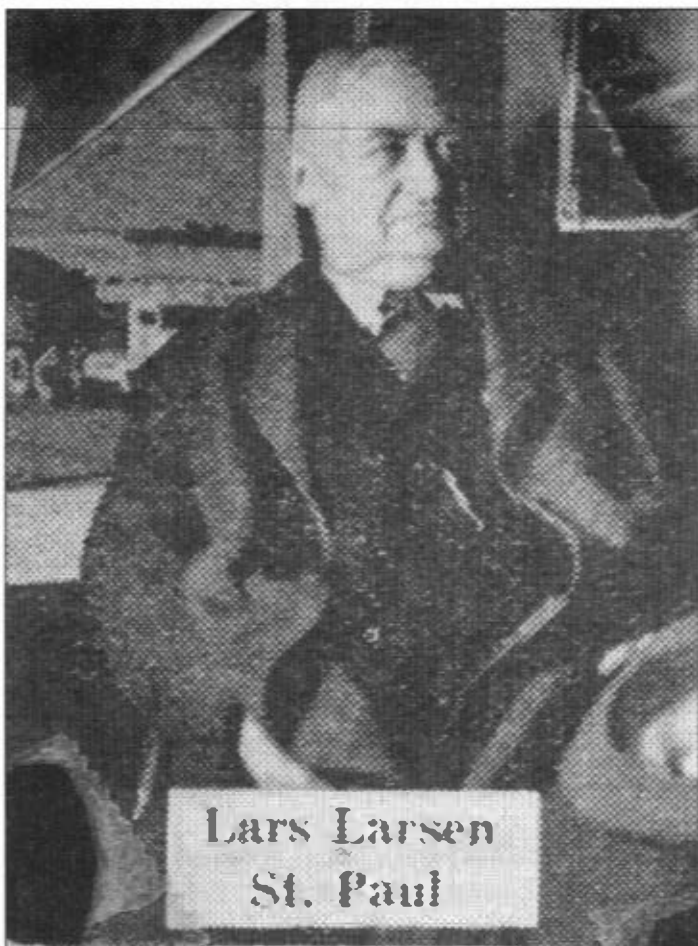
also worked in a lumberyard in Aurora, went to Elba and then St. Paul. He met Julia Brock and married in St. Paul. Julia came from Denmark also.

The lumberyard was located south of Jorgensen Electric and across the alley from "Barney" McClure's cleaners. Lars ran the yard until my father, Paul, got out of school in Lincoln. Together they ran it until grampa retired in 1932.

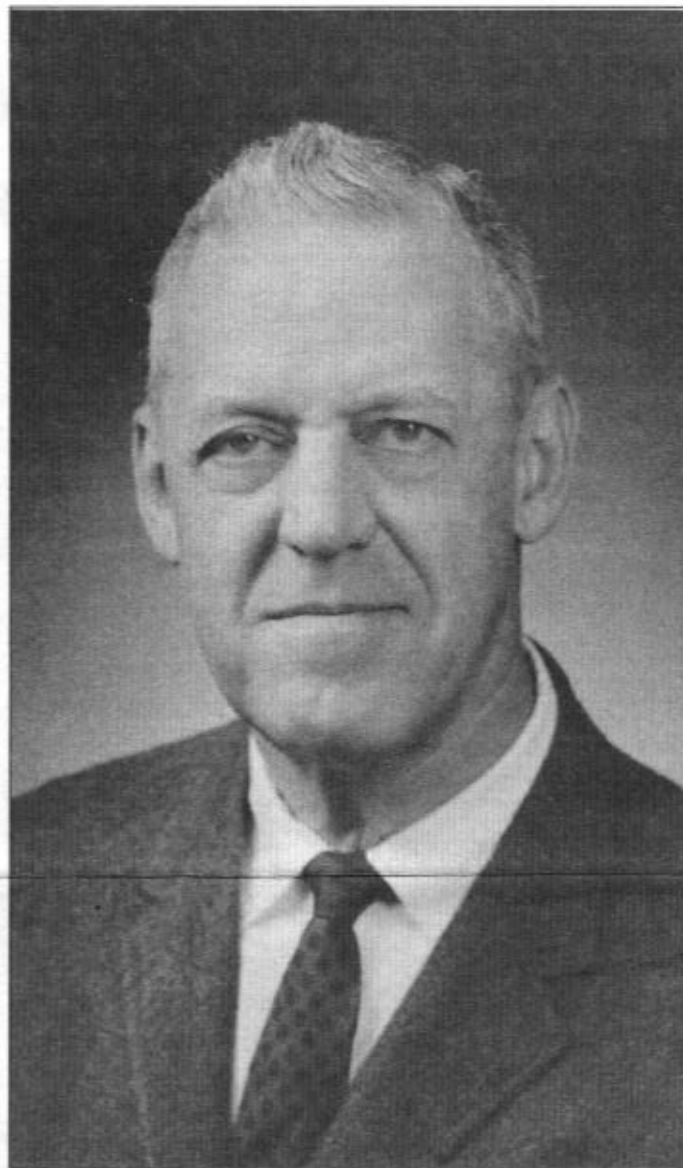
Paul's sister, Alta, married Frank Rogers. He passed away in 1931.

A Message From the Secretary *Julie Spilinek*

The Howard County Historical Society is getting ready for the 2014 tourist season and will be sprucing up the buildings and grounds for the many visitors we hope to have. There is always a need for volunteers to help with this effort. Also, we would like to have two or more people present when the village is open to act as guides. The plan is to have the village open on Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 4. You can often meet some interesting individuals during this time.



Lars Larsen, who immigrated to the United States at the age of 17, was the co-founder of Larsen Lumber Company.



Paul Larsen, Lars Larsen's son, was involved in the family's lumber business. He and LaVerne "Curley" Jacobsen played key roles in the development of the Farwell and North Loup Irrigation projects and the construction of the Sherman and Calamus Dams.

Julia and Lars had five children—Alta, Helen, Francis, Ches and my dad, Paul, the youngest.

I remember the train coming in and the men at the lumberyard would go with their trucks to shovel coal. They would go all over town to deliver the coal to people's basements. Nails came in wooden kegs, glass was cut to fit a window. Paint just came in a few colors. There was always a pile of scraps that the kids would come to pick up to make boats, or use for school projects.

After the war my cousin, Harold Rogers, came



The Lars Larsen family home was located at 6th and Grand Streets in St. Paul.

to look for a job and by that time my dad, Paul, had gotten involved in other things, so Harold worked there.

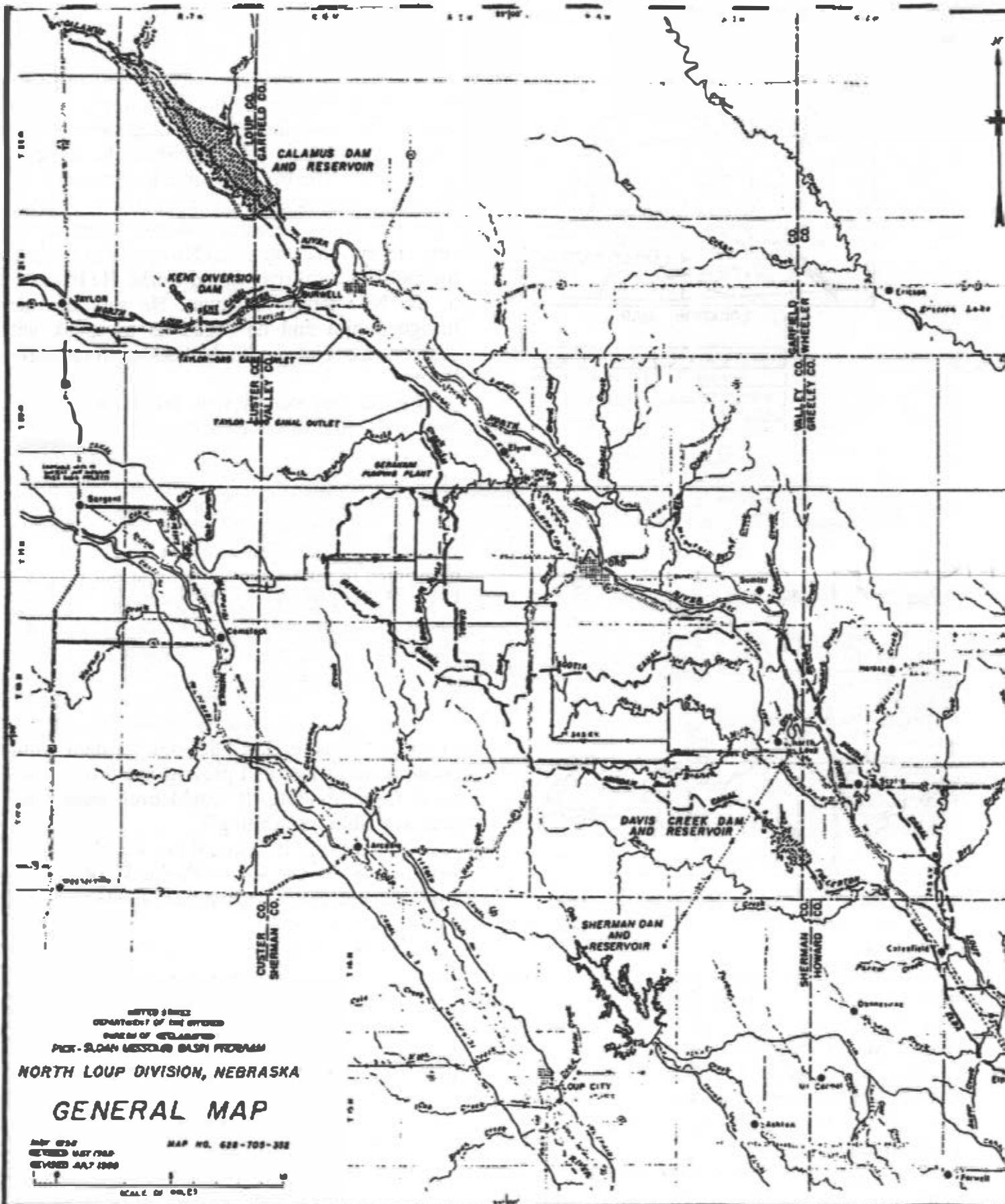
During the depression business was tough and my dad went around to the farmers and to others who needed help with their repairs. He offered them a good discount for repairs.

Paul and Barney McClure would play gin rummy in the basement of the lumberyard when business was slow. Many friends would gather on cold winter afternoons.

My dad got involved with the Pepsi Cola Company in Grand Island. He sold the lumber

yard around 1960 and he and mom moved to Grand Island.

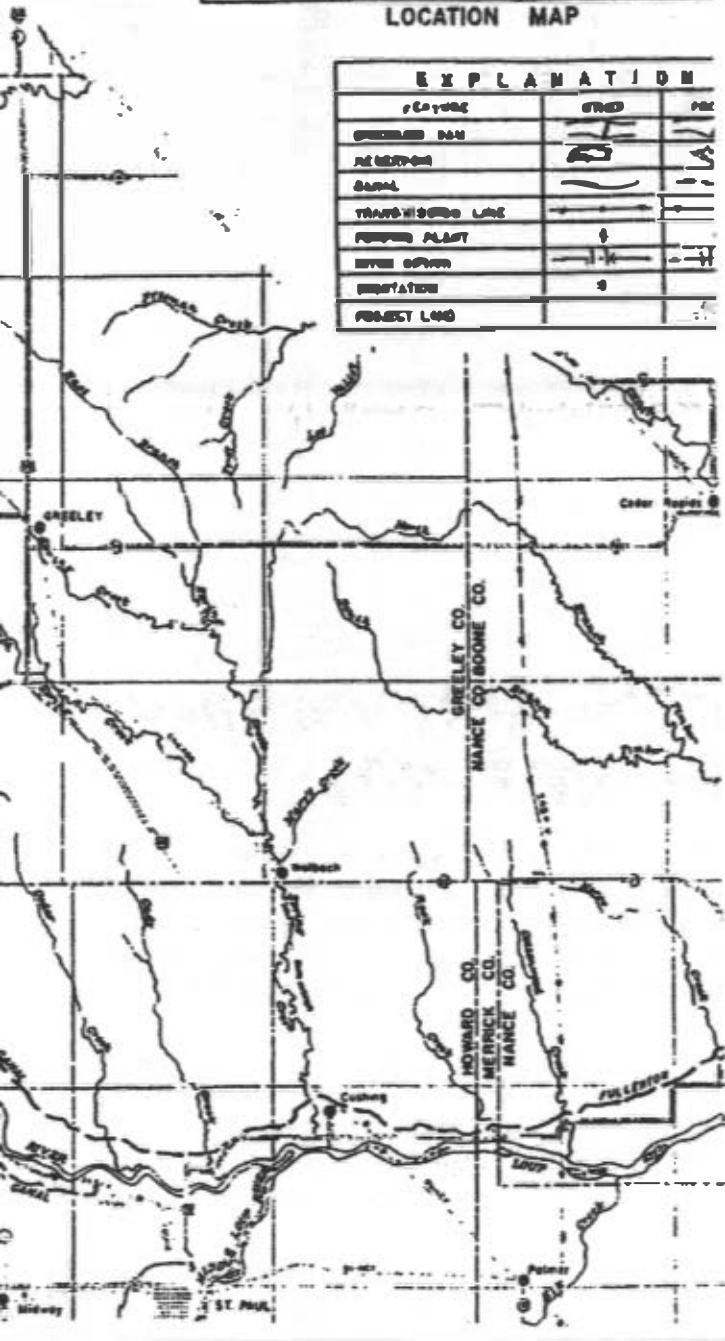
She also enclosed her dad's account of the inception of the Sherman Dam. This was quite timely as the February 12th issue of the "Phonograph-Herald" recounted the origin of the Twin Loups-Calamus Dam project. Among the original members of the Twin Loups District were several Howard County residents. These were Ras Rasmussen of Cotesfield; Charles Augustyn, Richard Spilinek, and Carl Andersen of Elba; and Wilbur Edwards of Cushing. Cyril Shaughnessy of St. Paul was the attorney for the district.





LOCATION MAP

EXPLANATION		
SPERM DAM	[Symbol]	[Symbol]
RECLAMATION	[Symbol]	[Symbol]
DAM	[Symbol]	[Symbol]
TRANSVERSE LINE	[Symbol]	[Symbol]
POWER PLANT	[Symbol]	[Symbol]
RIVER CROSS	[Symbol]	[Symbol]
IRRIGATION	[Symbol]	[Symbol]
PROJECT LAND	[Symbol]	[Symbol]



Another interesting sidelight in my life happened in the 1930s while I lived in St. Paul. I was sitting behind a duck blind on the Loup River with a friend by the name of "Curley" Jacobsen. While we chatted and waited for ducks, we discussed the possibility of damming the river and making it available for irrigation. The more we thought of it, the more feasible it seemed. A few days later we drove to Lincoln and discussed the idea with a Ivan Wood, a professor at the university. He said that the Loup River was considered the most uniform river in the world. He likened it to the Nile River in Egypt. He said the idea intrigued him and he urged us to speak with someone associated with the Federal Reclamation Bureau.

We did just exactly that, but at the time we were only able to speak with some of the office personnel. However, within several weeks I was approached by a Mr. Sloan, head projects officer of the Reclamation Bureau. He came into the lumberyard and inquired about me. I told him who I was. He then introduced himself and said he wanted to take a serious look at our proposal. He continued by saying, "Mr. Larsen, this looks like the kind of project the Bureau could tackle." He then told me he had hired a pilot to fly him over the whole area and that it looked like a lot of farms on either side of the river would benefit from the channeled water that could be supplied to them. "Besides this," he said, "a dam would conserve the water and prevent many of the low areas from flooding. It would even make more land available for farming."

He asked me if I would be willing to drive with him out to see some tableland east of Loup City. He unrolled a topographical map to show me the area he wished to visit.

"You betcha I will." I was excited that the agency's response was so swift. I made a quick

Paul Larsen and LaVerne "Curly" Jacobsen got the idea of placing dams on the Loup River while sitting in a duck blind in the 1930s. They drove to Lincoln to talk with a University professor who encouraged them with the project. Larsen and Jacobsen contacted the Bureau of Reclamation and that put the ball in motion and eventually resulted in the construction of Sherman Dam (left) and, later, Calamus



Sherman Reservoir 50th Anniversary Dedication Held June 7, 2013

The 50th Anniversary Dedication of Sherman Reservoir was held last summer (June 7, 2013). Speakers at the dedication were, left, Loup City Mayor Alicia Toczek, Western Manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Kirk Nelson, Assistant Manager for the Loup Basin Reclamation District Matt Lukasiewicz, Manager of the Loup Basin Reclamation District Tom Knutson, Nebraska Senator for the 41st Legislative District Kate Sullivan, and Loup City Council Vice President Alec Baillie. — Photo courtesy of The Sherman County Times

call to “Curley” Jacobsen and he came right over. Together we drove out to the area that seemed most logical for a dam site. Sloan visually surveyed the land carefully all along the river. Then he wanted to check the tableland between Sherman and Howard Counties where he thought the dam should be placed. Later when he drove us

back to town he said, “I’ll be in touch with you boys. But mind you, I think in the years ahead the farmers for miles around will be glad for your foresight. Just pray that Congress will give us a go ahead.”

However, it was not until 1959 the budget committee of the federal government approved

estimates on costs of two Nebraska projects, the Farwell project and the North Loup Project. These included two major dams, the Sherman and the Calamus Dams. Included in the plans were main lateral canals with supplementary canals linking individual farms. The cost of the two projects would eventually be returned to the government through payment for so many acre-feet of water used by the many farmers who benefited from its use. Late in July of the same year, Congress gave the Bureau of Reclamation the green light to begin work. Paul Harley of the Grand Island Bureau of Reclamation office took the responsibility of the two projects. The Farwell project was to be finished first and in operation before the North Loup project could be started.

This began a whole series of meetings in setting up a successful project. We had all kinds of knowledgeable people available, it was only a matter of getting them all together. There were Dan Jones of the State Reclamation Association, Henry Lange, head of the Reclamation District, Walter Jennings, Chief Inspector for the Bureau. Many other construction contractors found their way to our meetings when it came time to fix budget requirements and schedules. Even those who opposed the project, made themselves known to us. Their major complaint was, it would put too much of a financial burden on the farmers, drain the rivers and increase state taxes.

Nevertheless, by 1962 the Sherman Dam was completed by the John A. Tobin Construction Company—prime contractor. The main canal and

the supplemental canals were finished in 1963. The Deer Creek Pumping plant, south of Ashton, was completed in 1965. This pumping station lifts the water 99.8 feet to associated lateral canals. Now with the completion of the Calamus Dam and its contributing lateral canals, the two projects service 53,000 acres of land with irrigation. Today the whole area is a garden spot.

Farmers who were once opposed to these irrigation projects are now prospering because of the access to water during the hot, dry summer months. Old time farmers still recall the area as a wasteland, where drought often devastated their crops.

I was just sorry that my friend, Curley Jacobsen, was not on hand to see the development and completion of these projects. Within five years after our dream of an irrigation system for the whole Loup Valley, he was killed in an accident outside of St. Paul.

Although neither dam is located in Howard County, both have provided that all important element to the farmers in this county—water for irrigation. Two Howard County residents are presently on the Twin Loups Reclamation board—Joe Payne of rural St. Paul and Roland Spilinek of Elba.

I would like to feature the medical institutions that once had their practice in Howard County. Any information—or even stories of interest—would be appreciated. This includes dentists, eye doctors and general practitioners.

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Check your address label, those with a 14 have paid their dues. Thanks.

Dues are \$10.00 a year.

**Send to Howard County Historical Society,
P.O. Box 1, St. Paul, NE 68873.**



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INSIDE: "Looking Back" is information furnished by Maren Larsen Palmer on the Larsen Lumber Company and the impetus of Sherman Dam.

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