

# Historically Speaking

P.O. Box 1 • St. Paul, NE 68873 • [www.historichc.us](http://www.historichc.us) • E-mail: [historichc@historichc.us](mailto:historichc@historichc.us)



Howard Avenue, looking east from 8th Street, as it looked in the 1950s. Note the arrow is pointing to the store building that is now in the Historical Village. —Photo courtesy of Ron Sack

## Remembering Howard Avenue

Written by Robin Elstermeier

Since I am one of the newer members of the Howard County Historical Society, I'd like to tell my story about the early years in St. Paul, as I remember them. I write this story as a tribute to my father, Hamie Elstermeier, and the large number of people that started or continued businesses after World War II.

Most of these business owners had very little money and had brand new families to support. They also saw great opportunities in retail trade. My father, Hamie, had been farming 120 acres of really bad soil on the northeast edge of Grand Island and also working for the UP Railroad in G. I. He had met a beautiful young lady, Joy Loft, at the many dances that he attended on the weekends, and she lived in Ord. On his way from Grand Island to Ord, he often stopped in St. Paul to buy some flowers for his sweetheart. He got to know Frank Blazek, who sold him these flowers. In the summer of 1949, Frank told Hamie that he was tired of running his business, since his wife, Helen, had died. Dad loved to grow flowers and thought this would be a great idea, to buy a greenhouse and flower shop.

One of the first problems, as with most of the new entrepreneurs, is—no money. The times were a lot

different then. My folks went to talk to Jay Paul at the St. Paul National Bank. They told him that they wanted to buy the Flower Shop, and that they needed \$10,000, but they had no collateral. Jay said, "Sounds like a great idea." He put the money in their account, on a band shake, no problem.

The original founders or even the second generation owners of the local businesses were getting older and wanted to retire. The 1950s were the big years in St. Paul and in fact in all of Howard County. The population grew and a new school was built as was a new hospital. New motels were built and a whole new phone system was brought to town. Between the end of the war and 1960, almost every business in town went to the next generation or to a totally new owner. This month's *Historically Speaking* is dedicated to those new managers or new owners.

Being a 10 year old in 1958, I have probably forgotten some of the stores that used to line Howard Avenue. (We'll have to write another story to talk about the other businesses on the various side streets.) I spent a lot of time running up and down the main street, since we lived at the flower shop, which was at the corner of Howard Avenue and 5th Street. In the days before Mega Mart, we had everything you could want in St. Paul. Saturday nights were very

## A Message From the President *Jessie Kiser*

*As the President of the Historical Society, I hope our members will help us build our new building by donating money to help pay for it. Every little bit will help. We held groundbreaking ceremonies, the trees have been removed, the ground leveled, and cement is to be run, weather permitting. Thanks in advance for your help.*

*I wish to thank all the volunteers that have helped this summer with keeping the village open on weekends.*

busy on main street. The stores stayed open until 10 or 11 o'clock (or later). I remember well the time I spent in my Boy Scout uniform, trying to learn how to make popcorn on a propane popper in front of Sidel's Tavern. Larry McClure and Doug Leth were my mentors in that endeavor. Practically everyone came to St. Paul on Saturday evening, to shop, socialize and dance.

Times change! A new generation is taking over, but some things don't change. St. Paul and the whole county are still real small town friendly and welcoming to new residents and visitors. Those of us who have been here a long time, hope it stays that way.

I have made some brief lists of the businesses that I remember as a young child. I'm sure that I've made some mistakes in my lists. Please come into our Flower Shop and tell me about the things that you remember differently. There is a lot of history on the streets of St. Paul, and I love history.

### **South Side of Howard Avenue:**

Union Pacific Railroad Depot was east of the railroad tracks. (It was demolished in about 1974.)

Livestock Shipping Yard.

Livery Stable.

### **Howard Avenue—Fourth To Fifth Streets: South Side**

Clarence Southard built the John Deere Implement building with steel from WW II hangers at

the Grand Island airport.

Then it became St. Paul Equipment, then St. Paul Tire, then T.O. Haas and presently Thiel Automotive. Dale Matousek built his music store where he sold music, pianos and musical instruments.

Debus Bread Company had a warehouse for their bread products.

Livery Stable, then a Bakery and Cafe, then a Shoe Store in 1921. In the 1930s Frank Blazek started the Flower Shop and glass greenhouse. In 1949, Hamie and Joy Elstermeier purchased this business.

### **North Side of Howard Avenue :**

Coal Yards were located west of the railroad tracks.

### **Howard Avenue—Fourth To Fifth Streets: North Side**

The Howard Greeley Rural Public Power District offices and equipment were on the corner. In the 1960s this building became the home of *The Phonograph/Tommy-Rene Printers, Inc.* A new building was constructed to the east in 1982 and the old building was torn down. The site of the old building is where the newspaper's parking lot is located today. The second generation of Thompsons have taken over.

Paul Larson had a lumber yard in this area.

City wells were located here.

The Howard Greeley RPPD built new offices and they continue in this location.

### **Howard Avenue—Fifth Street To Sixth Street: South Side**

Clifford Hall Auto Sales was on the corner. Then Henry Rasmussen built the Bureau of Reclamation office building on this site. Albert and Rose Larson bought the building and turned it into Larson Apartments. Dan Scheer presently owns this building and it is unoccupied.

McKoski Garage and Repair and some of the family had living quarters in this building. Presently this building is used for storage, on the east side of this building.

The west side of the McKoski property was remodeled and Dr. Richard Hanisch had offices here, after he sold his office near the Hospital. St. Paul Economic Development then used these offices for some time. Presently this building is unoccupied.

Larsons sold records and televisions in this building. Ruby Klinginsmith Steffey operated an antique store in this building for several years. This building, owned by Wroblewskis, is now used for storage.

The next building was Fote's Bowling Alley, then Larsons bought the bowling alley and closed it later. The building was used for storage for a while.



Howard Avenue, looking east from 7th Street, as it looked in the 1950s. —Photo courtesy of Ron Sack

Then Loren and Barb Wroblewski bought the building and it was remodeled and used as the St. Paul Head Start School for several years.

Albert and Rose Larson lived in the two story apartment building. This building has been remodeled into a beauty shop and housed several different businesses over the years. It is presently a private residence.

There was a house here, a private residence. Herb Spears, attorney, had an office in this building for a short time.

Jorgensen Electric occupied this entire building and two generations of Jorgensens did electrical work in this area for many years. The business continues today and is owned by Thomas and Janet Hake.

### Howard Avenue—Fifth Street To Sixth Street: North Side

Ed Fleming had a lumber yard on this property, until it was destroyed by fire in 1936. He served as the Mayor of St. Paul for 14 years, and accomplished several things for the City of St. Paul.

#### St. Paul City Park

The Cushman Block is the name on the building on the western corner of the City Park. The City Library occupied the east part of the building, until the new one was built near the school. St. Paul City Hall was in the center part of this building, until it moved to the present location. Keating Mortuary was in the west part of this building. This space was utilized as the office for the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce for a short time. Now the Howard Greeley Food Pantry is here.

### Howard Avenue—Sixth Street To Seventh Street: South Side

At the top of this building, it says “Wilson Bros 1889”. It used to house Polansky Pharmacy and Schumacher Jewelry. Then Jack and Mary Duffy purchased this pharmacy and ran it for several years. Wieser Decorating moved into this building, with son Ben taking over when dad Harold retired, when Duffy’s moved to another location. A beauty salon was located here for a while. Then a consignment store was opened here. Jim and Joyce Olsen renovated this building and opened the 6th Street V-INN-U. It has a meeting room at street level with beautiful rooms upstairs that can be rented for short stays.

At the top of this building, it says “E.S. Chadwick 1871”. It was the home of St. Paul Hardware, which was operated by Einer Nielsen and later by his son Harvey Nielsen. My Dad used to say “If Harvey doesn’t have it, you don’t need it”. They sold a little bit of everything. The River of Life Church purchased the building and it is currently being used for worship and study.

Bartle’s Store was operated by two generations of the Bartle family. They sold groceries and dry goods. JoAnne Switzer operated the Hobby House on the west side of the building for a few years. Harold Obermiller purchased the store from Bartles and also had Obermiller Insurance on the west side. The Sweet Shoppe purchased the east side of the building and then they occupied the west side of the building. This was their third location in St. Paul, as their business grew and they needed more room.



*St. Paul business men danced for a good cause at a fundraiser in the 1950s—Photo courtesy of Robin Elstermeier*

Moravec Pharmacy occupied this building for several years. Paul and Bernice Hill purchased it and it became the home of Hill Liquor. The Everett family purchased the Liquor Store and Jim and then his son, Jim, ran the store for several years. Todd and Anita Speace then purchased this liquor store. When they moved to another location, Noel Olm opened the Sport Shack, where all kinds of sporting goods were sold. After his business closed, First Federal Lincoln opened a branch office for banking business. They later sold out to Great Western Bank. As of November 2014, this building is the home of Elstermeier Floral. It is a beautiful building with the original ceramic tile floor that Moravecs installed.

The *Phonograph* newspaper office was in the next building. When that building was vacated, Tom and Leona Pflipsen moved their Gambles Store to this location. When they closed their business, this building became the home of the Brick Street Mall. There is also a business in the upstairs area.

Leth's IGA was one of several grocery stores in St. Paul for many years. When they moved to another building, Gambles expanded into this area, making it the west half of their store. This area is now the west part of the Brick Street Mall.

The next building was actually two smaller business areas. The east side was the Ideal Cafe many years ago. Since then it housed a beauty salon, a photographer, and most recently a dog grooming business. The west side was the barber shop of Mr. Alonzo French, who sold his business to "Doc" Ziemba and it continued for many years in that capacity. Several small businesses have been located in that side since.

The Model Grocery was operated by Edward Dvoracek for many years. He later sold the building to Clarence and Mamie Leth and they moved their IGA store to this location. They added an addition to the south side of the building so that they could offer an enlarged meat counter to their customers. Presently, Wroblewski Law Offices occupy this building.

Johnson's Five and Dime Store was next door. This business was run by two generations of the Johnson family. They had many things to offer the customers of the area. When they closed their business, the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce purchased the building and they maintain their offices here. This building is also the home of the Museum of Nebraska Major League Baseball, which brings many visitors to St. Paul that are interested in baseball history.

The next building is the home of Skelgas, now SourceGas, the supplier of natural gas to this area. Above the Chamber of Commerce Office and the SourceGas building we find the Masonic Temple. The Masons and Job's Daughters hold their meetings in this upstairs area.

The next building was a very narrow building and it was the first location of the Sweet Shoppe in town. Ruby (Klinginsmith) Steffey, who owned this building, had an antique store here for a few years. This building was later demolished.

On the corner, this building is one of the older buildings in St. Paul. It was called the Center Bank, and I think this bank suffered financial ruin during the depression. Then there were two generations of Stahlnecker men who operated the Corner Barber Shop, for many years. They later sold their business to Deb Meyer, who cut hair for several years. Today this building is owned by Caitlin Jerabek and she operates Beyond Blueprints. She has recently embellished her outside property south of the building.

### **Howard Avenue—Sixth Street To Seventh Street: North Side**

St. Paul National Bank was on the corner, until they built a new building at the corner of Grand and 7th Streets. L.G. Davolt purchased this building and used it for his jewelry store, until he closed his business. Mick McDowell then operated McDowell Management from this building for a few years. He also rented an office to Todd Elsbemd, who was an attorney in Grand Island. Currently, this building is the home of Valerie's Interiors.

The Riviera Theatre building is next and the Marvel family ran this theatre. They provided movies for the St. Paul area residents for many years. The building was sold to The Happy Church and services

were held there regularly for several years. Todd Wojtalewicz and Loren Studley now own this building and they have allowed several groups to use the building for various causes.

The Coast-to-Coast Store was next. I remember Jim and Jane Laughrey, then Jack and Leslie Hausmann, running this store. After it closed, Dr. Lofgreen, from Grand Island, had a dental office. When they closed the dental office, Brehm Drug purchased this building and it became the east side of their store.

The west side of the current Brehm Drug was the original building that Bob and Dorothy Brehm bought from the Dillard family in 1953. They had a great "soda fountain" and as a young boy, I really liked to spend time there! It was great. The second generation of the Brehm family is now in charge of this drug store and Dave and Marilyn work very hard to meet all of the pharmacy needs of the community.

The entry way to this next building says "Kotik's" and Mr. Julesgard ran the pool hall for many years before he sold it to Curly Jacobsen. Curly also sold sporting goods to those who needed them. When Tom and Leona Pflipsen came to St. Paul, this is where their original Gambles Store was located. Currently John McClellan owns this building.

Floyd Tesmer owned Tesmer's Heating, Electric and Appliance in the next building. Later, this building was the second site for the Sweet Shoppe, since they needed more room. A few years ago, John and Elaine McClellan made "The Gathering Place", a great building where we can rent the area and have a party or reception, with tables and chairs and a full kitchen to use when entertaining guests.

Many years ago, Charlie Wenke owned a Gambles Store in this next building. Later it was the home of Pat Kelly's Bar, and later it became Becker's Bar. Today it is the home of the County Cage Bar.

Havlik's Market was located in the next building. The entire family was involved in the operation of this store. (Dave Brehm told me that Art Hansen, an employee at Havlik's, became a friend of some of the young kids in town. When he found Havlik's homemade hot dogs that weren't quite big enough or didn't look just right, he would cook them at the back of the store. It didn't take these kids long to realize that this was a good thing! They could go get a snack from Art and be all the happier for that experience.) In 1961 Havlik's built a new building on 6th Street and moved to their new location. They sold the building to Robert Nowak for his propane business. Charles and Pearl Dobry, Attorneys-at-Law, had their offices above Havlik's Market. Barb Wroblewski and Pam Baker



*The fundraisers to raise money for polio vaccinations proved to be popular and well attended events. — Photo courtesy of Robin Elstermeier*

felt it was time to open a ladies clothing store in St. Paul, so Ann Marie's Dress Shop was opened, in the former Havlik building. It was in operation for several years. Since that time, there have been a couple of beauty shops opened in this building and in the building to the west of this one. Currently this area houses Love It Salon where you can have your beauty needs taken care of, and get a massage. Tracey Hansen is the current owner.

The Fashionette was a ladies clothing store owned by Blanche and Bob Nowak for several years and later was operated by Helen Nowak. It later became part of the Ann Marie's Dress Shop. There is exercise equipment there now, part of the Love It Salon.

The next building was a bar that was later owned by Ernie Sidel. Eventually this building became the east side of the present Bryan Jensen Clothing Store.

The Bryan Jensen Clothing store was opened in the late 1930s. They sold all types of men's clothing, shoes, coats, suits, etc. This store is currently owned and operated by Loren Studley. He specializes in big and tall men's clothing in addition to all of the men's clothing that they offer, for dress or casual.

The building on the corner says "Svoboda 1929" on the front of the store. The St. Paul Post Office was located on this corner of Howard and 7th Street. In 1960, a new Post Office was built at the corner of Indian and 7th Street. This building was sold to Jack and Mary Duffy and they moved their pharmacy to this location. Some years later, they sold their pharmacy to Jim and Lorraine Swinarski, who continued their business for many years. When they went out of business, the building was sold to Family Eyecare and

they are presently in business here. It is noted that they were able to save one of the original walls in the building and they've left it uncovered, for everyone to enjoy this piece of history in St. Paul.

### Howard Avenue—Seventh To Eighth Street: South Side

Citizen's National Bank was built on this corner and their name was later changed to Citizen's State Bank.

*The Howard County Herald* newspaper office was in the next building. Olga and Irene Larkowski were the owners and operators of this business for many years. Ron Furse of *The Aurora News Register* purchased the newspaper and he later sold it to the Thompson family, who merged *The Phonograph* and *The Howard County Herald* into *The Phonograph Herald*. This building was added into the Citizen's Bank. Dean R. Armstrong, Attorney, had offices above *The Howard County Herald*.

The creamery was in the next building. I remember when they closed the creamery, in around 1965, my Dad purchased the "egg cooler" and we moved it to the flower shop, along with the wood from the floor. We continued to use that cooler until we sold our greenhouse and old flower shop in 2014. In fact, that cooler is now being used somewhere in southern Nebraska.

The next building was not as wide, but it was a wonderful place! It was Mrs. Harvey's Candy Store. She made homemade candies, and you could always get something for a penny. We know that doesn't happen too much anymore. Mrs. Harvey lived in the back of her store and she was always a happy lady. Both the creamery and the candy store became Family Eyecare. Currently these buildings have been remodeled and they are part of the Citizen's Bank.

Jarocke Motors is another business that has continued for two generations. Ed started the business and Tom continues with the business today. Tom and his staff continue to work on cars and make the necessary repairs. They used to sell new Chryslers.

The next building was the home of International Harvester. Stan Habr and Jim Bryson were the owners of this business. When they moved their business north on Highway 281, they sold their building to Wheelers. This business supplied clothing, farm supplies, toys, games and many other things in St. Paul for several years. When they discontinued their business this building was sold and is used for storage.

Next door to the west, there is a smaller building. I don't remember what used to be there. In the last several years, Jerry and Colleen Killinger had an



*Joy Elstermeier organized the polio fundraisers and wrote the scripts. —Photo courtesy of Robin Elstermeier*

office for their auction and real estate business.

Vance Lind built the next building, where he sold and repaired televisions and radios. There were large windows looking out over Howard Avenue, Vance liked to see what was going on in town. Later, this building was used as the first Senior Center. After the present Senior Center was built, the Lind building was demolished and there is now an empty lot at that location.

### Howard Avenue—Seventh To Eighth Streets: North Side

Knights of Columbus Building—formerly the Family Shoe store—faced 7th Street. Girl Scouts used to meet in the basement with an outside stairway from the sidewalk.

Susie Wolfert had a beauty shop until she closed her business. The Legion Auxiliary stores their supply of crutches, walkers, wheelchairs, and other medical equipment in this building.

Back door to the bakery.

Ernie Stanczyk operated a bar in this location for several years.

Dog grooming business moved into this building fairly recently.

Ron Vonderohes son also had a business here.

Robert Nowak had his propane business in this building. Ben and Marie Sekutera opened a liquor store at this location. They sold out to Eddie Wojtalewicz. He later moved his business to Highway 281. Around 1984, the Chamber of Commerce office



Many people who lived in St. Paul from the 1950s to today may recognize many of the men in the pictures.—Photo courtesy of Robin Elstermeier

was located in this building. Currently a clothing and accessory store, called Department 49, is housed in this building.

Vonderahe Business Services occupies this building. He used to rent an office in this building to Suzan DeCamp, who had an abstractor business.

The Uptown Grill was housed in the next building. There was seating in the front near the grill and booths in the back room. The building was demolished several years after the business was discontinued.

The Lynch Jewelry Store was in a small building and they sold out to L.G. Davolt in the 1950s. They sold jewelry and offered repair work on watches and clocks. Later, Zlomke Furniture stored used furniture to be sold, in this building. This building has been demolished.

George and May Zlomke built a large furniture store and also sold floor coverings and window treatments. After their deaths, some of their employees purchased the business and it continued for several years. It was purchased by St. Paul Economic Development with the possibility of building a Community Center. That decision was changed due to several reasons. Today it is an empty lot.

Next to the furniture store, Mr. Swanson ran a shoe repair shop. This was the last building in town to have a wooden sidewalk. As a young boy, I thought that was pretty cool. When that building was torn down, Mr. Swanson moved to the shoe repair shop that had been run by Mr. Ben Graunke.

The brick building on the corner was the home of

the St. Paul Fire Department, with City Hall occupying the upstairs rooms. When the new fire department building was built, and City Hall was moved, this building was sold to Zlomke Furniture for storage. It is currently "Tubby's Fire Museum". Fire trucks and fire fighting equipment are on display by the owner.

Many of the business leaders in the 1950s got together annually to produce a Variety Show entitled "The Polio Show". They raised money for the March of Dimes, to fund research to learn more about polio and then to provide vaccinations against polio for the students in school. My mother, Joy Elstermeier, was largely responsible for organizing these variety shows. She wrote the skits that were then performed by the business leaders and their children.

Today, some of the business leaders of St. Paul, through the St. Paul Rotary Club, are trying to eradicate polio worldwide. They are raising money, (perhaps more respectfully?) than some of their fathers did, as you may understand as you review the photos included in this newsletter. These pictures show some of the "fun" that was had by St. Paul business owners during some of these variety shows that I referred to.

Out of respect for our elders, we have not named the people in these pictures. You may or may not recognize some of these faces. Just remember, they became involved in these variety shows for a very good cause.

There are still many businesses that I did not talk about in this story. We will have to do that at another time. You see that there is a lot of history as you look up and down the streets of St. Paul.

Many improvements have been made and I think we are lucky to live in "small town America". Everyone has the opportunity to get involved in the Howard County Historical Society. Why don't you think about talking to some of the current members today, and see how you can help out? Robin

### Accepting Donations for Building

The Howard County Historical Society has launched a campaign to raise funds to construct a building on the historical society grounds north of the present Agricultural Building. The 40'x100' building will cost around \$200,000.

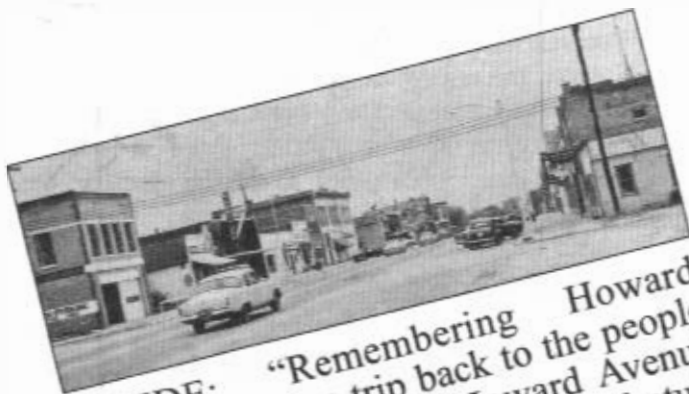
Donations of \$100 or more will be recognized on a donor board. Donations may be sent to the Howard County Historical Society, P.O. Box 1, St. Paul, NE 68873. Earmark your check "Building Fund."



HOWARD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
 P.O. BOX 1  
 SAINT PAUL, NEBRASKA 68873



## Historically Speaking



**INSIDE:** "Remembering Howard Avenue" takes a trip back to the people and businesses along Howard Avenue from the 1950s to today. The feature was written by Robin Elstermeier.

## Historically Speaking

**PUBLISHER:**

Howard County Historical Society

**EDITING, LAYOUT, AND DESIGN:**

Many fine members of the Howard County Historical Society

**CIRCULATION:**

300+

**MAILING ADDRESS:**

P.O. Box 1, Saint Paul, NE 68873

**MEMBERSHIP (INCLUDES NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTION AND MAILINGS):**

\$10 per person

Preserving the history of:  
 Boelus, Cotesfield, Cushing,  
 Dannebrog, Dannevirke, Elba,  
 Fairdale, Farwell, Nysted, Paplin,  
 Saint Libory, Saint Paul, and Warsaw

**2015 OFFICERS:**

Jessie Kiser, President  
 Carl Hoeber, Vice President  
 Julie Spilneck, Secretary  
 Evelyn Dvorak, Treasurer

**OTHER 2015 DIRECTORS:**

Jean Poes  
 Janet Hruza  
 Jim Ross  
 Rose Ross  
 Roger Van Pelt  
 Robin Elstermeier  
 Roger Goetsche

The HCHS is a non-discriminatory provider.