

Historically Speaking

P.O. Box 1 • St. Paul, NE 68873 • www.historichc.us • E-mail: historichc@historichc.us



“HOME OF THE WINNERS.”



HIS CATALOG marks the 21st year of pure bred draft and coach horses at the “Home of the Winners,” St. Paul, Neb. Frank Iams, founder and owner, was a horseman born—not made—and had been breeding horses six years previous in Iowa, and bred his first colt at fifteen years of age. He began life in a small way (having sold peanuts and saved money for his first colt), until now he has 117 black Percherons, Clydes, Belgians, and Coachers on hand; has made more importations from Europe than any other importer of Nebraska, and imported and owned more first class top-notchers than all of them, as will be seen by his successful career in the show yards of leading state fairs. Iams’ home bred black Percherons and Clydes, stallions and mares, have won the first prize at the Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska state fairs, and great St. Louis fair. Also his imported stallions and mares have won first and sweepstakes prizes at the Omaha exposition and leading state fairs, where he showed thirty horses, mostly blacks, and received \$1,320.00 for doing so. His “herd of horses” have won the “herd prize” for best lot of horses owned by one man, for six years in succession at Nebraska state fairs. His career has been a continuation of success, and his patrons are as well successful, as he is a mascot to buyers. He has the largest collection of first-class stallions on hand of all importers of Nebraska, 95 per cent blacks and 50 per cent “ton” horses. You can see a “horse show” there any day that are “hot propositions” to his competitors, and if you mean business and want a good horse, and have money or make bankable notes, you will buy a stallion at Frank Iams’ importing barns.

I am,

FRANK IAMS.

St. Paul’s Frank Iams, A Horseman Known Around the World

LEFT: The 1903 catalog of Frank Iams had this story telling prospective buyers of background of the famous horseman.

ABOVE: This picture ran opposite the story in the 1903 catalog and had the following caption—One of Iams’ Importing Barns and Ten Three-Year-Old Ton Stallions. This barn has 50 Box stalls, and 30 stalls more or 80 stallions. This is only one of Iams’ barns. He has others.

A Message From the President *Evelyn Dvorak*

The season for vacationing is here. The schools are closed and families are making plans for their vacations.

The Howard County Historical Society volunteers have worked together to have all the facilities ready for the summer months. Dedicated volunteers swept down the cobwebs, washed windows (how they do shine), vacuumed floors and dusted our displays. The grounds are neatly mowed and flowers have been planted in the "tubs". Yes, we are ready and looking forward to having visitors from a distance and especially many of you local folks.

We have something of interest for every one. The Farwell Danish Lutheran Church, which was built in 1898, was moved to the village in 1967. Most of it is exactly as it was when last used.

The country school, District 41, was restored to its original setting in 2003 and it brings back memories for many. The young children enjoy seeing how school was for Grandpa and Grandma.

The store is a memorial to the original Bartle's Store. The building still is on the main street of St. Paul. You will find many interesting articles on display that our pioneers would purchase.

The blacksmith shop is open every Sunday afternoon from 1-4 p.m. The authentic forge is "fired up" with Dave Sprague, as a member of the Prairie Blacksmith Association, doing living history demonstrations.

The original Cotesfield Post Office was moved to the village in 1997 and has been restored as an authentic working post office.

The Union Pacific depot is a transportation museum that was moved to St. Paul in 1998. This, too, was restored as a depot of the past with many transportation and railroad displays.

The Gruber house, across the street from the depot, was purchased by the Society in 1992. The upper level is furnished as a home from the Victorian era. The lower level has a Veterans Museum with displays, records and memorabilia of Howard County Veterans from the Civil War to the present. The Native American exhibit, the Jean Potts (a mystery writer) exhibit, and a religious exhibit are also at the lower level.

On May 29, 2005, we had our formal opening of the village and Gruber house. We now have a traveling exhibit, "The Dust Bowl" on display at the depot. Dorothy Rieke was our keynote speaker on May 29th, speaking on

"Nebraska Farm Families during the Depression". These two programs are made possible by the Nebraska Humanities Council.

Ron Sack has two new displays. "Those St. Libory Melons: How Early Settlers Marketed and Transported Their Products" is in the depot freight room. "Father Macourek, Catholic Renaissance Priest" is displayed in the religious room at the lower level of the Gruber house.

The Historical Society welcomes all of you to visit us this summer. We will be open Tuesday through Friday and Sunday from 1-4 p.m. or by appointment. Call 308-754-4977 or 308-754-4060.

The May 29 presenter, Dorothy Rieke, and her husband, Kenneth, were so impressed with the Gruber house, village and displays that they, upon leaving left us a generous donation.

"Entering Howard County" Makes a Great Gift. Order a Copy Today!

Yes, please send me ___ copies of the 544-page history book "*Entering Howard County*."

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

1. Number of Books: _____ x \$75.00 = _____

2. Shipping and Handling:
(\$5 per book, if desired) _____ x \$ 5.00 = _____

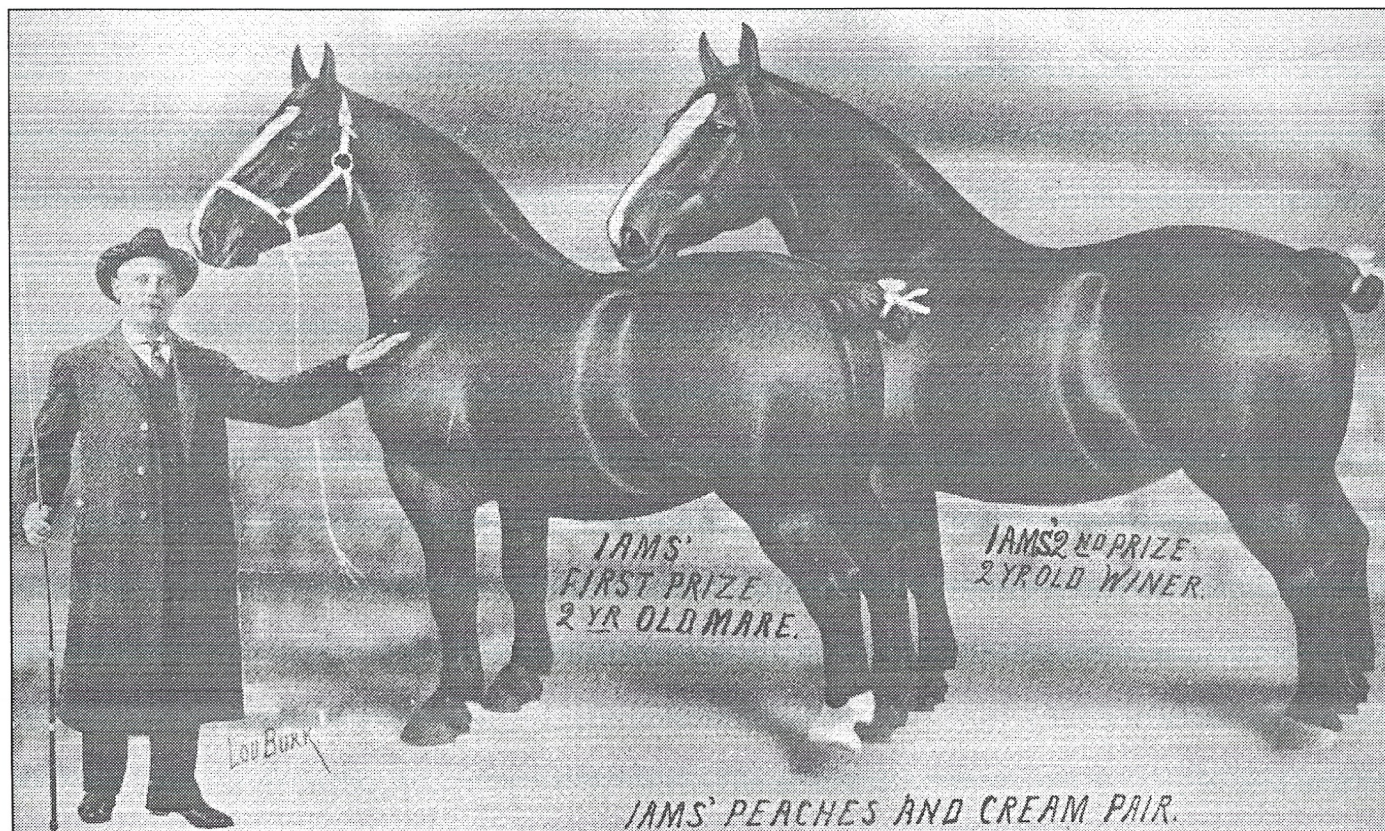
3. Tax:
5% Nebraska Sales Tax (\$3.75
per if purchased in state): _____ x \$3.75 = _____

OR 6%, includes St. Paul
City Sales Tax (\$4.50, if
purchased in St. Paul _____ x \$4.50 = _____

Total: \$ = _____

*Make checks payable to the
Howard County Historical Society,
P.O. Box 1, St. Paul, NE 68873*

Frank Iams, Nebraska's "Little Napoleon" . . . Imported Draft Horses Made History



Uncle Hiram, Iams is the "Live Wire" horseman—"the man behind" the gun that "shows you more" first-class stallions and mares of quality and finish than can be seen in any importing barn in the U.S. "For money or chalk" Iams is surely a "big Fly in the Ointment" in the horse business. He actually sold 200 horses in 1912 and saved over \$200,000 to buyers. This "pair of mares" has produced \$10,500 of horses in five years and only nine years old.—Picture and information from Frank Iams' 1917 Stud Catalog featuring 40 Percheron and Belgian Stallions and Mares.

by Ellen Kiechel Partsch
Western Outlook Magazine
April 1974

There are probably more people in France today who would recognize the name of Frank Iams than there are in his old home state of Nebraska. But he was one of the more colorful characters of our pioneer days, and in his time he—and his hometown of St. Paul—were known around the world.

He was small in size, but what he lacked in size he made up for in nerve. The only fear he admitted was of ocean travel, and he gave in to that only after many journeys across the Atlantic, and the sinking of the Titanic. There was certainly no fear evident in his attitude to the huge draft horses which were his great passion.

Born on the Iowa prairies in 1857, he was given his first horse when he was 15, and from then on until shortly before his death he was involved in breeding, raising, and

buying and selling the finest draft horses in the world.

The Iams family came to St. Paul in 1882, bringing with them three of the finest stallions ever seen, and for the next forty years the name of Frank Iams and his hometown were recognized all across America and half of Europe. He began his business with a modest livery stable, and became the largest importer of French and Belgian horses in the country.

His personality had much to do with his success. Called Little Napoleon not only because of his size and his managing ability, but also for the Napoleonic pose he struck for his business portraits, he had a flair for publicity. He boasted that he could carry on his business in both French and German, eliminating the need for an interpreter and resulting in better deals for his customers. His catalogues were works of art, both for his original way of writing and for the illustrations. Every year an artist came out from Chicago and stayed in the Iams home, painting pic-



The 1912 "Peaches and Cream" catalog had a picture of the St. Paul home of Frank Iams with the following caption: *This home was made by selling first-class stallions at let-live prices, and making every statement good and "having the goods." You will own one like it if you buy your stallions of Iams. All Iams customers have white houses and red barns, and wear diamonds after they buy stallions of him. Iams has 120 imported stallions and mares that must be sold, panic or no panic.*

tures of the horses for that year's edition.

He dressed for his role, loved to wear diamonds, and on his trips away from home always carried a gold-headed cane.

The first few years he brought in horses from Iowa, but in 1889 he decided to begin importing, and he and a friend, Ed Bartlett, made a trip to France, Belgium, and the British Isles. Bartlett wrote back to the editor of the St. Paul PHONOGRAPH, "It would have been worth twice the price of admission for you to have seen Iams wish he was home when he was seasick."

In Paris Bartlett remarked that they were hampered by being unable to speak French, so whenever they saw a sign, "English spoken here", they dropped in, but to quote him again: "the English gentleman was always out, and the Frenchman always wanted to sell Monsieur something." That must have been when Iams decided to learn a little French.

In Paris they attended the Wild West show and visited with Buffalo Bill Cody, also a Nebraskan. They went to

Chaterne in the Perche district, where Iams selected the best Percherons he could find. In Scotland they bought a half-dozen of the finest large horses available, including a two-year-old colt weighing 2000 lbs., and they were royally entertained by one of the large landowners. Bartlett did most of the socializing, while Iams combed the byways, collecting 21 large Percherons, Clydes and Shires. He also brought home two little Shetland ponies, a curiosity on the Nebraska prairie. Bartlett wrote again:

"Iams is the best judge of horses I ever knew, a fair judge of wine and women, a brave man on land with the nerve of a lion, but he is positively the worst seaman I ever saw. At the sight of water he wilts. He went to bed seasick before we lost sight of land, and stayed in bed for eight days."

In spite of his dislike of water, Iams made yearly and oftener trips to Europe until the sinking of the Titanic, after which his brother made two trips for him.

On the way to Europe in 1890, Iams stopped at a hotel in New York City and signed the register "Frank Iams" in



Frank Iams and his special express train of 103 draft and coach stallions as it appeared coming from New York to St. Paul, Nebr., August 24, 1905. This is the third special express train of 103 Imported Stallions each shipped by Frank Iams to St. Paul, Nebraska, in 1903-4-5. This shows what a real live Horseman of hustling business qualities can do—you can do the same. Iams began life a poor boy. The Iams' Motto: "Sell the best horses for the least money, make every representation and promise good."—From the Iams 1906 catalog.

the fancy flowing style of penmanship of the day. He wrote home the result:

"I am situated at the St. Dennis Hotel on Broadway. I created quite a sensation by registering here. They thought the great Frank James (outlaw and brother of Jesse James) was in the city. I was pointed out, stared at, and interviewed, but they always kept their off eye on me. I had my fun just the same, and lots of them will be none the wiser, thinking they have seen the living Frank James."

From then on, he was famous enough in his own right that reporters met his ship when he returned, year after year, to describe the horses and the colorful westerner who conducted such a large business. His exhibits won prizes in fairs and national expositions all over the country. In 1899 the highest priced green pacer ever sold in Chicago was raised in Howard County and shipped by Iams.

Many western Europeans learned about the Nebraska prairies firsthand, for he hired French and Belgian stablehands to accompany his shipments until they were settled in his "Home of the Winners." Then he paid their transportation back to Europe.

While they were coming home from France in 1909, a mid-Atlantic storm hit, and 14 of the huge stallions, each weighing more than a ton, stampeded. It took more than two hours to calm them.

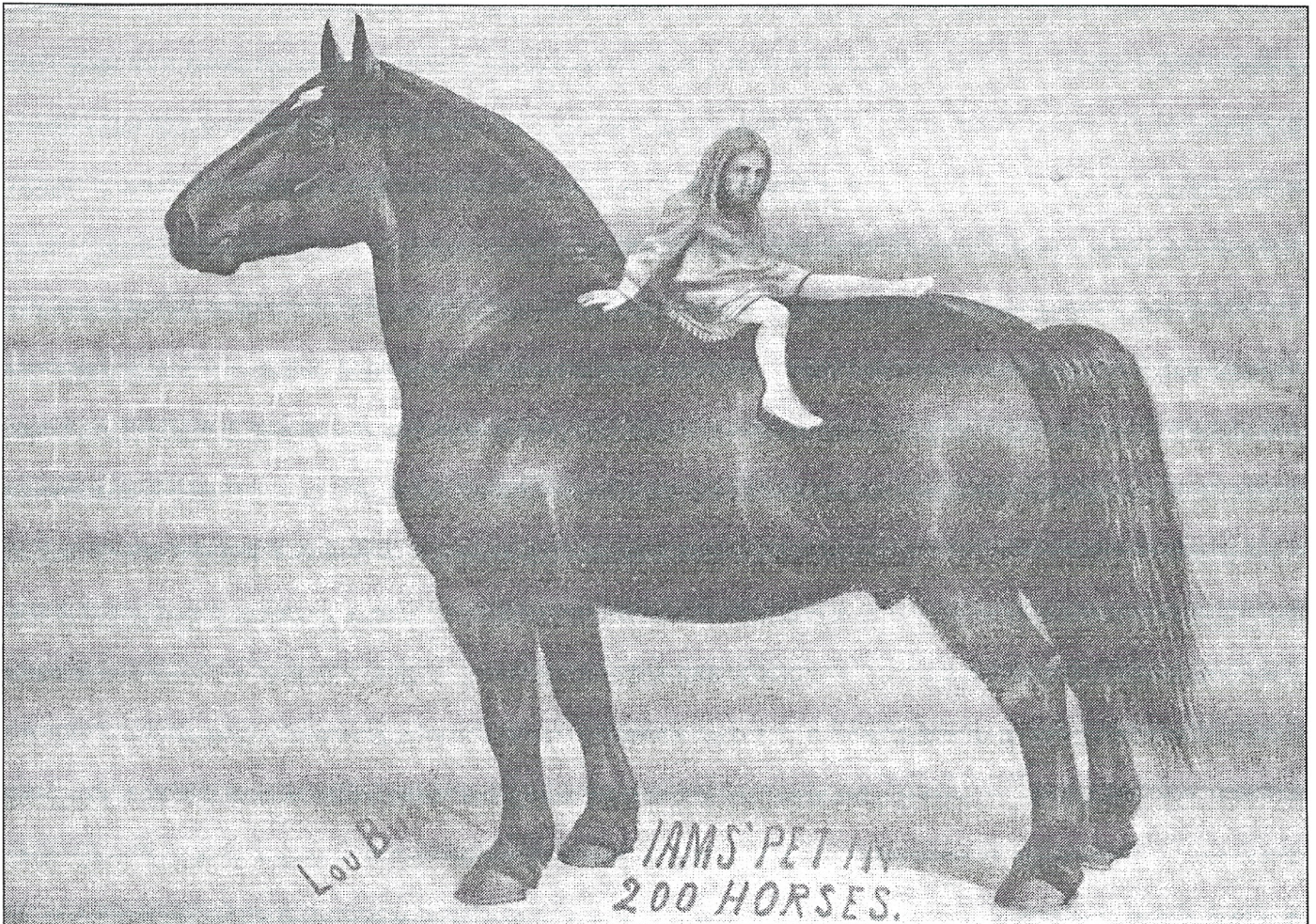
As his shipments grew larger, he began hiring special

trains to transport them across the country after landing. In 1910 he brought in the largest single importation ever made by one man. He had engaged the entire deck of the S.S. St. Andrew for the 200 mares and stallions, and in New York made arrangements for a special train of 10 cars. The tracks were cleared, and except for stops for two mail trains, they ran straight through to St. Paul in 60 hours, at a cost of \$5,250. When they arrived home, it took hours to lead the horses from the depot to the barns on the opposite edge of town, and old timers say it was like a parade—everyone turned out to watch the magnificent horses prancing along.

Many of his stallions were sold to Farmers' Alliance Co-operatives, and buyers came from all the states, Mexico, Canada, and Japan.

World War I put an end to importing, and he went into the cattle business in South Dakota, keeping his home in St. Paul. He died in 1919, one of the victims of the great flu epidemic. He wanted to be buried with the statue of a horse over his grave, but that was one of his ideas never carried out. He lies beneath a simple tombstone in the St. Paul Cemetery.

A year or so ago, a group of men who import draft horses for people who raise them for a hobby, were in France, where they visited a large breeding business run by the Chapelle family. To their surprise they found one of

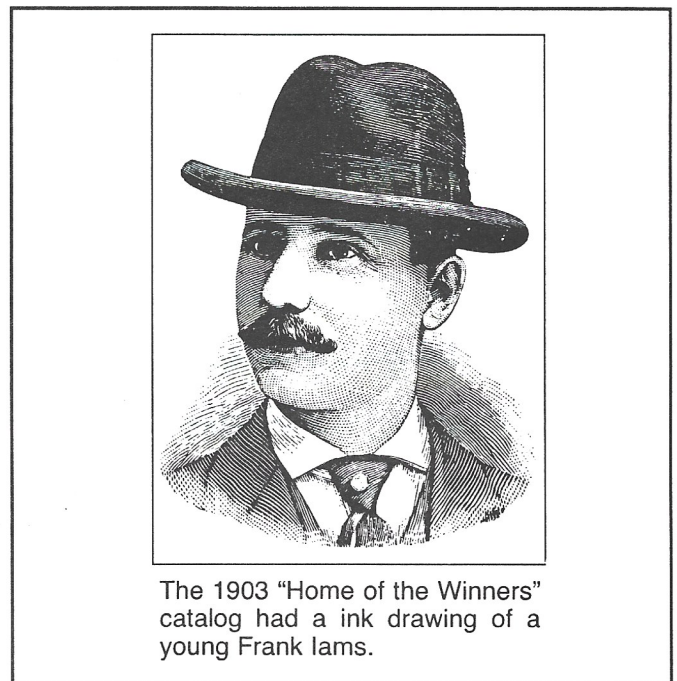


It is not known who the girl is atop 3-year old 1800 lbs. "Iams Isoete," a Bay Percheron featured in Iams 1911 "Peaches and Cream" catalog.

Frank Iams' advertising posters on the wall—the first time they had ever heard of him. Ronald Chapelle, now in charge, told them how Iams had dealt with his grandfather. Later, on a business trip to O'Neill, they went through St. Paul, and by a curious coincidence, stopped at one of the few places where they could find someone who could tell them about the man who was so well-known so long ago—the motel and filling station owned by his niece and her husband, Ernest and Gladys Iams Cerney.

While only a few old residents remember him, around Nebraska, the name of Frank Iams, and his business, and his home, are still found on that wall in France, and very probably remembered by those whose fathers and grandfathers made the long trip to the Wild West and back to the Old World, as grooms for his hundreds of Belgians and Clydes, Percherons, Shires and Coachers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Ellen Kiechel Partsch was a local historian and author, who wrote the book, "Howard County: The First 100 Years." She also wrote a weekly column in the Phonograph-Herald entitled Midnight Musing.



The 1903 "Home of the Winners" catalog had a ink drawing of a young Frank Iams.

HOW IAMS BUYS HIS HORSES IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM

IAMS is a "HORSEMAN BORN"—not MADE TO ORDER (in six weeks, or six months), at an agricultural college. IAMS has been buying and selling horses "40 YEARS"—29 years at St. Paul, Nebr. Importing, breeding and feeding Stallions and mares, and buying them LARGER—with MORE BONE—QUALITY and FINISH each successive year. Iams is a "successful business man." His breeding guarantee is backed by half million dollars—all made by breeding and selling FIRST-CLASS, FULL BLOOD, registered Stallions and mares.

IAMS visits Europe each year and remains there FOUR MONTHS. As the "PERCHERON DISTRICT" is only about "150 MILES SQUARE," IAMS has BECOME acquainted with the "PRINCIPAL breeders" of PERCHERONS there. As he SPEAKS the LANGUAGE—KNOWS the COUNTRY ROADS—he TAKES an "AUTO" and travels from FARM TO FARM, and SELECTS from BEST BREEDERS the choicest draft horses of 2-3-4-year-olds to BE FOUND, REGARDLESS of price. He traveled OVER 6,000 miles in an AUTO in 1910, looking at horses. The Belgium district for best Belgians is in a RADIUS of 100 miles from BRUSSELS. IAMS travels here in same manner, and many of BEST BREEDERS in both countries RESERVE THEIR HORSES each year for IAMS. They positively refuse to sell other importers until "IAMS"—the man that buys the "TOP-NOTCHERS"—and pays "highest prices" for horses—SEES THEM—then all he REFUSES are sold to "OTHER IMPORTERS."

IAMS POSITIVELY PAYS HIGHEST PRICES IN EUROPE FOR PERCHERONS AND BELGIAN STALLIONS AND MARES.

THAT IS WHY HE HAS THE "TOP-NOTCHERS," AND MORE TON STALLIONS THAN ANY FIVE IMPORTERS IN THE UNITED STATES.

Howard County Historical Society
P.O. Box 1
St. Paul, Nebraska 68873

Non-profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 28
ST. PAUL, NE 68873

Historically Speaking

Attention Readers:
To continue to receive the issues of *Historically Speaking*, we need your 2005 dues of \$10. If your dues are not paid by the next publication, this will be your last issue.

Historically Speaking

PUBLISHER:
Howard County
Historical Society

CIRCULATION:
300

MAILING ADDRESS:
P.O. Box 1,
St. Paul, NE 68873

MEMBERSHIP
(Including Newsletter
Subscription &
Mailings):
\$10 per person

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

**2005 BOARD OF
DIRECTORS:**
Carl Christensen
Donna Dobish
Evelyn Dvorak
Janet Hruza
Gale Pemberton
Gary Peterson
Glen Rasmussen
Dave Sprague
Mena Sprague
Setha Zimbelman

2005 OFFICERS:
Evelyn Dvorak,
President
Gary Petersen,
Vice President
Carl Christensen,
Secretary
Gale Pemberton,
Treasurer

The HCHS is a non-
discriminatory provider.