

# historically speaking

A quarterly newsletter from the HOWARD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 1021 Sixth Street, St. Paul NE 68873

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[www.historichc.us](http://www.historichc.us)

Knud Bastholm of Aalborg, Denmark, visited Howard County in 1892 or so, and published his impressions in *Fra Amerika* [Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag, 1897] Gaylord Mickelsen had the book translated from Danish by Ardean Andersen of Marquette. Following are excerpts:

## Dannebrog, about 1892

From Omaha, one travels by Southern Pacific Railway to Grand Island. It is about a half-day's trip. From Grand Island one goes north upon a smaller railway and arrives toward evening in a friendly town that is named Dannebrog. It is a Danish town which is the center of a Danish region that is almost as large as Fyn. [a Danish island just east of Jutland.]

The houses in Dannebrog are wooden, and small in relationship to the large foundations. After you pass the market and go down the main street, you come to a creek, which is grown over with a small forest. A large sign reads, "Central Park." As we walked down Main Street, we passed a blacksmith standing in his doorway. Not far away we saw the "Kroen & Dania" hotel and, on top of a house nearby, a big sign, "Stjernen's Redaktion." [*Star's* editorial office.] The editor, V. Christensen, stood in the doorway bareheaded and in shirtsleeves, which is not surprising since he runs the press himself.

We visited the farm of P. Christensen, passing the farms of Jens Nielsen, Kristen Madsen, and Lars Hansen. Over 3000 Danes live in this district and many of them cannot speak anything but Danish. It seemed that I had fallen into a whole little Denmark on the Nebraska prairie. Everything here is different from back home. The farmhouse is far from the barn. The farm buildings are spread out. Cattle run around among the many marvelous iron machines that are the pride of the farmers. It isn't merely because

land is so cheap that the farmstead is spacious. Fire insurance companies require that the buildings be spread out. Also, the climate compels farmers to abandon Danish practices. For example, you never find manure piles in the yard because, in Nebraska, manure would smell too strong and because the West's powerful topsoil needs no manure.

Life is lonely upon the farms. My arrival created a sensation. Light-haired and rosy-cheeked boys and girls regarded me with surprise and rapt attention.

A Danish housewife must change her habits here: She must wash on Monday, and not Saturday. She must not roll the clothes but must iron them after washing. Corncobs are burned instead of peat or coal. One doesn't drink beer, but instead water. When the hired man goes out to visit his neighbor's hired hand or his sweetheart, he saddles his employer's horse without request or permission. Farmers and their large families do most of the work. A domestic maid receives \$2 a week, a hired man is paid a yearly wage of \$160-\$175 or a monthly wage of \$15-\$20 in the summer. Danes are unaccustomed to the abundance of food here and are shocked by apparent waste.

The farm produces all the food one can want, but ready cash is in short supply. The farmer is completely dependent upon the railroad which, too often, is owned by a speculator who plunders the farm population. It costs more to send a pound of butter from Dannebrog to Chicago than from Copenhagen to Chicago.

## St. Paul, about 1892

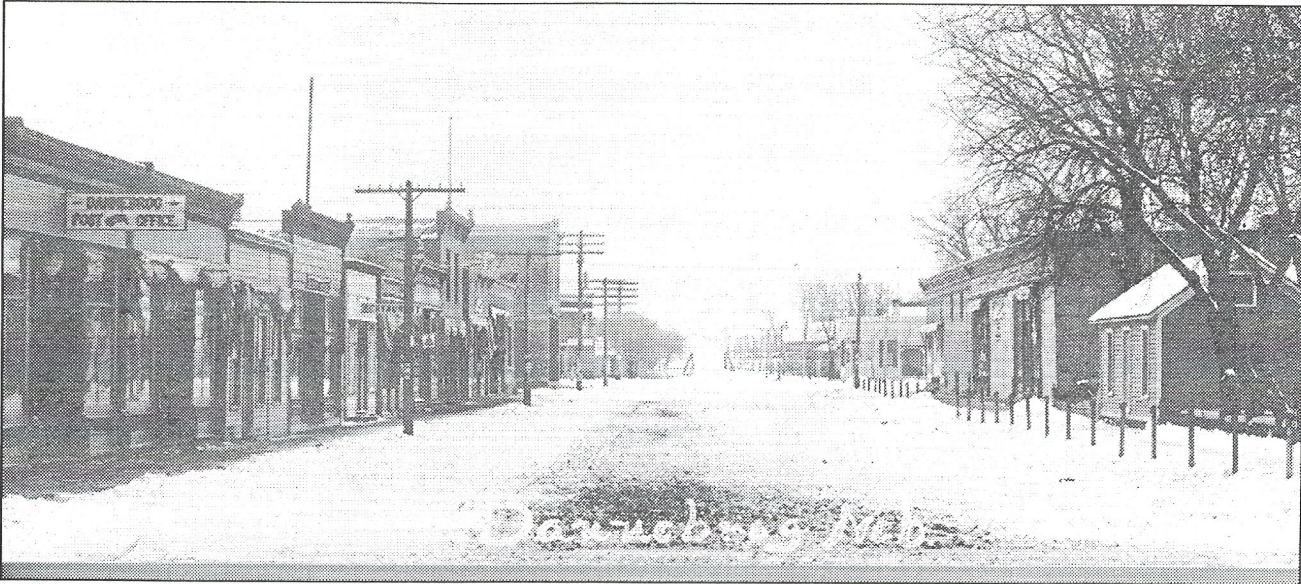
Knud Bastholm gave his impressions of the County seat.

St. Paul appears to be a characteristic small city. It is comprised of a few hundred buildings casually placed upon a flat land without any lakes or enclosed fences and otherwise without other small things that are indispensable to representing such a city. One doesn't live out on the prairie without struggle. A prairie town looks like a storm flood has gone over it and torn everything out except the buildings. On St. Paul's only street one wades up to the knees in churned-up soil and pedestrians are smart to keep themselves upon the highest wooden walks, of slotted boards. In that main street throbs the town's mercantile life. Here we two Danes saw the lawyer's office, the banks, the saloons, and the local newspaper that was printed in English but owned by a Dane. As we proceeded on, several folks strolled around on the street. Along the walls stood a formidable number of loafers sunning their gaunt bodies. In the county offices, all doors were thrown wide open. People went in or out of the public offices, opened the counters, went through pages of books and stuck their fingers into cabinets where the officials hid their small "stomach bitters." In the county tax collector's office, we chanced upon a young lady who had taken over the office while the tax official was out upon the street to see the voters. In the courtroom we visited with the judge, Rasmus Hannibal, who had a colossal soft hat upon his head. He had a few witnesses come forward but when the matter didn't seem to interest him, he postponed it and went with us to get a drink. In the saloon, where Hannibal presented me to the Sheriff, Mr. Wm. Kendall, all the county heads of administration had gathered. The county officials enticed the loafers who generally knew of those times of the year when the officials enjoyed their beer. In an instant afterwards, the saloon was overflowing with a great number of individuals decked out with flat gray hats that looked like tin plates.

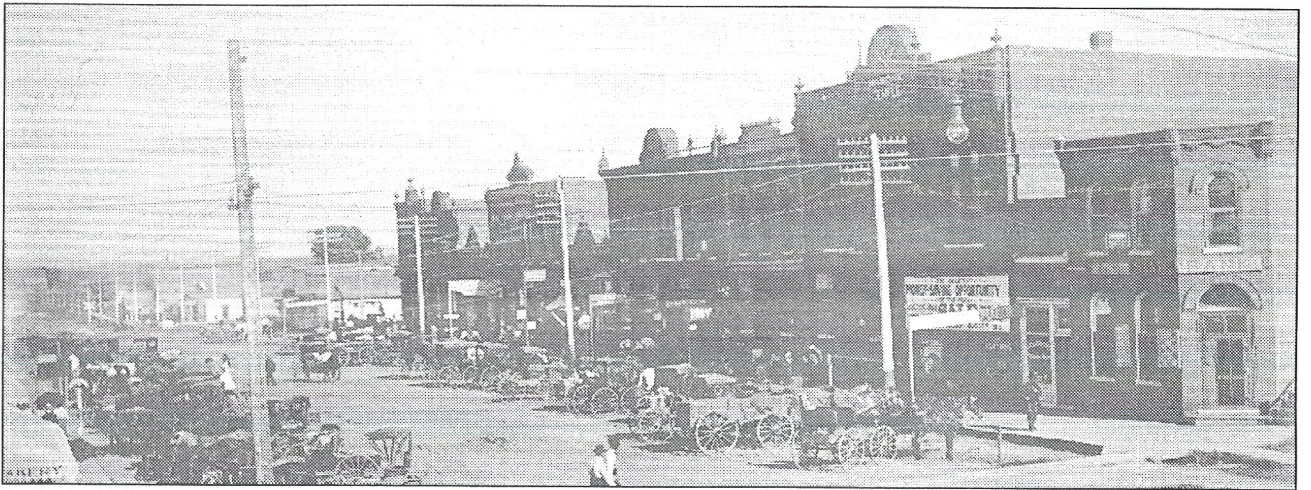
Everywhere one saw unshaven faces and foaming beer glasses in large fists. In this society one hears Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Irish and German. The result is a Babylonian confusion of language that assumes obvious multiplication with the increasing number of drinks. *Translated from "Fra Amerika", by Knud Bastholm, published in Denmark, 1897.*

## Main Street, 1880-1915 *as gleaned from County newspapers by Ellen Partsch*

In 1880 St. Paul boasted five livery stables and saloons, four hotels, law offices, and doctors; three groceries, restaurants, and blacksmiths; two each hardware stores, harness shops, lumberyards, milliners, newspapers, real estate offices, painters, boarding houses, wagon-makers, dressmakers, dry goods stores, dray services, drug stores, and general stores. There existed only one laundry, jeweler, shoe store, artist, bank, bakery, barber, dentist, and clothing store. The town population was about 800. By 1881 St. Paul had 200 buildings and 950 people. The Opera House (8<sup>th</sup> St.) and Cushman Block (6<sup>th</sup> St.) were begun in 1886 on Howard Avenue and hitching posts were added. In 1899 telephone service came to St. Paul, with rows of telephone posts on the main streets. The "central office" was in a private home at Grand and 7<sup>th</sup> Street, but the long-distance office was located in a drug store on Main Street. In 1892 new sidewalks, four feet wide, made of boards one inch thick, were added on Main Street, as well as a public watering trough. In this year, it became illegal to tie cattle on the street. The first electric lights came on in 1904 and service was provided for a few hours daily. The first automobile was driven into town in 1904. A brick City Hall was completed in 1907, at 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Howard Avenue. In 1912 the telephone posts were moved from Main Street to the alleys. Main Street was paved with bricks in 1913. In 1914 a new Union Pacific depot was completed and a second bridge, to carry non-train traffic. *From Howard County, The First Hundred Years, by Ellen Kiechel Partsch.*



Dannebrog's Mill Street on a snowy day. Photo courtesy of Kenny Nelson. Ca 1912



St. Paul's Main Street between 1892 and 1899. Wooden sidewalks were added in 1892 and telephone posts in 1899. Photos courtesy of Howard County Historical Society.



Telephone posts were moved to the alley in 1912.

## Memories of Northwestern Bell

by Erma Matousek Rasmussen

*From its beginning in St. Paul, in 1892, the telephone became more and more important in everyday life – and more complicated. Numbers went from two digits to the present ten. Service became almost completely impersonal. We are moving into a new era of communication with the computer and the Internet. Erma recalls a simpler and more personal time and place.*

The Northwestern Bell Telephone Company was located on the second floor of the Taylor Block, at 805-1/2 7<sup>th</sup> Street. This office was the “hub” of Howard County and also the toll center for long-distance calls for Arcadia, Ashton, Boelus, Burwell, Elba, Cotesfield, Dannebrog, Farwell, Greeley, Loup City, North Loup, Ord, Palmer, Scotia, and Wolbach. Smaller towns had a switchboard in someone’s home for local calls.

A person initiating a long-distance call would ask for the long-distance operator, who would come on the line with a cheery “long-distance,” after which the caller would state the town and telephone number they wished to call. The operator would write a “toll ticket” with the above data and record the beginning time of the call after the connection was made. She would interrupt the service to announce, “Your three minutes are up.” The caller could then decide if he or she wished to talk longer, for an additional charge.

A caller might also request “person-to-person” service, in which case the operator had to ask for a particular person at the original telephone number or possibly at several numbers (or even towns) until the specified person identified himself on the line. Person-to-person service cost more, but the operator might have to persist through several calls until the proper person was located.

Several switchboards, each arm-length high and wide, were located on a north-south axis in the front of the building overlooking 7<sup>th</sup> Street. The operators sat on swiveling stools from which they could reach all of the many sockets into which plugs with wires attached

were placed in order to make connections. There were two switchboards for local calls and several more for long distance. The operators communicated through headphones with the customer they were serving on the connected wire. The manager, linemen, and business office clerk had an office on the north side of the building.

Telephone directories, published annually, provided complete histories of families and businesses. Few of them now exist. [Old ones are sought for the Society’s collection.]

Service had to be provided on a 24-hour, seven-day basis. Linemen had to go out at all hours and in any kind of weather to repair broken wires, which were then all above ground. The chief operator and her assistant assigned schedules for the operators, such as seven to four, eight to five, split shifts, etc. Nobody liked the night shifts or holiday assignments.

Operators provided important services beyond the “information” requests, which might be for information unrelated to telephone service. Operators rang the noon, six, and “fire” whistle, which told the working man when to go home and called the volunteer firemen to an emergency. The firemen had to call in to find out where the fire was. Messages for people without telephones could be forwarded by the operator by means of a note carried by the town policeman.

Dial telephones were introduced in Cushing in 1934, the first in the county. In 1955 all twenty telephone-operators were laid off, which was a substantial blow to the local economy. At this time the telephone office was moved from the Taylor Block to 812 Eighth Street, where it is now. The business office closed in 1976. Lou Lemke is now the only local employee. He installs and repairs telephone lines for the Bell descendant known as “Qwest,” in St. Paul, Farwell, and Loup City. He is also “on call” for Cairo, Central City, Fullerton, Litchfield, Silver Creek, and Wood River.

### Friends Forever

Northwestern Bell workers established friendships and loyalties which are still cherished. Some of the **managers** were Harold Hameloth, Norman Jacobsen, Les Jung, Charles Meford, Jeff Richards, Milton Rubeck, Cecil Shade, and H.J. Wiederspan. **Other workers** were Don Christensen, Don Fair, Ray Gordon, Ed Green, Jerry Grzywa, Albert Jacobs, Cecil Kennedy, Lou Lemke, and Dick Miner.

### Some St. Paul Operators \*Chief Operator

Jean McClure Adams  
Niconas Anaberry\*  
Helen Chancellor (mother)  
Helen Arlene Chancellor (daughter)  
Rosie Bulin Coons

Lillian Dillon\*  
Mary Alice Kittridge Donovan  
Joan Stone Ewers  
Marilyn Fisher  
Annabel Ward Fredrick

Lavonna Silk Gillham  
Bernice Sturek Gorecki  
Bonnie Jepson Hansen  
Janet Rohman Hruza  
Delores Matousek Hurt

Mary Ann Miller Jarecke  
Bernice Dever Johnson  
Mildred Miller Johnson  
Orpha Kasson  
Irene Schenck Kezeor

Mary Sturek Kezeor  
Alice Stout Kittridge  
Patty Skull Kunze  
Shirley Anderson Matousek  
Evelyn Winfrey Mattley

Alice Jacobsen Mayne  
Lafern Schenck Mudloff  
Delores Stefanowicz Muhs  
Joan Krzycki Nielsen  
Mrs. Norton (mother)\*

Norma Norton\*  
Marie Stout O'Hare  
Robertta Stout O'Hern  
Joyce Uleman Petska  
Willie Skala Piontkowski  
Marilyn Matousek Placke

Wanda Prandell  
Dorothy Reynolds Prince  
Rita Krzycki Prince  
Erma Matousek Rasmussen (Business Office Clerk)  
Phyllis Nevriy Ross  
Valeria Brahatcek Ross  
Kathryn Webster Rubeck (Business Office Clerk)

Margaret O'Hern Rubesh  
Virginia Potts Ruzicka  
Vivian Harvey Salak  
Garnette Schack\*

Gladys Schack  
Kathy Rasmussen Schwenk  
Ola Warner Stoeger \*  
Gwen Stout (Business Office Clerk)\*  
Dorothy Jensen Throop

Phyllis Fairbairn Ward  
Margrette Webster\*  
Bettie Mae Christensen Wegner  
Nonnie Welch  
Patty O'Hern Williams

Rosie Berggren Woodward  
Phyllis Rojewski Woodward  
Joyce Ward Ziemba

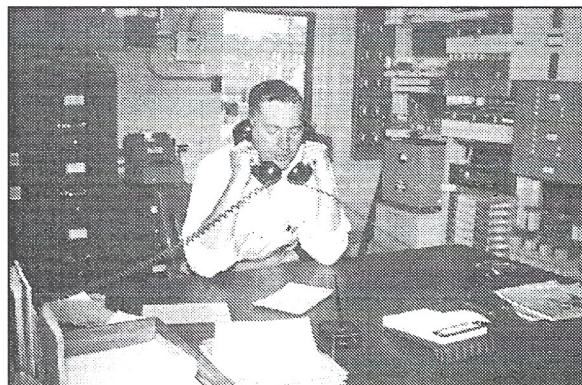
### Some County Operators

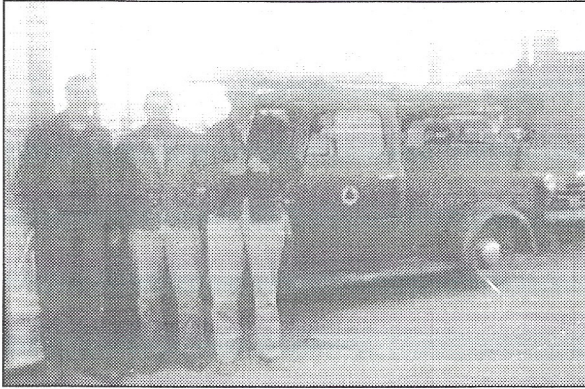
(Boelus, Cotesfield, Dannebrog, Elba, Farwell, St. Libory)

Agnes Bremer  
Darlene Bremer  
Phyllis Keldsen Christensen  
Pauline Dahms  
Ann Marie Frandsen

Clara Hannibal  
Blanche Hesselgesser  
Gladys McCloughan Hoon  
Minnie Kipp  
Lillie McCloughan

Georgia McCloughan Pavlik  
Clara Ingerle Schimek  
Marie Spilinek Suntych  
Norma Bremer Whitefoot  
Lillian Windolph  
Marlene Platek Wolinski





Cecil Kennedy, Harold Hameloth, and John Wiederspan.



Lineman Albert Jacobs and wife, Alice, at his retirement party.



L to R: Arlene Christensen Pedersen, Bonnie Jepson Hansen, Lavonna Silk Gillham (rear), Mary Alice Kittridge Donovan, Gladys Schack, Lafern Schenck Mudloff, Evelyn Winfrey Mattley, Helen Chancellor, Joyce Uleman Petska; standing at right, Gwen Stout, Mildred Miller Johnson (rear), Garnette Schack. Photo courtesy of Evelyn Mattley.

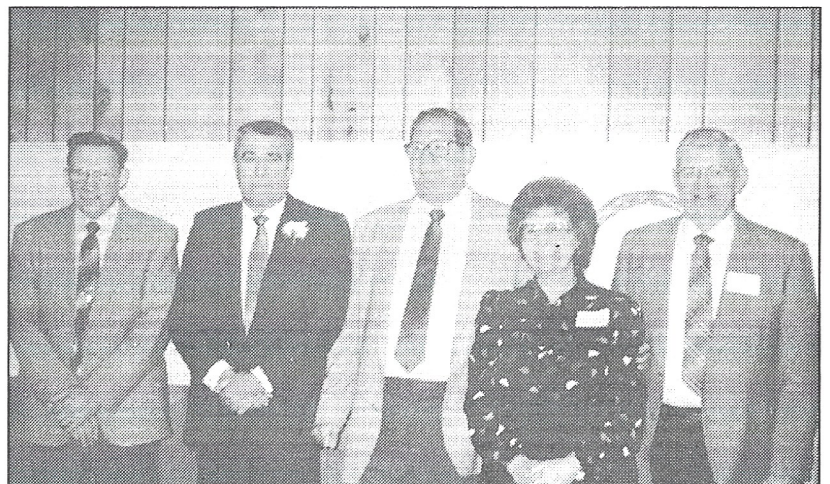


Doris Hurst, Evelyn Winfrey Mattley, and Dorothy Jensen Throop at the switchboard. On the rear wall is a connection to the town siren which was activated by the operators at noon, 6 p.m. and to call volunteer firemen to action.

Unless otherwise stated, all photos are courtesy of Erma Rasmussen.



Front, seated: Bettie Mae Christensen Wegner, Gladys Schack, Bernice Sturek Gorecki, Annabel Ward Fredrick, Phyllis Rojewski Woodward, Delores Matousek Hurt, Margaret O'Hern Rubesh; L to R: Garnette Schack, Joyce Uleman Petska, Gwen Stout, Marilyn Matousek Placke, Mary Sturek Kezeor, Evelyn Winfrey Mattley, Phyllis Nevrvy Ross, Rosie Bulin Coons. Photo courtesy of Shirley Matousek.



NW Bell employees, L to R, Don Christensen, Cecil Kennedy, John Wiederspan, Erma Matousek Rasmussen, Harold Hameloth.

**CANDIDATES FOR OFFICERS &  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
*Howard County Historical Society, 2003*

**Officer Candidates**

*One-Year term. (Vote for one for each office.)*

**President:**

**Marion Bahensky.** 13-year member, past president, secretary, treasurer, neighbor, grant-writer, custodian.

**Vice-President:**

**Gary Peterson.** Reliable, hard worker, problem solver.

**Secretary:**

**Carl Christensen.** His legal & engineering degrees are useful talents but Society cherishes his carpentry, painting, concrete, and recording skills more.

**Treasurer:**

**Bernadine (Buzz) Welch.** Preservationist, hard-worker, retired banker.

**Director Candidate for 2003 term** *(Vote for 1)*

**Glenn Rasmussen.** Hard worker with practical skills.

**Director Candidates for 2003-2004 term** *(Vote for 7)*

**Marion Bahensky.** Past president, secretary, treasurer in 13-year membership. Also curator & weeder.

**Alice Bartle.** Cheerful, willing, kind, cooperative, versatile, loyal.

**Donna Dobish.** Hard worker, practical, reliable, with many talents.

**Janet Hruza.** Hard worker, who concentrates on Gruber House and Vets Exhibit.

**James P. Jacobsen, III.** Willing brick-picker, window-scraper, whatever is needed.

**Dave Sprague.** Village blacksmith, an important tourist attraction.

**Buzz Welch.** Antique knowledge & hard worker. Talents include floor-scraping & organizing Store.

**Incumbents completing the 2002-2003 term.**

**Carl Christensen, Gary Peterson, Ron Sack, Mena Sprague, Setha Zimbelman**

**ANNUAL MEETING JANUARY 20, 2003, 7 P.M.**

**ST. PAUL LIBRARY**

**Please come!**

**OFFICIAL BALLOT**  
**HOWARD COUNTY**  
**HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Please return your ballot in enclosed self-addressed envelope. (We hope you won't mind contributing a stamp.) Ballots must be postmarked on or before **January 10, 2003.**

**OFFICERS (Vote for one)**

**One-Year Term**

**President:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Marion Bahensky**

***Write-in:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Vice-President:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Gary Peterson**

***Write-in:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Secretary:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Carl Christensen**

***Write-in:***

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Treasurer:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Buzz Welch**

***Write-in***

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Directors (Vote for 1)**

**\*One-Year Term (2003)**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Glenn Rasmussen**

\*to balance board

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Directors (Vote for 7)**

**Two-Year Term (2003-2004)**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Marion Bahensky**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Alice Bartle**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Donna Dobish**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Janet Hruza**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Jimmy Jacobsen**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Dave Sprague**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Bernadine Welch**

**Reminders:**

**Please pay 2003 dues: \$10 per person annually.**

**Election ballot enclosed for 2003 Officers and directors. Members, please return by January 10.**

**Annual Meeting January 20.**

**Re-dedication of St. Libory School & celebration of country schools.  
May 24**

**historically speaking**

PUBLISHER: Howard County Historical Society

Including the settlements of  
Boelus, Cotesfield, Cushing, Dannebrog, Dannevirke, Elba,  
Farwell, Nysted, Paplin, St. Libory, St. Paul, and Warsaw

EDITOR: Marion Bahensky  
CIRCULATION: 450+

MAILING ADDRESS: 1021 Sixth Street, St. Paul, NE  
68873

MEMBERSHIP \$10 per person/year

*The HCHS is a non-profit organization.*

2002 BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Marion Bahensky, Alice Bartle, Carl A. Christensen, Donna Dobish, Janet Hruza,  
Carl Huebner, James P. Jacobsen, III, Gary Peterson, Marian Potts, Ron W. Sack,  
Dave Sprague, Mena Sprague, Kim Turpitt, Buzz Welch, Setha Zimbelman

2002 OFFICERS: *President:* Marion Bahensky, *Vice-President:* Jimmy Jacobsen,  
*Secretary* Carl Christensen, *Treasurer* Buzz Welch

Howard County Historical Society  
1021 Sixth Street  
St. Paul, Nebraska 68873

Winter, 2002

Non-Profit Organization  
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**Inside this issue- Early days in Dannebrog & St. Paul; Memories of Northwestern Bell; 2003 Ballot**