



# historically speaking

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE HOWARD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 1 / Saint Paul, Nebraska / 68873

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

E-mail: [historichc@historichc.us](mailto:historichc@historichc.us)

Fall Issue 2003

## Howard COUNTY'S Silver Star Recipients

By  
Ron W. Sack

*Part one in a series of three.*

**M**y grandmother, Pauline Sack, kept many scrap books. These scrapbooks recorded the history of our family. One of the many clippings she placed prominently in one book was that of my grandfather's cousin, Leo Goracke. "He was a hero," my grandmother would reply. Our family thought highly of this valiant-looking man. It wasn't until thirty years later that I discovered why.



Saint Paul's hometown hero, Leo U. Goracke. Goracke wears the Silver Star, two Bronze Stars for Heroism (one for heroism in Northern Italy in April of 1945), Presidential Citation Medal, Purple Heart, Pie-Pearl Harbor Ribbon, Good Conduct Medal, European Medal with Silver Star for five major combat zones, American Service Medal, Marksmanship Medal, and the World War II Victory Medal. Photograph courtesy of Leo U. Goracke.

Leo U. Goracke is the son of Frank and Caroline Goracke. Leo had seven other brothers and one sister.

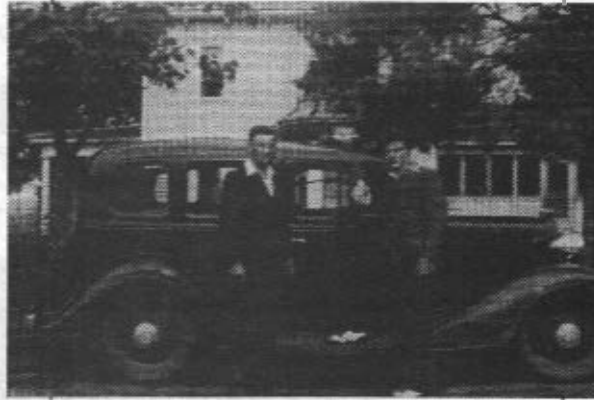
The Goracke family lived on a farm southwest of Saint Paul which used to be known as the Armstrong farm. Today the farm is owned by my parents, Bill and Jan Sack.

During the dry years of the 1930s, Leo moved to New York and worked for the Ford Motor Company.

Goracke, who rose to the rank of First Lieutenant during World War II, was in service for four years and two months with three years and two months of that time overseas in England, Africa, and Italy. He served in a heavy tank battalion.

Commanding General Jacob J. Devers had this to say about our native son, "I wish to express to you my very real appreciation for the important part you have played in this war. The Nation, the Army, and the Army Ground Forces share your contribution to making our arms victorious. Without you, and others who like you unselfishly gave up civil pursuits to defend the civilization we cherish, our brilliant and complete victory could never have been achieved..."

An article from the *Howard County Herald* proudly reported on Goracke. The headline read: "Leo U. Goracke of Saint Paul awarded Bronze Star Medal." The article stated the following: "Goracke is awarded a Bronze Star for heroic achievement in action on October 1, 1944 in the vicinity of Canova de Sasso, Italy. While supporting an infantry assault upon strong, easily defended enemy positions, the platoon leader's tank was disabled, causing damage to the radio and



Top photograph: Leo and his brother on the Goracke farm southwest of Saint Paul. Middle photograph: Leo Goracke during his years in service. Bottom photograph: The fields on the Goracke farm southwest of Saint Paul. Photographs courtesy of Leo U. Goracke.

An exhibit honoring Leo U. Goracke was donated in May, 2003. It is located in the Gruber House near the Howard County Historical Village. Two other exhibits, which honor Silver Star recipients Christensen and Irvine, are also on display.

loss of communication with the remainder of the platoon. Remaining exposed in the turret, Sergeant Goracke ordered his tank forward and assumed command. Moving under direct observation and heavy shellfire, Sergeant Goracke destroyed several enemy machine guns and emplacements, a pill box, and a large number of enemy troops so placed to protect the enemy position. Immediately thereafter, the infantry advanced and secured the objective with a minimum of casualties. The initiative and disregard of self, displayed by Sergeant Goracke, demonstrates the ability and fighting spirit of the American soldier."

A press release sent out by the White House informed Howard County of the following: "Silver Star awarded to Saint Paul's Goracke... Lieutenant Leo U. Goracke, son of Frank and Caroline Goracke of Saint Paul, was recently awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action on April 27, 1945, in the vicinity of Fontaniva, Italy. While consolidating a bridgehead across the Brenta River, an enemy counterattack launched toward the rear and threatened to surround the company. Noticing the situation and without orders and assistance from other vehicles, Goracke moved back

down the road and attempted to halt the attack. Under some intense small arms fire, he dismounted from his tank to the road of vehicles. Then with his tank, he proceeded toward the enemy who, armed with bazookas, offered fanatical resistance. Moving forward relentlessly in the face of intense enemy fire, Goracke killed or wounded approximately 75 of the enemy.

The action taken by Goracke saved the company from a desperate situation and prevented them being cut off from friendly forces.”

Beside Leo, Frank and Caroline Goracke had four other sons who served in the military. They include: Albert, who was a Lieutenant with the anti-aircraft battalion in the Pacific; Bernard, who was a Lieutenant with the Air Force in India; Clarence, who was a Private in Laramie, Wyoming; and Norman, who was a Yeoman 2nd Class with the Navy in Saipan.

Leo was united in marriage to Eleanor Marjorie Bratos at Transfiguration Catholic Church in Buffalo, New York.

Several of Goracke's relatives still reside in Nebraska in the cities of Omaha, Lincoln, Saint Mary, and Saint Paul. Leo is a lifetime member of Veterans Post 8113 of West Seneca, New York, and a lifetime member of the Knights of Columbus. He is an active member of the Queen of Heaven Catholic Church in West Seneca.

As of August, 2003, he resides in Buffalo, New York

*Of note: The Howard County Historical Society seeks your help. If you know of any other Silver Star recipients from Howard County, please let us know.*



Photo above: 752 tank battalion in Rome. Goracke's tanks were the first ones to arrive in Rome. 15 tanks to a company; three companies to a battalion. Goracke's tank is noted with an arrow. All photos are courtesy of Leo U. Goracke.

Photo below: Goracke's platoon was the first to cross the Po River. They stayed at the river to cover any counter attack and were the first ones to cross the bridge. The middle tank in the photo at the bottom of the page is Goracke's.



Vehicles of a tank battalion attached to the 5th Army wait in Sorizzo, Italy for a pontoon bridge to be completed across the Po River, 25 April 1945. The nearest row of vehicles are M4A3 (76mm) tanks; behind them are M18 Hellcat tank destroyers and M20 scout cars. Again, most of the Shermans carry no significant markings.

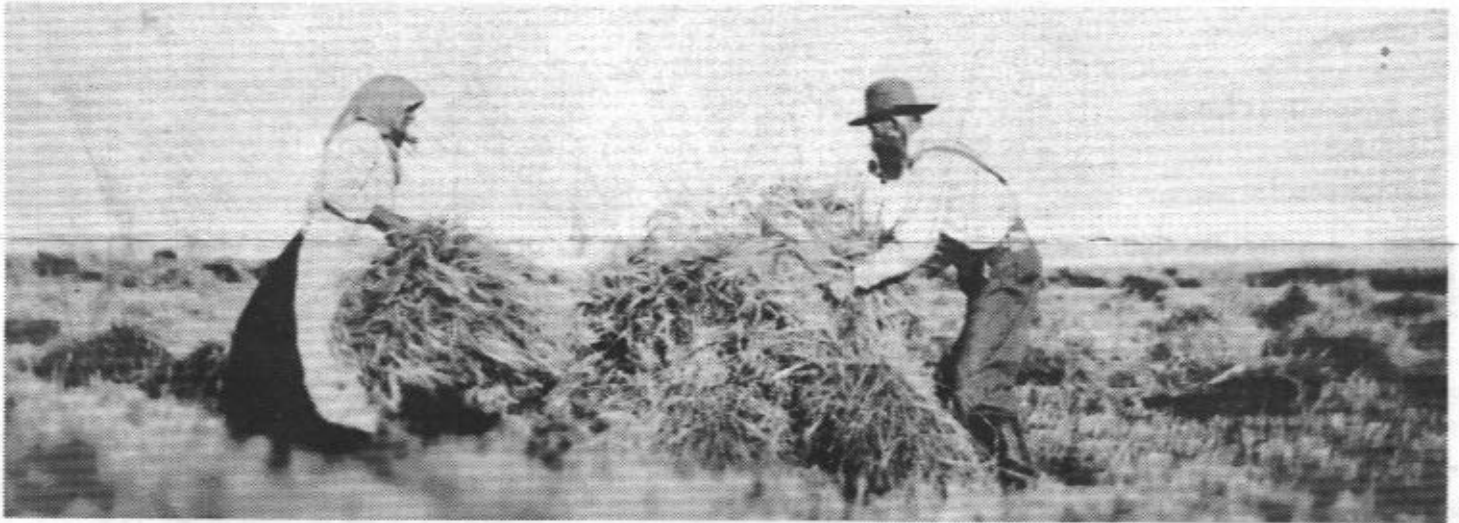


*A tribute to rural life in Nebraska.*

THOSE AMAZING PIONEERS. THEY CONQUERED NEW TERRITORY. THEY TAMED THE LAND.  
AND THEY STILL HAVE STORIES LEFT TO TELL.

*By Ron W. Sack*

There are many people whom I love to visit with. One such person is my good friend Georgia Trubl Jensen. Her keen mind challenges me to keep learning. This past year, I found a collection of outstanding photographs dealing with rural life in Howard County. I purchased them from an antique dealer in Utah. We can learn from these photographs. These images depict life in Howard County in the early 1900s. Fortunately for us, the Holechek family painstakingly recorded their family history with a camera. The Holechek family resided on a farm north of Farwell. Former Howard County resident Georgia Trubl Jensen of Lincoln knows this farm...it was her grandparent's place...and what a place. Look and listen to these photographs...they have a story to tell.



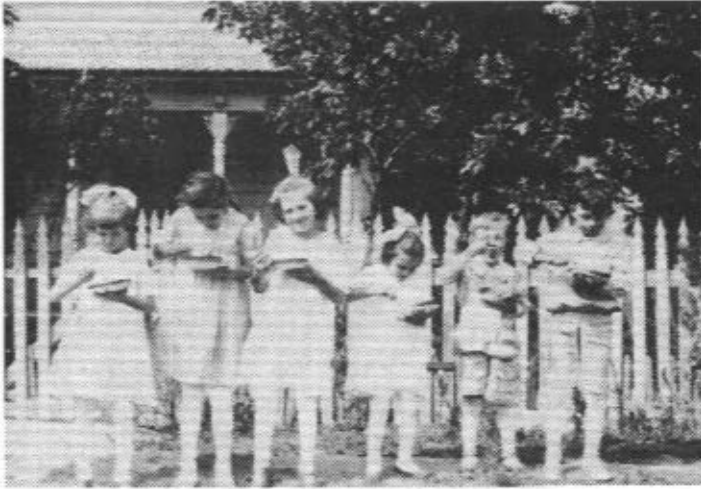
*This is one of my favorite photographs...grandmother Anna and grandfather John Holechek in the fields near their farm, circa 1917.*



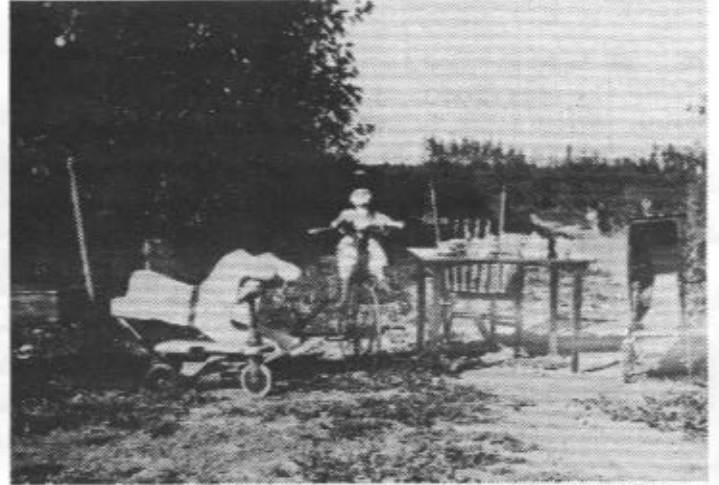
*Georgia Trubl Jensen on her grandparent's porch with her toys...and the cat, circa 1918.*



*Aunt Martha Holechek canning cherries on her parent's farm.*



*Mildred, Georgia, Angela, Adnelle, Lawrence, and Paul enjoy some watermelon.*



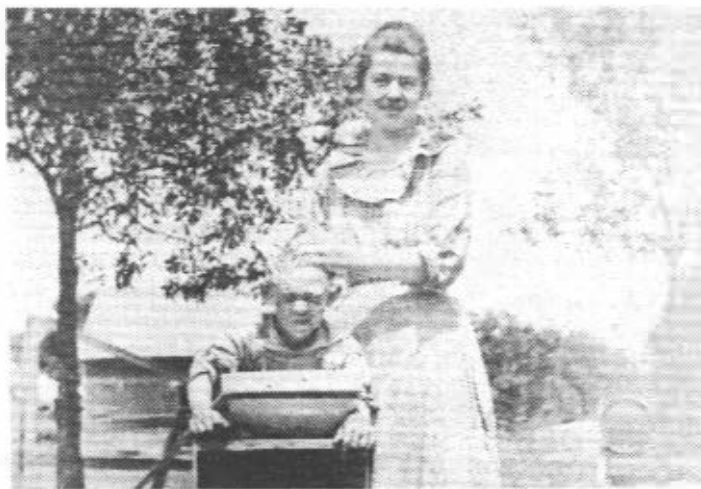
*Toys—including a wagon, rocking horse, bicycle, doll, rocker, table, dishes and baby buggy—wait patiently for the Holechek children.*



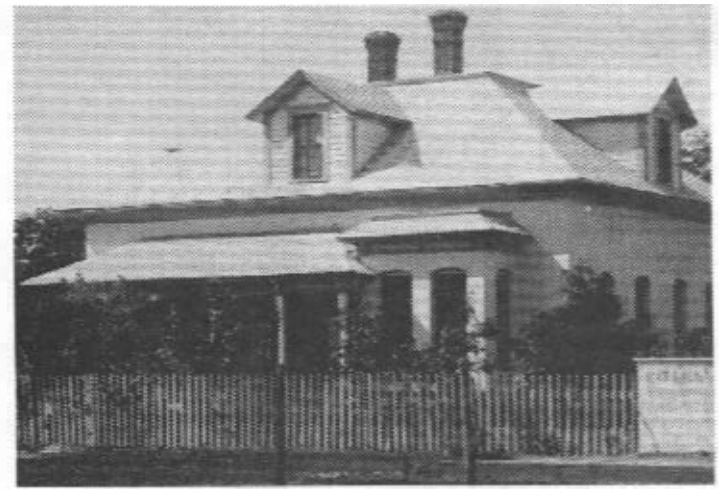
*From porches were places where family and friends would gather and spend their afternoons and evenings. The Holecheks, Trubls, Bartas, and Millers enjoy some watermelon on a summer day.*



*John and Mary Holechek Trubl in front of the Holechek house with Georgia and Paul.*



*Emma Holechek Kremlaek washing Paul Trubl's hair on an August day in 1919. Photograph taken by Georgia Trubl Jensen.*



*The Holechek house with a beautiful bay window and front porch.*

Photo below: Former Saint Libory District 41 student Elmer Leschinsky releases balloons during the dedication. Leschinsky is 91. Over 200 people took part in the Saint Libory District 41 dedication during Memorial Day weekend. Photo courtesy of Jan Sack.



Photo at left: Betty Greenwalt, Betty Sahipman, Joyce Ward, LaVonne Yaeger, Bev Kunze, Pat Paulsen, Jan Leschinsky, and Elmer Leschinsky were special guests. Photo below: Greenwalt and Kunze cut the ribbon during the Saint Libory school dedication. Photos courtesy of Jan Sack.



Dedications  
and  
tributes  
highlight  
the  
summer  
of  
2003.



Photo above: Tom Pflapsen's three daughters unveil a plaque honoring Tom at a special dedication near the depot. The dedication took place in September. Pflapsen contributed his knowledge of the railroad as well as many artifacts to the HCHS over the years. Photo courtesy of Mena Sprague.



Photo above: A large crowd gathers near the courtyard and depot to honor Saint Paul's Tom Pflapsen in September. Photo at left: The Pflapsen family gathers to pay tribute to Tom at the Howard County Historical Village in Saint Paul. Photos courtesy of Mena Sprague.

Unable find the time to help the Historical Society?  
Would like to help at the Historical Village, but don't live nearby?  
Here are some ways you can help us. Give these forms to friends  
you know who might be interested in helping preserve our history  
or purchase our award-winning history book.

Photocopy or cut along dotted line and send in.

YES, I WOULD LIKE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE HOWARD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

I wish to donate:

\$100     \$250     \$500     \$1,000     \$2,500     \$5,000     \$10,000     Other

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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All donations over \$100 will be remembered on the Donor Board which will be prominently displayed in the depot.  
Donations of \$2,500 or more will receive special recognition.

Name you wished to have inscribed. \_\_\_\_\_

Your donation, made out to the Howard County Historical Society, is tax deductible.  
Send in your tax-deductible donation to us at: P.O. Box 1, Saint Paul, NE 68873

Questions?

Contact the Historical Society at the address above or contact any of the other board members.

*Thank you!*

IT'S YOUR MEMORY. IT'S OUR HISTORY. IT'S WORTH SAVING.

"ENTERING HOWARD COUNTY" MAKES A GREAT GIFT.  
ORDER A COPY TODAY!

Photocopy or cut along dotted line and send in.

Yes, please send me \_\_\_\_\_ copies of the 544 page history book *Entering Howard County*.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

1.) Number of History Books: \_\_\_\_\_ x \$75.00 = \_\_\_\_\_

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

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5% Nebraska Sales Tax (\$3.75 per book, if purchased in state): \_\_\_\_\_ x \$ 3.75 = \_\_\_\_\_

OR 6% St. Paul City Sales Tax (\$4.50, if purchased in St. Paul): \_\_\_\_\_ x \$ 4.50 = \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to the Howard County Historical Society      Total:      \$ = \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Board and officers change in mid-2003.**

2003 marked changes in the board and officers Evelyn Dvorak is now president. Dvorak replaces Marion Bahensky who resigned from the board and presidency. Gale Pemberton is the new treasurer. Both Dvorak and Pemberton serve on the board.

***This might be your last newsletter.***

If your address label reads "02" you have not paid your dues for 2003 and this will be your last newsletter. Your dues help fund a variety of projects in Howard County, all of which promote tourism and economic development. We thank you for your continued support.

***Fall bake sale slated for November.***

Our annual bake sale is planned for November 30, 2003. All baked goods and donations are appreciated. For more information, contact Mena Sprague at (308) 754-4901.

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The HCHS is a  
non-discriminatory provider.

Your support helps preserve  
OUR history.

Photograph on mailing side: The Holechek farm north of Farwell circa 1917.

All production costs of this newsletter, except for printing, have been donated to the Howard County Historical Society.



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