



historically speaking

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM THE HOWARD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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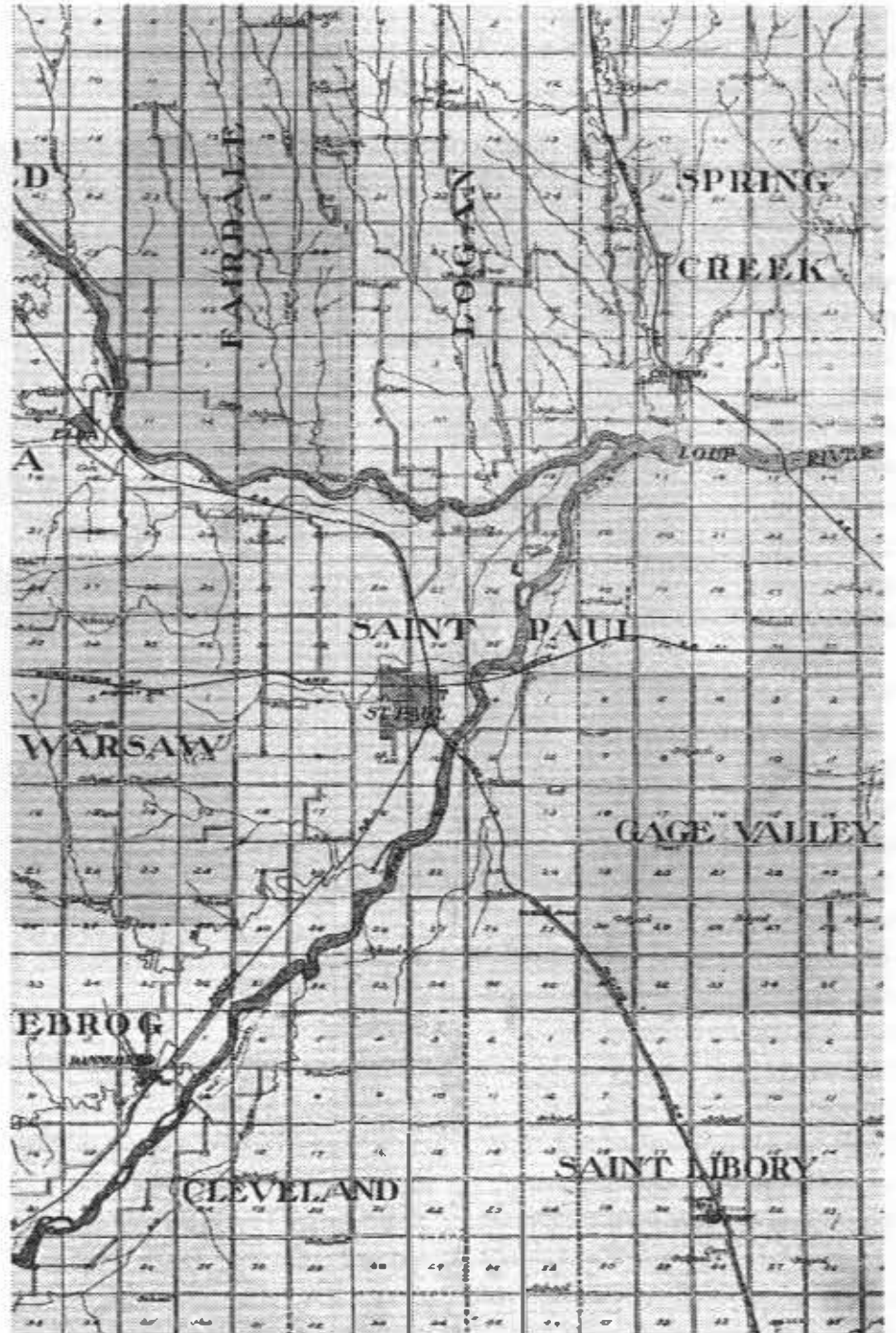
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Summer Issue 2004

Howard COUNTY'S patchwork Quilt

By
Ron W. Sack

When I was young, I would sneak our family's Howard County atlas out from the bottom drawer of my father's desk. Many hours were spent looking at it. I remember seeing names like Smolczyk, Svoboda, Lorkowski, Rasmussen, Gerdes, and others which defined the farms and homesteads.



A section of my father's Howard County atlas. When I was young, this atlas inspired me to take a deeper look at the people who settled the land of Howard County, Nebraska

Germans, Danes, Poles, Czechs, Irish, Swedes, and others made Howard County their home. Seeing these names bounded by the section lines reminded me of a quilt my grandmother had. The threads that tied everything together were the county roads and bridges. These roads and bridges will still take you anywhere you want to go. They

connect us to the past...and to the future. Looking at this 1901 atlas today, it is clear that Howard County was indeed a melting pot for European immigrants. Several of my favorite landmarks lay testament to that fact.

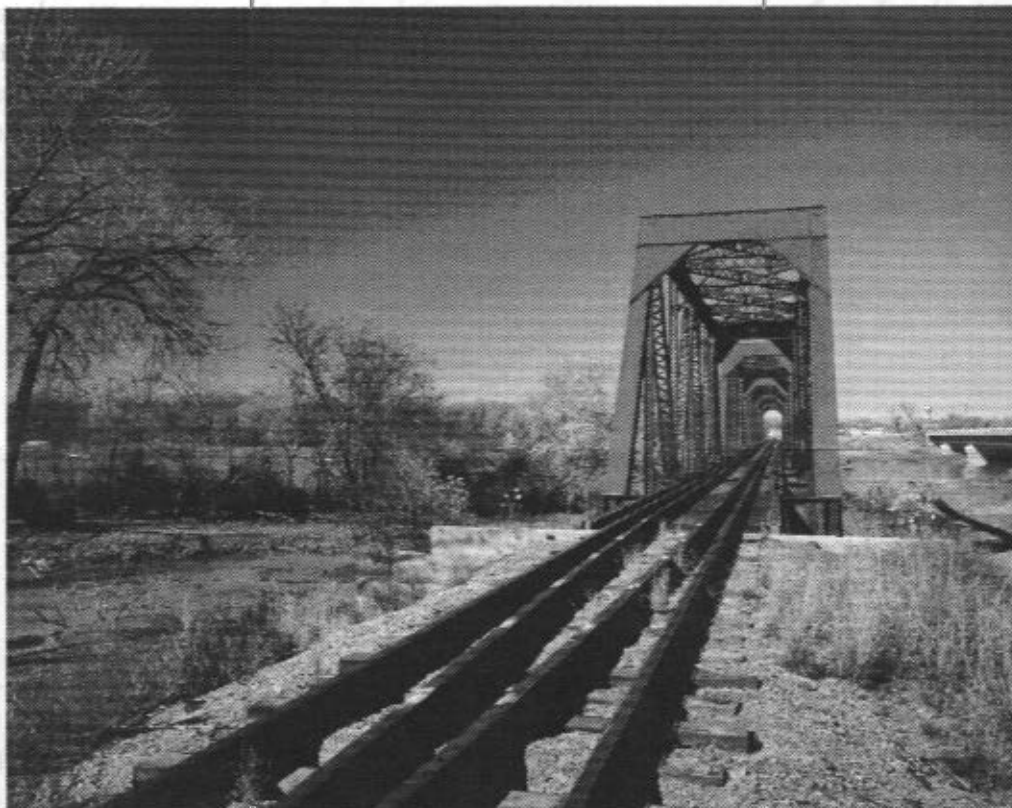
Let me take you on a journey. Head north on Highway 281 from the Hall/Howard County line for about a mile-and-

a-half. You'll see a grove of trees north of my uncle Marvin Schwenk's place on the west side of the highway. This is where the old Saint Libory District 41 school once stood. The school was attended mostly by Germans and a few Irish settlers. In the mid-1960s, some Howard County residents had the vision to preserve the school and it was moved to the historical village in Saint Paul. All that remains of this school site is the grove of trees. Historian Ellen Partsch said, "In 1958, the number of rural schools had dwindled to 24. Lack of

pupils, caused by the growth of larger farms, and consolidation of neighboring districts to enable more courses were the chief causes."

Today, all of Howard County's country schools have closed.

Get back on 281 and head north for about a mile. Take the dirt road and head east for one-half of a mile. You'll



One of the last remaining Union Pacific Railroad bridges of this type in the state. It is located just south of Saint Paul. Photo by Ron W. Sock and Bob Ervin and appears courtesy of Nebraska Public Power District.

see the stately brick German Catholic church named for Saint Liborius. Before the first wooden church was built, Catholics and Protestants would come and gather around a simple wooden cross placed on the prairie.

Once back on 281, head nine miles north to Saint Paul. As you cross the Middle Loup River, you'll see one of the last remaining Union Pacific

Railroad bridges of this type in Nebraska. It is simply breathtaking. This iron bridge was constructed in 1918. It united settlers and goods from the south to the north.

When arriving in Saint Paul, turn on Howard Avenue and go west for four blocks—you'll be on a brick street. Head north on Sixth Street for one

block. There it is...you can't miss it...the Howard County Courthouse. It's the tallest public building in the county.

The Danes in Dannebrog fought hard for the seat, but Saint Paul would win the battle.

Get back on Highway 281 and head north out of Saint Paul. Take a left and head west when you see the Highway 92

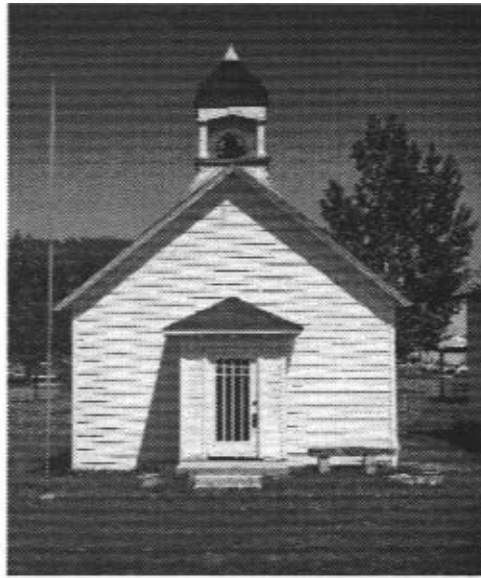
sign. You'll take 92 for about five miles until you get to the intersection that the locals refer to as "Midway" (junctions of 92 and 11). Head south on Highway 11 for one mile, then take the dirt road west for about a mile. You are now where the Czech community of Warsaw and the Catholic church of Saint Wenceslaus once stood. Saint Wenceslaus cemetery is one of my favorites. I often bring Howard County pioneer C.V. Svoboda's writings out with me and read them in the cemetery. Svoboda had vision. He proclaimed:

"The Czech language is seldom heard in the Warsaw church. No longer do the beautiful Czech songs of a bygone era echo over the Warsaw plain! The time is not far distant when, as Rev. Broz says, 'The bell will toll in heartrending tones for the last sermon of a Czech priest in Warsaw.' The time is not distant when the dear Czech language will vanish and only the Czech inscriptions on the monuments in Warsaw cemetery will remind the passerby of the fact that there lie loyal Czech pioneers, who struggled for a livelihood and a better future for their descendants."

Once back on Highway 11, head north for about 10 miles. You'll pass the town of Elba and will now be in the beautiful Ioup River Valley. The small village of Cotesfield will be on the horizon. On the east side of the highway stood the Cotesfield grain elevator. This elevator towered over everything on the prairie. It was always one of my highlights as I headed north on Highway 11 because it was a monument to the farmers of this area and a tribute to their marketing ability. It was demolished several years ago.

Early settlers were from Ireland, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Denmark. Some of the names in my atlas included Kilpatrick, Wells, Moravec, Vlach, and Petersen.

If you head down Cotesfield's "main street," you'll be near the site of the old Cotesfield post office. It was at this spot



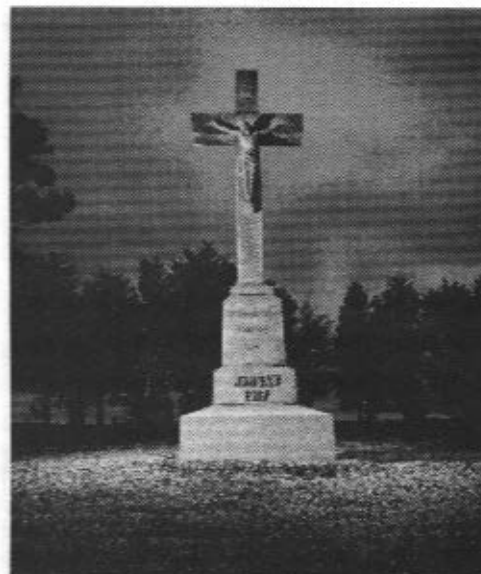
where my father (Bill Sack), Joe and Maxine Coufal, and some of our friends moved this post office south to the historical village in Saint Paul.

I'll never forget the image of seeing the small post office head south on Highway 11 and meander through the Ioup River Valley. It was then that the preservation movement in Howard County was reborn.

Saving the post office was important to me. This building symbolized the way the world entered Cotesfield, and Cotesfield entered the world.



Once back on Highway 11, you'll again head south for two miles. You'll approach a sign which reads "Dannevirke." Take this dirt road and head west for almost five-and-a-half miles. This road is quite hilly, so you better have good tires in case it is muddy or snow-covered. Once there, you've reached the Danish colony of Dannevirke. All that remains of this settlement are the Lutheran church, the ball, a house and another building.



The Lutheran church and ball are some of the best preserved buildings in the state.

I would take Arthur W. Christensen's book, *A Story of the Danish Settlement in Dannevirke*, along with me on my drives north to Dannevirke. In this book, Christensen mentions a speech delivered in the wooden hall by early settler John Andersen in May of 1901. Christensen writes: "The evening had

Top photo: The old Saint Libory District 41 school was built in 1880. In 2004, it turned 124 years old. Middle photo: Interior of the court room of the Howard County Courthouse in Saint Paul. The courthouse is on the National

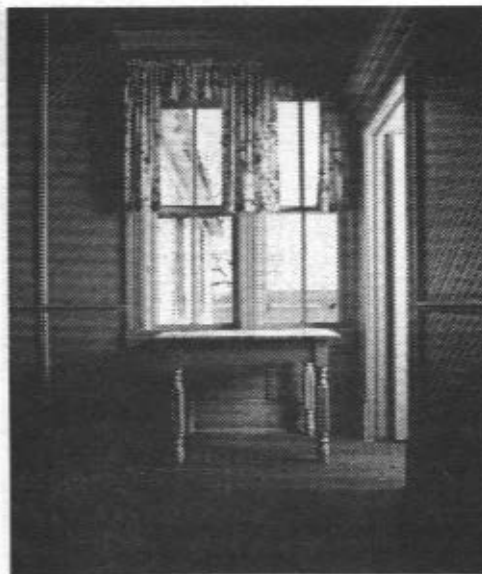
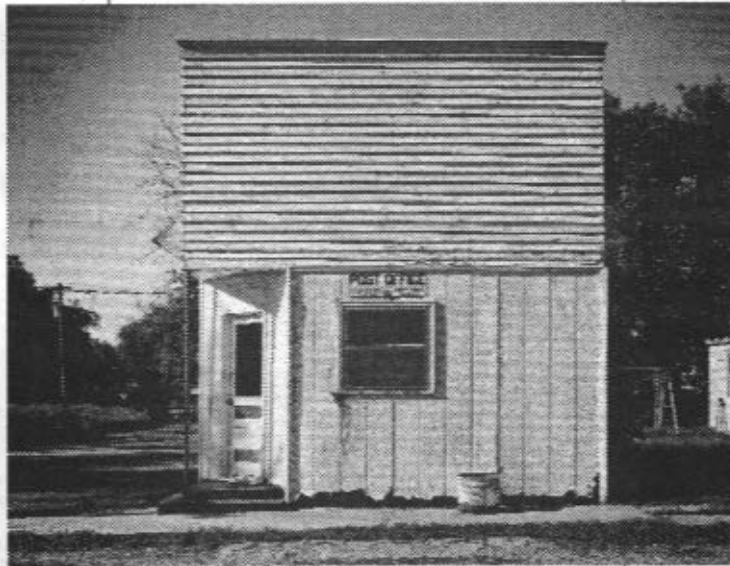
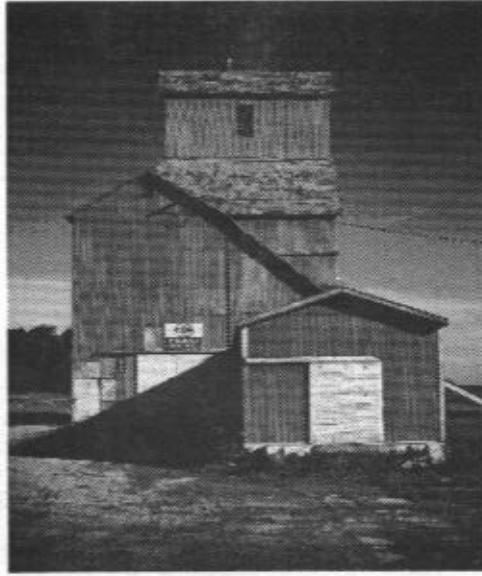
Register of Historic Places. Bottom photo: This cross is the focal point of Saint Wenceslaus Czech Catholic Cemetery near the former settlement of Warsaw. Photos by Ron W. Sack and Bob Ervin.

arrived—and people came from right and left with their families. At one end of the stage was a large American flag, at the other end was a Danish flag of the same size. Now the main speaker of the evening, John Andersen, president of the Dannevirke Hall Association, came onto the stage. The facts were that John Andersen was inordinately proud of his mastery of the English language and he wanted to impress his compatriots with his attainments. He stopped for a few seconds for effect, then pointing with his right forefinger at his chest, solemnly said, 'I John Andersen, President of the Dannevirke Hall Association, foremost an era of amity and love throughout this settlement. I foresee unbounded prosperity and, as our children—the first generation of Americans—take over where their elders leave off, they will build within this settlement a new Denmark within the boundary of the U.S.A.' A little more along that line he bowed and left the stage. He was roundly cheered. John Andersen had reached the zenith of his career; he was in seventh heaven."

Take Wausa Road and head south for three miles. Turn west onto 17th Avenue. You'll reach the Polish settlement of Choynice or Paplin.

On the hill is the picturesque cemetery of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The church rests in the valley.

Paplin was settled by a large congregation from Poland. In 1882, a beautiful



Top photo: A tribute to the farmers of Howard County—the old Cotesfield grain elevator stood proud for many years. Middle photo: The former Cotesfield post office—this building symbolized the way the world entered Cotesfield, and

church was built—a white frame building flanked by two steeples—which appear to reach towards heaven. It stands as the oldest church building in the diocese of Grand Island. Legend has it that in 1888, a wind of tornadic proportions blew the church about a foot and-a-half off its foundation. Finally, when a decision had been reached about placing a new foundation to support the church, a wind blew from the opposite direction and settled the church back on its foundation. Also, in the 1890s, a severe diphtheria epidemic broke out.

Some estimate one hundred children died within one year, in a community a little over six miles square. Many of the parents, on coming home from the funeral of one child, would find one or two more dead. The lower portion on the west side of the cemetery contains the graves of the children who succumbed to this dreaded disease. It is a sobering experience to stand in the cemetery and look down the rows and to realize that so many children died in

such a little time period in this small community, and to think what a long-lasting effect it must have had on the entire community.

You'll want to get back on Wausa Road and head south until you get to Highway 92. Head east on 92 for about five miles until you get to Farwell.

This area was settled by both the Poles and Danes. The train no longer stops here...the tracks were torn up in

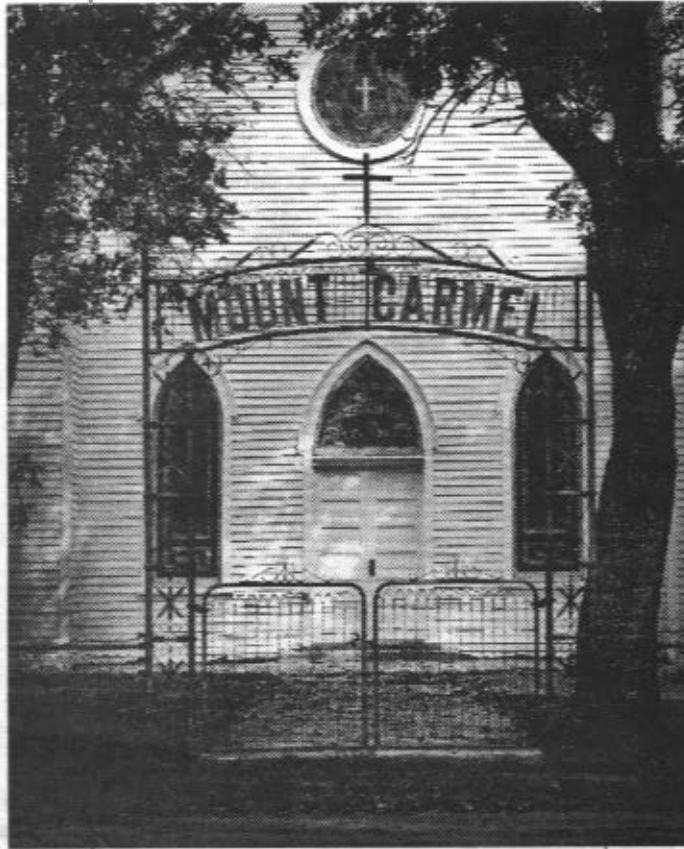
Cotesfield entered the world. Bottom photo: Simple wainscoting panels create a pattern in the Dannevirke Hall. Dannevirke was one of several Danish settlements in Howard County. Photos by Ron W. Sack and Bob Ervin.

the late 1980s. Once in the village of Farwell, you'll want to see Saint Anthony of Padua Catholic Church.

A 1962 issue of the *Nebraska Catholic Register* had this to say about the Polish community. "During Father Iadislavus Sebestyanski's tenure, a rectory and then a school were built, but the combination church, school, and living quarters were destroyed. With the help of the faithful, a larger church—with two towers (which reached towards heaven) and two large bells—was built. But before completion, it too was destroyed by fire. Undaunted by their misfortune, Father Sebestyanski and his parishioners were determined to have their church. This time they hauled lumber from Dannebrog, and built the church on the same foundation. The first mass offered in the new church was on August 7, 1887. St. Anthony's Catholic Church is the oldest Polish Parish in the state and the oldest Polish Catholic Parish west of the Mississippi.

I can't help but think that every time I make this trek on Howard County roads that the threads are tightened.

Could traveling these roads and remembering our history make the threads in Howard County's patchwork quilt tighter and stronger? I think so.



Top photo: Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church was built in 1882. The wooden church is nestled in a valley. Bottom photo: Interior of the sacristy of Saint Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in Farwell. Photos by Ron W. Sack and Bob Ervin.

Personally, I think there are several good reasons for saving these older buildings. First, they are great to look at, and we should save them because they give our communities beauty, variety, and visual texture—eye candy as I like to call it. Second, they have an almost infinite capacity for reuse, and we should save them because it makes good sense (and sound ecological practice) to do so. Third, they help us define a sense of space and time. As I get older, this last reason seems increasingly important.

John Ruskin, a great poet, philosopher, artist, and environmentalist, said this about architecture: "We may live without her and worship without her, but we cannot remember without her. Remembering is essential, and the task of avoiding amnesia is much easier when we can see the past and touch it and live with it."

I have to admit, something incredibly powerful happens when I walk into a building and say to myself, "This is where it happened, within these walls, right here."

That's what a building does: It tells you, "Right here." Without buildings to guide us, we get lost.

Everybody knows that, but somehow I never grasped the real truth of it until I looked for a part of me in Howard County and couldn't find it.

A look back at the Saint Paul Business College.

A tribute to the Zocholl family. Photographs courtesy of Liz King and Ron W. Sack

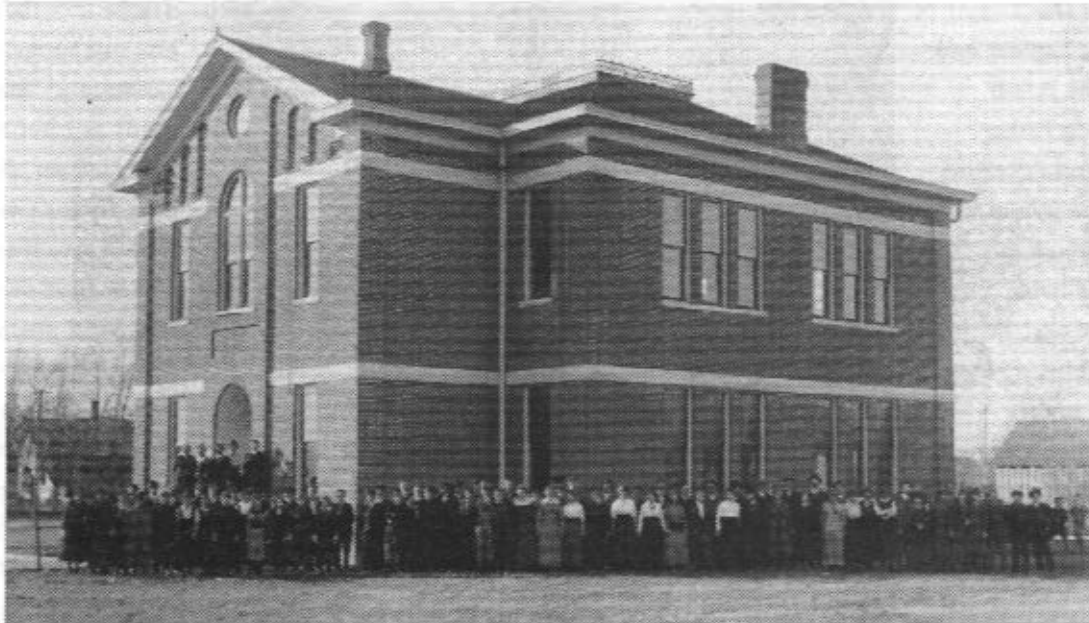


Photo at left:
Large classes
gather in front
of the stately
brick Saint Paul
Business College.



Photos above:
The Saint Paul Business
College offered competitive
sports for both women and
men. The photos above
show coach Joseph Zocholl
with his 1911 women and
men's teams.

Photo at right: This photo-
graph of the Saint Paul
Business College basketball
teams is quite rare. It shows
the teams leaving from the
Saint Paul depot to play the
Ord, Nebraska teams. The
caption on the front also
mentions they were to play
the Palmer, Nebraska teams
the next day.





Photo at left: The arts were important at the college. This photo shows members of the annual theater production in 1911.

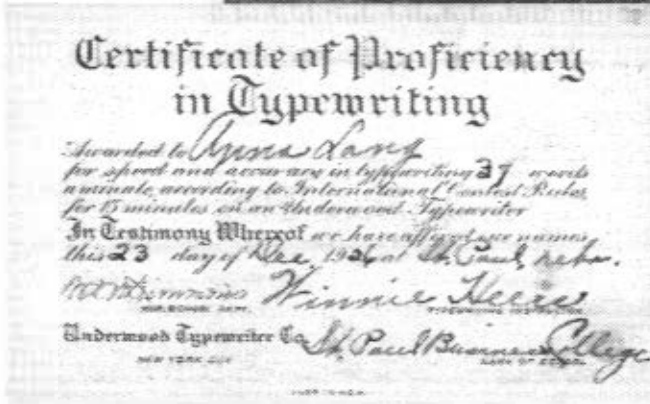


Photo above:
A "Certificate of Proficiency" certificate issued to Anna Lang in 1926. This was recently donated by Marilyn and Jim Nelson.



Photo above: From this photograph it is evident that the college brought many students to Saint Paul.

Photo at left: This image shows the sale of the college Gene Zocholl, son of Joseph and Louise, is shown third from the right.



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Upcoming Historical Society Programs

On Sunday, May 30 (Memorial Day Weekend), we will have the "Opening of the Howard County Historical Village and Gruber House." Plans are in the works to have some special dedications at the Veterans' exhibit.

"Living History at the Village" takes place on Sunday, June 13. Blacksmith Dave Sprague will give demonstrations at the blacksmith shop.

The entire Historical Village will be open on Saturday and Sunday, July 10 and 11 for GCA Days

Sunday, August 15, we will have "Living History at the Village...Back to School." Former teachers and students inform the young and old about what it was like at a one-room school. The location for this program will be the Saint Libory District 41 school at the Historical Village.

Musician Peggy Lang will be performing Sunday, September 12 at the Historical Village. This is one performance you won't want to miss.

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Photograph on mailing side: Howard County one-room.