

GOTHENBURG HISTORICAL MUSEUM

"A Window into the Past"

SPRING-SUMMER 2016

GOTHENBURG
HISTORICAL MUSEUM

1420 Avenue F, PO BOX 204

Gothenburg, NE 69138

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HOURS: Tuesday-Friday
10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Saturday—10 a.m.—2 p.m.

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1892—BIG BOOM COMING TO GOTHENBURG

1892 was the year of the big boom in Gothenburg. The canal and lake had been completed and the Gothenburg Water Power and Investment Company was promoting Gothenburg through the eastern states.

On January 21, 1892, the first of a series of excursions arrived in Gothenburg. Included were Nebraska's Governor John M. Thayer and 50 eastern capitalists. They arrived on a special train following a reception in Omaha and breakfast in Kearney with the Kearney

Board of Trade. They were from Chicago, Boston, New York, Cleveland and Milwaukee, and enthusiasm reigned.

The three story building had just been completed on the corner of 10th and Lake. It was

built by the Gothenburg Water Power and Investment Co. and the company offices were on the second floor.

The GWP & I Company had printed 50,000 32-page booklets. 100,000 four-page preliminary prospectus, and thousands of posters all calling attention to the extensive waterpower development at Gothenburg. And the advertising bore fruit.

In May, N.A. Baker of Chicago announced that the money had been raised for a brass and copper factory and later in the month contracts were let for 12 houses and the factory: The Holton Brass & Copper Company.

At this time the Omaha Bee ran an article on Gothenburg with the prediction: "This extreme waterpower will make Gothenburg at an early date a great manufacturing and milling center, as a large portion of the wheat of the northwest can be laid down at the mills of Gothenburg as cheaply as at Minneapolis."

"The enormous advantages of Gothenburg will invite manufactures of paper, cotton, woolen goods, starch, oat meal, all grain products and manufactured goods of all descriptions." And the prediction started to come true. Two local brickyards were running full blast to make 5 million bricks for factory construction. Real estate transfers reached \$150,000 a week.

C.F. and C.R. Kittridge, Boston capitalists, built a two story building, now the Five Star Flooring business.

The Burlington & Missouri railroad planned to extend their line from Farnam to Gothenburg. The 1,000 foot flume arrived for the new powerhouse.

The Midland Hotel, a three-story building was completed in West Gothenburg and nearby the vinegar and pickling works building was built. It was a block long, 100 feet wide, three stories with the front of iron and glass.

Under construction in the industrial area west of the tailrace were a machine shop, galvanized iron works, lead pipe works, sheet copper roll-

ing foundry, boiler iron works and foundry and bath tub factory.

In June, an excursion of 200 business men from Boston visited Gothenburg. There were four weekly papers in Gothenburg: The Independent, The Sun, The News and The Star, and The Independent announced plans on changing to daily publications.

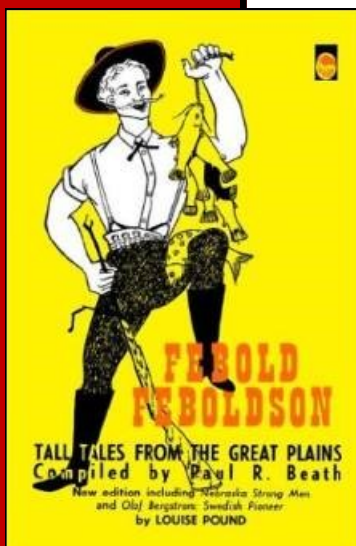
In July, the bridge across the Platte was purchased with money raised by subscriptions and was made a free bridge. Toll had been 25 cents.

The side track was built to the brass and copper works. The GWP & I Company was planning waterworks, tiles and mains being on the ground and light plant material was arriving.

In December the Overall and Shirt factory was ready to start, the Pickle and Vinegar Works was producing 20 to 30 barrels of vinegar a day and the Barb Wire factory had three machines operating with an output of 1,500 pounds a day.

In April two carloads of machinery arrived for the Holten Brass & Copper Works, but the bloom was off the boom. Things had slowed down. In January of 1894 a fire in Vail's Villa burned what was known as the Old Opera building with a loss of \$13,000 to the GWP & I Company. That seemed to be the end, combined with the big money panic. In March the Company went into the hands of a receiver and the big boom was a bust.

IT SEEMS FEBOLD WAS THE EARLIEST SETTLER IN THESE PARTS, AND, IT WAS THROUGH HIS INFLUENCE THAT THE GOVERNMENT DECIDED TO RUN THE PLATTE RIVER THROUGH NEBRASKA



The Lincoln Highway Stair-Steps

The Lincoln Highway Stairs south of Gothenburg were part of the original 1913 highway that crossed the United States from Boston to San Francisco. You can still travel this route by taking the Banner Road all the way to North Platte. If you look closely, there are road signs that mark this historic road. The Gothenburg Tourism Committee is working to provide additional, information-

al, signage along this route. There is another feature of this route that may not be quite as well known. A piece of the original roadbed can be seen on Highway 47 just south of Gothenburg, between the Platte River bridge and the Banner Road. Located to the east you will see a "berm" or raised roadway that vehicles traveled after crossing the mile-wide bridge spanning the Platte River.

The "berm" is on private property so please view from the roadside.

The Lincoln Highway, while not a "trail", was certainly not the only road in the Gothenburg area in yester-year. The Oregon, Overland Stage and Morman Trails passed by our community as well as the famous Pony Express route.

FACTS BEHIND STRONGMEN OF YORE!

Paul Bunyan's legendary feats of strength are part of a long tradition that stretches back to ancient Greece, where guys like Hercules and Atlas were known to hoist the whole world on their shoulders.

Out here in Nebraska the most famous strongman distinction goes to Febold Febodson, reputed to be the first while settler west of the Mississippi.

Another story goes this way. Febold noticed that Kansas was just as mountainous as Colorado, and in sympathy for the farmers and their laboring animals simply turned the state over to reveal the flat underside. Farming has been much easier and more profitable since then.

Feboldson and Bunyan had something in common. Both were made popular not by pioneers trading lies around the campfire but by companies advertising their products.

Feboldson was the brainchild of Wayne Carroll in the late 1920's. Carroll was a lumber dealer in Gothenburg, and wrote a column for a the Gothenburg Independent where Feboldson was included in his ad called "The Two By Four:. When the Independent folded, Don Holmes of the Gothenburg Times kept the on-going saga of Feboldson alive for years. Evenutally Paul Beath of Gothenburg compiled several of the stories and printed a book entitled Febold Feboldson.

Beath's work helped cinch Febold's status as Nebraska's most famous strong man. Being Nebraskan, Feboldson was no lumberjack. Instead, he fought with twisters and droughts and other extreme Nebraska weather conditions. Take 1848 for instance. That was the year the Petrified Snow covered the plains all summer and held up the '48ers in their gold rush to California with the result that they became '49ers. At that time Febold was operating an ox train between San Francisco and Kansas City, because the snow prevented him from doing anything else.

After twenty years, he gave up on taming the state's climate and moved to the sunny climate of California.

In 1973 the "Old Codger" shows up in the office of Tot Holmes by surprise. For those who don't know who the "Old Codger" is, he's the one and only Bergstrom Stromsborg, grand nephew of the legendary Febold Feboldson. Tot would continue the tall tales of Bergstrom Stromsborg for everyone's enjoyment until July 1985.

SOUND THE ALARM!! FIRE!!!!!!

Built in 1892 by the Gothenburg Water Works and Investment Company, the Opera House was a grand three story structure with a cupola on its top. Located on the corner of 10th and Winchell Street (now Lake Avenue), it was home to stores on the ground floor, business and doctor offices on the second



floor and the third floor offered a dance hall, basketball court and stage area for stage productions. In 1912 businesses

located in the building included Hickley's Drug Store, George Back's Jewelry, the Gothenburg Light & Power Company and Pete Edwall's Meat Market. Shortly after midnight on February 25, 1912 a fire started in the base of the cupola above the third story of the Opera House Building. The fireboys were unable to reach the fire from the inside due to dense clouds of smoke. Fighting fire from the outside, it was impossible to raise effective streams of water above the third floor due to low water pressure, and the building was doomed. It burned for two days.

On September 26, 1919 the worst fire in the history of the city occurred late Friday afternoon when the plant of the Platte Valley Milling Company was destroyed. The wind blew strong from the south-east and carried dense smoke and burning embers over the entire business section. The stable at the east end of E.G. West's Lumber Yard required constant attention, as did Wilkin's Blacksmith Shop across the street and J.E. Norsworthy's Feed Store



directly north of the mill. The fire at night could be seen 20 miles away. The mill had a capacity of 140 barrels of flour daily and was the largest buyer of grain in this territory.

The Houston Hotel, opened on May 2, 1891, was a first-class hotel in all its appointments, the rooms large with high ceilings and well-lighted from many large windows. The principle entrance was on the east opening into an office with the dining room directly to the rear. On the second floor there was a parlor with a large bay window and 15 guest rooms. The third floor was almost a duplicate of the second. In all the hotel had 35 guest rooms. It was considered to be "a most elegant hostelry". In January 1979, the proud old building



was completely destroyed by fire. A bizarre set of circumstances led to the end of the Houston Hotel. A deranged man from New York was put off the bus in Gothenburg for causing problems. As he wandered around town asking about places to stay, someone suggested the Houston. In the man's sick mind he connected the word Houston with the space program and decided it had to be destroyed. He slipped into the building and started the fire. Gothenburg firemen

fought the blaze all night in the sub-zero weather but to no avail. Too badly damaged, it was torn down and hauled away.

In 1895, following the loss of the Opera House in 1894, the village board of trustees proposed forming a hook

and ladder company with about 50 leather buckets and 10 axes which could be placed on a wagon. The whole cost from \$200 to \$250. This was Gothenburg's first organized fire protection. Six years later this new fire company was seriously tested. In 1901, a midnight fire was discovered and the church bell was rung to sound the alarm. The 300 pound fire bell purchased in 1897 refused to ring. The whole town turned out with their buckets. Singers Livery Stable and the Odencrantz Store burned. Things became worse. Flames of 30 feet reached the Carlson Hardware Store and Stacks Restaurant. Oil and shells in the hardware store began to explore. What was needed was water, more than a bucket brigade could supply. On January 15, 1909 a meeting was held and the Gothenburg Volunteer Fire Department was organized. With a fire department and a water supply, good equipment was needed and that same year they acquired two hose trucks, 1000 feet of 2-1/2 inch hose and a hook and ladder truck. Later a new electric fire alarm system was installed operating from the telephone office. It was not long before the firemen were put to the test by a series of disastrous fires. The role of the Volunteer Fire Department continued to expand as it became more involved in the rescue of victims. In 1985 the department would locate in its new home on the corner of 10th and Avenue F.

Things have changed since the early days of the bucket brigade and perhaps Albert



Patterson said it best: "It used to be hurry up with a whole lot of water. Now you'd have to say it's a bit more scientific." We are proud of the fire department today with its 44 members, the majority being certified EMT's.

HOWE BARB WIRE FACTORY—1892

The year is 1892. The factory is located on the west side, on a continuation of "F" Street. Mr. F.J. Howe, the general proprietor, is a thorough mechanic and knows every part of his business. There are three large machines for the turning out the wire, each machine capable of a daily output of twelve hundred to fifteen hundred pounds. These make the common sort of barb wire.

Another large machine turns out a wire which was patented by Mr. Howe and is a great improvement over the old kind. Instead of the barbs projecting, they run upwards, thus doing away with all the danger of cutting stock, but at the same time making a substantial fence.

In addition to manufacturing wire, a general repair business will be carried on, and

for this branch of the business there is a fine and complete an outfit as can be found anywhere.

On Thursday the men were busily employed in putting up a larger engine, as the one that had been in use hither was found to be too small to do the work.

Information taken from the Gothenburg Independent, December 31, 1892.

Take a moment to visit the lake, enjoy the view, exercise on the 2.5 walking trail or drop your pole in from the dock and relax.

LAKE HELEN—A Project of the Century

Foresighted citizens approved a bond issue in 1889 for construction of a 12-mile canal that would connect the northwest part of town to the river. This created electric power, the beginnings of an irrigation system and a man-made lake that spurred industrial, community and agricultural growth that has become the hallmark of Gothenburg's success throughout its history. By 1892, Gothenburg residents had electricity—the first in western Nebraska—and the canal system was providing power for numerous industries. At one time the lake was the

second largest artificial body of water in the state.

Community volunteers cleared land, planted trees and erected buildings to develop a park area adjacent to the lake in the early 1900's. Campfire Girls and the Boy

and Girl Scout organizations led in this early development of Lafayette Park. The lake was rehabilitated in the 1970's and has just completed a renewal project spurred by the need to control the influx of Canadian geese.

