

GOTHENBURG HISTORICAL MUSEUM

“A Window into the Past”

DECEMBER 2014

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Dick Larson, Pres.
- Milan Franzen, V. Pres.
- Mike Wolff, Sec.
- Anne Anderson, Treas.
- Lyle Franzen
- Roger Heidebrink
- Donna McConnell
- Ramona Ollendorf
- Dick Schwanz
- Bev Titkemeier
- Chuck Titkemeier

GOTHENBURG HISTORICAL MUSEUM

1420 Avenue F

Gothenburg, NE 69138

Telephone: 308-537-4212

www.gothenburghistory.org

Email: gothenburg history@outlook.com

The “Good Old Days”

In 1963 H.A. Nelson recorded a short biography of his father, Eric Alfred Nelson, who, at the age of six, migrated with his family from Sweden to America, arriving in Gothenburg, Nebraska on July 9, 1885, the year Gothenburg was originally founded. Following are excerpts from that story.

(When) “we arrived at Gothenburg...none of us could speak English. I remember all of us wore a tag around our necks with some writing on the tag telling where we were suppose to go.”

“There were no trees.

Gothenburg, at that time, had no depot but used a boxcar for a depot.”

We were to stay at a place “twenty-five miles north and west of Gothenburg” and “Our hopes were high for a new place to live” but “we found the...new home was not finished” where we were to stay”. The “old home was a dug-out in the side of a hill. The front was made of sod, no floor, one door and dirt walls.”

In Gothenburg there was

a hardware store, a couple of grocery stores, lumber yard, and butcher shop.

The streets were pure sand with board sidewalks

Hitching posts were located in front of the business houses

There were a few houses, perhaps no more than 20

We used Nebraska coal (cow chips) for fuel, but these were darn hard to find because of the shortage of cattle.

Watch for more excerpts in future newsletters.

2014 VISITORS.....

During the five month period of May through September, 2014, there were over 2,000 visitors at the Museum. This included visitors from (47 of the fifty states in the United States and 11 foreign countries. In addition, there was “A Dog” and a “puppy”. A

few of the visitors from outside the United States were from Gothenburg, Sweden. Perhaps, if all of the members of the tour groups that visited the Museum, and any of the 75 or so individuals who did not list their address, HAD recorded their home ad-

dress, we would have had ALL 50 states and more foreign countries represented as visitors to our Museum this past summer

HOWE BARB WIRE FACTORY—1892



Caption describing picture or graphic.

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 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.

BIG BOOM COMING TO GOTHENBURG

"To catch the reader's attention, place an interesting sentence or quote from the story here."

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.



Caption describing picture or graphic.

BOOM or BUST? Continued



Caption describing picture or graphic.

mills, brass foundry, boiler iron works and foundry and bath tub factory.

In June, and 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 1983 the new Columbian school building was built, a number (of) new store buildings and 30 new homes. The Gothenburg, Broken Bow & Southern railroad applied for a charter and was debating whether to go south to Farnam from here or southwest to Curtis.

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.

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 tail-race were a machine shop, galvanized iron works, lead pipe works, sheet copper rolling

“Gothenburg was destined to become the little Chicago of Nebraska”

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 is again undergoing a renewal project spurred by the need to control the influx of Canadian geese.



Caption describing picture or graphic.

THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

Fifty four (54) volunteers served as greeters at the Museum this past summer. Combined, they served a total of over 1,000 hours.

Volunteers also serve as Directors and provide the many repair, maintenance, grounds-keeping, and other "Labors of Love" required for the Museum to remain viable.

Would you consider becoming a volunteer for the Museum? If so, drop a line at our mailing address, call or email us:

GOTHENBURG HISTORICAL MUSEUM

1420 Avenue F

PO Box 204

Gothenburg, NE 69138

Phone: 308-537-4212

E-mail: gothenburghistory@outlook.com

FYI

Ramona Ollendorf has donated a book entitled "Boss Cowman" to the Museum. This book is the recollections of Ed Lemmon who was born in 1857 and was, as described on the jacket of the book as a "cowhand, trail rider, wagon boss, range manager, and ranch owner. He covered virtually very foot of range in western South Dakota and parts of Wyoming, Montana and Nebraska on horse back." If you are interested in checking out this book, contact a museum board member for more information.

2014 Members

Anne/Gary Anderson
Carol/Dennis Van Overbeke
Connie Bihlmaier
Deb/Mike Bacon
Denise Brittenham
Dennis Zimbelman
Dick/Connie Larson
Dick/Jackie Schwanz
Donna McConnell
Dr. James Graff DDS
Elsie/Leroy Cyriacks
Father Wayne Pavela
Gene/Velma Schriver
Gothenburg Feed Products
Gothenburg State Bank
Jack Soller
Jane Sheets
Jim/Janice Gonzales
Linda/Dave Loostrom
Liz/Dan Frerichs
Loren/Mary Koch
Marilyn/Leigh McNeal
Mary Kite
Mary Theasmeyer
Milan/Barb Franzen
Pam Slack
Regis/Eddie Fruit
Rhonda/Tom Jobman
Robert Ronnekamp
Roger Heidebrink
Romaine/Joan Aden
Roy/Lavawn Fernstrom
Syd/Joleen Kite
Terry/Cathy Healey