

GOTHENBURG HISTORICAL MUSEUM

SEPTEMBER 2025

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Mission Statement:

*The mission of the
Historical Museum is:*

- to manage donated and
loaned items in a responsible
manner,
- to encourage and provide
opportunities for genealogy
research,
- to enhance the quality of life
for the people of Gothen-
burg by preserving our histo-
ry and heritage.

NEWSLETTER EDITOR:

Anne Anderson

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DID YOU KNOW?

The following are interesting tidbits about people and places around Gothenburg and stories you may not have heard.

Walter Benson: He lived by the motto "If a task is once begun, never leave it till it's done. If the task be great or small, do it well or not at all". Walter's father, Peter Benson, immigrated from Denmark in 1895 and started working for the railroad at the age of 14. Peter helped build the railroad up to Lake Helen to get ice for the rail-

road fruit cars. Later Peter ran a blacksmith and machine shop. Following in his father's footsteps, Walter worked as a mechanic and machinist beginning in 1917. He was employed as the body shop foreman by the Ford Garage in 1935. While he was employed there he built a fire truck for the Gothenburg Rural Fire Department in 1939. Also, while he was working at the Ford Garage, he took a new 1940 Mercury car, cut them in two, lengthened them out to make



the first ambulance for the City of Gothenburg. Mr. Benson died in 1985 at the age of 87.

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GOTHENBURG, NE 69138
308.537.4212**

www.gothenburghistory.com
Email: gothenburghistory@outlook.com



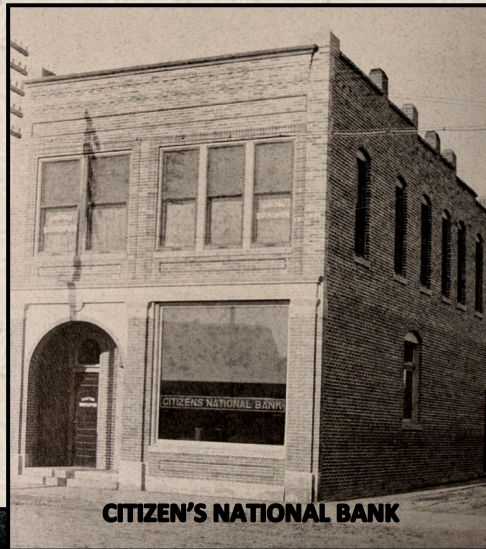
DID YOU KNOW?

Edith Booth became a certified midwife in 1942 delivering over 200 babies. She and her husband Charles moved to Gothenburg in 1921 along with their six children from Pine Bluffs, WY. Although there were two hospitals in Gothenburg, the Pyle Hospital above Potter's Drug and the Harvey Hospital on the corner of 14th & Lake, local doctors urged her to become a licensed maternity caregiver. Booth not only cared for the baby and mother but for other children in the family plus doing washing and cooking. She charged \$20 for staying 10 days with a family. Later the fee went up to \$50 for 10 days. Accounts say Booth continued to help deliver and care for babies and their mothers until she was nearly 70 years old.



Belle Ralston Kelly Kittenbrink: Belle was born in Kircubbin, Ireland, the daughter of John and Mary Ralston. At the age of ten she came with her parents to Willow Island along with twelve brothers and sisters. As a young woman Miss Belle Ralston took an active part in politics of Ogallala and was appointed deputy county clerk, a post which she held for four years. Western Nebraska was where she met her first husband, J.H. Kelly and married in 1895. John Kelly had a teaching degree but left the teaching profession to become a banker in 1900 in Maywood, NE. For fifty years Belle was associated with the banking business, starting her career in Maywood. In the summer of 1902 they came to Gothenburg and again engaged in the banking

business building up one of the strongest banks in the mid-west. In 1906 she and her husband, in cooperation with other local business men, founded the Citizens National Bank, which became First State Bank, giving her the distinction at the time of being one of the first woman bankers in the state of Nebraska. For a period of several years she was president of both the First State Bank of Gothenburg and the Bank of Brady. John Kelly died in 1926. Belle continued as president of the banks until 1934. She married William Kittenbrink in 1932. William Kittenbrink settled in Gothenburg in 1901. He was noted to be an excellent well man and farmer-rancher. In 1928 he was one of the leaders in organizing the 30-mile canal project seeing it through to completion. Following his marriage to Belle Kelly his interests were focused on managing the bank and



she stepped down as president in 1934. At the time of her death in 1951 she was a director of the First State Bank. William Kittenbrink died in 1974 at the age of 96.

Hugh Ralston, Belle's nephew, started as a bookkeeper-teller at the First State Bank following college at the University of Omaha. He became Chairman of the Board of the Directors at the bank and continued

until the time of his death at 87 in 2000. Ralston was involved in many activities in the community and gave generously to various projects.

STATISTICS AS OF

**AUGUST 31,
2025**

- **VISITORS TO DATE: 1.414**
- **STATES REPRESENTED: 47 out of 51 including the District of Columbia.**
- **VOLUNTEER HOURS: Greeters—1,065.50 Others—1,220.75**

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

**YOU ARE
INVITED TO THE
ANNUAL
MEETING
OF THE
GOTHENBURG
HISTORICAL
MUSEUM**

**NOVEMBER 17,
2025**

**WATCH FOR MORE
INFORMATION TO
COME.**

DID YOU KNOW?

Joshua Peckham leads family on a journey westward and settles near the Platte River in 1879. The family originally from England immigrated to America in 1634 with a land grant from the Crown of England. By 1879 the Nebraska prairies were a promising garden of green when the Peckham family traveled west from Wisconsin to homestead on the rolling hills south of the Platte River. With six wagons, four teams of horses, two yoke of oxen and more than a hundred head of cattle the caravan left Wisconsin on May 12, 1879. The party consisted of Joshua Peckham, his wife, Ann and their four sons, Fremont, 21, Herman 19, Elmer 13 and Oscar 7; Joshua's brother, Halsey Peckham and his wife Paulina and their two sons, Fred and Charley; Paulina's two daughters, Emma and Nelli Carpenter; Paulina's niece, Ada Colvin and Tom Northey.



Four sons of Joshua & Ann Peckham:
Fremont, Elmer, Oscar, Herman
circa 1886

Equality of the sexes was not an issue for the women were responsible just as the men. They helped drive the teams and since all the horses were on wagons, the cattle had to be driven by foot.

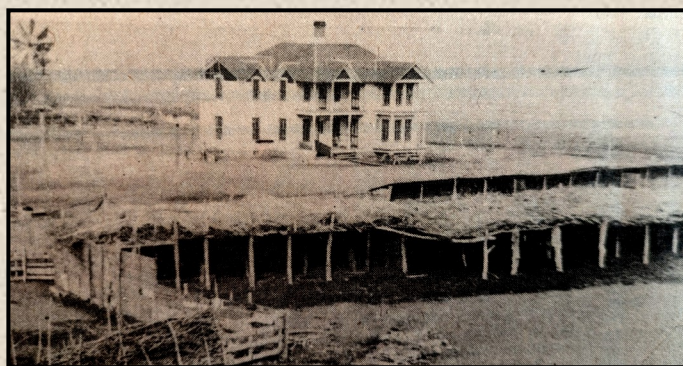
Not knowing where they would finally locate, they decided to leave most of their cattle and part of the wagons in Carroll, Iowa with family of Ann's.

They continued across southern Nebraska. Using maps and brochures of available lands that had been distributed by the Union Pacific Railroad, the Peckhams decided to look at the open land in Lincoln County. They continued west through Plum Creek and into the Platte Valley finding the finest place they'd ever seen.

Joshua Peckham was the first to file for a quarter section

of homestead land and another quarter section of timber claim in what came to be known as the Peckham Precinct at the land office in North Platte in July, 1879. Halsey Peckham also filed for a quarter section and a tree claim as did Fremont, Ada Colvin and Nellie Carpenter. Land was also filed for Herman, who had stayed behind in Iowa and for Tom Northey.

They battled harsh winters and dry, hot summers, but they pushed through the hardships and prospered over the years. On the whole, the 1880's were good years. New immigrants and settlers were flooding the state. Gothenburg developed across the river as a Swedish settlement. In 1884 a bridge spanned the Platte into town, giving the southside residents access to the railroad and merchants. From 1881 until 1895, Joshua kept a post office resulting in the Peckham name on many early maps and even a cemetery. In the beginning the mail route ran on the south side of the river from Lexington to Cottonwood Springs (Maxwell) twice a week with Ann Peckham as the postmistress.



Joshua and Ann lived to enjoy their grandchildren and their large Victorian home which had been built at the turn of the century.

From these early homesteaders came generations following in their footsteps. In 1979, the Peckhams were honored as a Pioneer Farm Family for remaining on the same piece of land for a full century.

Excerpts taken from the June, 1985 issue of The Gothenburg Times.

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DID YOU KNOW?

MUSEUMS LOSE COUNTY SUPPORT

Dawson County Historical Society: The **Dawson County Historical Society** was founded in 1958 in the Tassel Room of the Cornland Hotel with the purpose of organizing a group to start a society and later a museum for the purpose of keeping a record of the events and settlers of Dawson County. In 1964 the organization became incorporated, land was donated and a fund-drive was started to build a museum. In 1971 the County Commissioners approved funding for the Dawson County Historical Society from money collected from taxpayers from assessments of three-tenths of a cent per \$100 in property valuation which was set by state statute. Since 1971 to date this money has been used to expand the museum into an outstanding county museum.

Gothenburg Pony Express Historical Society: The Gothenburg Pony Express Historical Society was organized February 18, 1980 by a small group of dedicated individuals led by the late Ramona Ollendorf and became incorporated December 28, 1981. The corporation assumed an exempt status to attract support from contributions by people in and around the community.

In 1982 inquiries were made to determine the possibility for the Gothenburg Historical Society to receive a portion of the county support. Their request was denied. In 1985, along with Cozad, they again asked for a portion of the amount received by the Dawson County Historical Society. Attorneys for the communities argued that a portion of the tax collected comes from taxpayers in the towns as well as the rural areas and therefore it should be prorated and returned to the communities. Commissioners urged representatives from the historical societies in Dawson County to conduct a joint meeting to discuss how to distribute the tax monies and then return. In 1985 historical records show that an agreement was reached and a formula set forth to divide the dollars based on assessed valuations in each community and the county. A stipulation was made that the organizations must have non-profit status. It was then that the Gothenburg Museum and the Robert Henri Museum in Cozad received a portion of the levy monies collected. As set forth in the mission statement of the Gothenburg society, the dollars received were to be used to gather, preserve and make available records and materials relating to the history of Gothenburg and the surrounding area and to stimulate interest in the knowledge of the settlement of our area and its development.

In September 2005 officers of the Gothenburg Pony Express Historical Society voted to purchase a building that would provide space to display the historical artifacts collected and stored for so many years. It was then the society began doing business as the Gothenburg Historical Museum.

After forty years of Gothenburg receiving a portion of the levy money from the Dawson County Historical Society, we were informed the County Commissioners will not be budgeting any levy money this year for **any** of the museums in Dawson County. You might ask, how much is received in levy income? This year we received \$4,600. It goes without saying that \$4,600 represents a significant part of the revenue stream needed to operate the museum and we are challenged with how we are going to make up this shortfall in the future.

The museum is 100 percent volunteer. Year-to-date volunteer hours, through August 2025, totaled 2,150 hours. Having a non-profit status does not mean that the museum does not have bills. Indeed it does: insurance, utilities, repairs, etc. So, how do we pay our bills? Our revenue consists primarily of money received from Dawson County in the form of a levy, donations from visitors to the museum during the open season, "Memberships" from the individual level to the Lifetime level, other much appreciated donations and memorials. The Gothenburg Chamber Tourism Committee also has money for promotion and improvements but only if the projects qualify for funding.

The Gothenburg Historical Museum feels it needs to have a planned annual fundraising program in place to insure that we can continue to be a viable organization serving and representing our community. This may include the annual "Give Big Gothenburg" campaign, and if you follow that resource, we would hope that you keep the museum in mind with your giving there. We consider our volunteers and others who have given their time and donations as "Friends of the Museum." Now, with the shortfall facing us, the board of directors are asking you to consider continuing your contributions and be a **"Friend of the Museum"** with a donation.

A donation form is included in this newsletter. Your help is needed and appreciated to continue for us to be **a window into the past for future generations.**

LIFETIME MEMBERSHIPS

- | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| • Karla Blasé | • Charlie & Connie Bihlmaier | • Kathy Peterson |
| • Denise Brittenham | • Marvin & Jill Franzen | • Gary & Deb Mroczek |
| • Jan Gill | • Kathy Nichols | • Mike & Deb Bacon |
| • Flatwater Bank | • Bev Titkemeier | • Heidebrink Family |
| • Terry & Cathy Healey | • Elsie Cyriacks | • Gary & Anne Anderson* |
| • Dick Larson | • Steve Windrum | • Tom & Rhonda Jobman* |
| • Donna McConnell | • Verlin & Charolett Janssen | • Jay & Sonia Richeson* |
| • Jenny Raymond | • Cecile Ackerman | • Rick & Pat Zarek* |
| • Tot & Pauline Holmes | • Norm & Colleen Geiken | • Steve & Ligia Peterson* |
| • Keith & Marcy Aden | • Father Wayne Pavela | • H. Kent Hodson Living Trust* |
| • Dennis & Sue Kirkpatrick | • Kim & Bev Anderson | |
| • Gerald & Janet Kranau | • Romaine & Joan Aden | |
| • Roger & Carol Wahlgren | • Steve & Margaret Davis | |
| • Robert & Mary Theasmeyer | | |
| • Mark & Cindy Peyton | | |

*** New Life-Time Members**

2025 MEMBERSHIP & BUILDING FUND REPORT

Thank you to the following who joined or renewed their membership for 2025 and contributed to the museum building fund*.

- | | | |
|---|--|------------------------------|
| • Robert & Mary Theasmeyer*** | • Gene & Cora Bosch* | • Keith & Marcy Aden* |
| • Tom & Rhonda Jobman*** | • Roger Heidebrink* | • Pat & Patty Cordell* |
| • Gary & Anne Anderson*** | • Carol VanOverbeke* | • Loren & Mary Koch* |
| • Rick & Pat Zarek*** | • Gater Road Repair (John & Jill Schmeeckle)* | • Robin & Lynnette Stevens |
| • Jay & Sonia Richeson*** | • Flatwater Bank* | • Bart & Angie Nichols |
| • Steve & Ligia Peterson*** | • Dick Larson* | • Edward & Marilyn Uehling |
| • H. Kent Hodson Living Trust*** | • Gothenburg Realty* | • Tim & Cordelia Aden |
| • Mark & Cindy Peyton*** | • Mark & Patti Aden* | • Charlie & Connie Bihlmaier |
| • Gothenburg Feed Products*** | • Thomas Hodson* | • Karla Blasé |
| • Jan Gill** | • Keith & Gail Fickenschers* | • Ed & Marilyn Uehling |
| • Nancy Fisher* | • Dan & Liz Frerichs* | • Bill * Penny Fattig |
| • Wendy Bridges Jerkich* | • Jerry & Sherri Peterson* | • Roger & Paula Hood |
| • Kathy Nichols* | • Hal & Kendra Fecht* | • Lettie Morse |

*****Life-Time Member **Building Fund Benefactor *Building Fund Contributor**
BOLD/ITALIC INDICATES NEW MEMBER/CONTRIBUTOR

THANK YOU!

- To the **Gothenburg Tourism Committee** for their continued support of the museum with the most recent contribution for our new sign.
- To **George Cornwell and family** for mowing the property at the St. John Church
- To **Cornerstone Bible Church volunteers** for scraping, repairing and painting the St. John Church and to Bruce Clark and Terri Nordin for coordinating this project as part of their community outreach.
- To **Joe Wahlgren, Tom Fickenschier, Duane Sukraw, Robbie Reidy, Isaiah Urman, Joyce Clark, Anne Anderson, Roger Heidebrink, Terri Nordin and Bruce Clark** for their time spent working on the repairing, scraping and painting at St. John's Church.
- To **Marcy Aden** for bringing cinnamon rolls for the volunteers working on St. John's Church.



- To **Kevin Earll** for providing the cement and doing the work to prepare the pads for the memorial bench and miniature buffalo statue in the garden area by the museum entrance. This is a work in progress.
- To **Pat Soller** for the donation of the miniature buffalo statue in memory of his mother, Bev Soller.
- To **Verlin Jansen** for lawn maintenance at the museum.
- To **Nanette Bates** for providing paper supplies for the restroom.
- To **Charlie Bihlmaier** for installation and maintenance of display case lighting.
- To the **Gothenburg Public Library** for donating the 1949 GHS yearbook to the museums collection.
- To **Darren and Matt Franzen** for their help moving the altar donated by the Zion Lutheran Church.
- To **Trudy Miller Ecoffey** for loaning the native hand-painted buffalo robe for display.
- To our **40+ volunteers** who greet our many visitors to the museum.

Form of Payment

Amount enclosed: \$ _____

Check payable to:

Gothenburg Historical Museum

PO Box 204

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Email Address** _____

****I WISH TO RECEIVE MY NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL**
 YES NO

MEMBERSHIPS

Life Time Membership:

☐ 10x Building Fund Contributor \$1,000

Building Fund:

☐ Building Fund Benefactor..... \$500+

☐ Building Fund Contributor.....\$100+

Annual Membership:

☐ Supporting..... \$50

☐ Contributing or Family\$25

☐ Individual\$15