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# FLORENCE DAYS

The Florence Historical Foundation Presents

VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENTS of AMERICA featuring PONCA HILLS VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT 50th ANNIVERSARY as Grand Marshal

## Historic Florence Days 2014 Celebrates the Ponca Hills Volunteer Fire Department's 50th-year Golden Anniversary

Featuring founding members Harold Hodges, Sr., Gerald Hodges, Sr., Ron Pfeifer and Glen Vlcek as Grand Marshals for the Florence Days Parade on May 10.

The present Fire Chief Joel Sacks stated the department was founded in 1964. It consisted of about 20 volunteers who were trained by the Nebraska Fire Service in basic fire fighting. They had one used 1948 Chevy pumper truck and three surplus military trucks from the Nebraska Forestry Service.

The Station House was located at 12919 Ponca Road, in the old Ponca School which the school board later donated to them. Their trucks were housed in the school building. In 1973 new truck bays were added to the building. The meeting rooms and kitchen were added later in the early 1980s.

This remodeled facility has been well maintained and is still used today. The boundary lines of the area they protect cover the area between the Omaha City limits on the south to the Washington County line on the north.

The east-to-west boundaries are from west of the Missouri river to 60th Street. They still cover the Omaha industrial properties northwest of Eppley Airfield.

Even though the area they cover today is smaller than it was in 1964, they have more buildings and houses to protect.

Today they also have mutual aid agreements with the Carter Lake, Iowa Volunteer Fire Department; The Irvington Volunteer Fire Department; and the Fort Calhoun Volunteer Fire Department. In 2013, Nebraska had approximately 14,000 firefighters including 12,000 volunteers. Volunteer firefighters are dedicated people. In rural areas, especially, they can mean the difference between life and death. They are critical in keeping their



Four of the 12 founding members of the Ponca Hills Volunteer Fire Department are still active today. Pictured left to right are Harold Hodges, Sr., Gerald Hodges, Sr., Ron Pfeifer and Glen Vlcek. The Florence community is honored to have them serve as Grand Marshals for this year's Florence Days Parade.

communities safe. The Ponca Volunteer Fire Department now has 32 well-trained firefighters; including the hazardous material people, the emergency medical technicians, and paramedics. They are trained by the Nebraska State Fire Marshal's training division, Creighton University pre-hospital education and Metropolitan Community College. They now have a 2007 rescue pumper, a 2009 ambulance, a 2002 brush truck, a 1995 water tanker, and a 2014 utility truck.

Most of the area covered by the Ponca Hills Volunteer Fire Department has fire hydrants. They also have a water tank in the pumper truck as well as having the water tanker for covering the areas without fire hydrants. The department is now funded by their annual barbecue, a dance, a pancake breakfast, donations, grants, and tax

*Ponca Hills VFD continued on page 4*

**Florence Days Parade & Activities**  
May 10, 2014  
10 am - ???

## Circus in Town

by Vern Hauger

The first circus came to Florence around 1860. They traveled in horse-drawn wagons over unbelievable roads to reach Florence. Their next show would be in that wicked Omaha City.

The circus was much like it is today. They had the clowns, acrobats, tightrope walkers, lion tamers, trapeze artists, elephants, and people who rode standing on horseback as their horses galloped around the center ring.

The circus entered Florence from the east coming across the river on the ferry boat. A lot of the town's people came to watch. The elephants swam across the river, and they

*Circus continued on page 2*



## WASHDAY

by Vern Hauger

My wife told me that she had to put a load of clothes in the washer, and I thought washing clothes is sure a lot easier today than it was when I was a lad growing up. I remember my Mom saying the same thing. "It sure is a lot easier washing clothes today than it was when I was growing up." We lived on a farm then with no electricity, gas, water, or sewer system.

We did have a windmill-powered well pump with good water. We also had a 1935 Maytag wringer washer powered by a gasoline engine, and a Coleman gasoline-pressure cookstove. Being a boy, I was intrigued by these machines and how they worked. Maytag manufactured a wringer clothes washer powered by an electric motor in 1907, however, we didn't get electricity in our part of the country until the late 1940s.

Monday was our washday; in the warmer months of the year we washed our clothes outdoors in the side yard. If the wind wasn't blowing strong enough to work the windmill, we had to pump the water by hand. Luckily this seldom happened because the wind blew constantly across the open farm land.

The pump was an essential part of our lives. When the wind blew too hard we had to shut the windmill down so it wouldn't fly apart. Then we had to pump the water by hand.

Mom woke my brother and me up early on Monday mornings during the months when we were on summer vacation. She fed us breakfast and then we went to work. We had assigned chores to do.

Mom filled the gas tank on the stove with white gasoline and pumped up the air pressure in the tank. My brother and I carried the old copper boiler into the house and put it on the kitchen stove and began filling it with water. Mom lit the burners under it and we continued to carry in the water until Mom told us the boiler was full enough.

Our next job was to go outside and get the washing machine out of the smokehouse and arrange our little laundry area with the washing machine and two wash tubs which we filled with cold water to rinse the clothes.

Mom filled the gas tank on the washing machine engine with a mixture of white gasoline and oil. My brother and I cut up thin slices of lye

*Washday continued on page 15*

THIS BLANK PAGE IS **NOT**  
INTENDED TO BE PRINTED.

TO VIEW MORE OF THE  
NEWSPAPER, PLEASE  
CONTINUE SCROLLING.

# Letter from the President

Dear Friends of Florence,

As we start another great year I would encourage all of you to recognize the positive changes we are seeing in our community. Florence is growing with much new business coming to our Neighborhood. Please join us as we welcome our new neighbors.

The Florence Historical Foundation continues our efforts to spruce up the Florence Depot making it ready for visitors again this season. Please come see us as we are open every weekend during the summer months. Mark your calendars for our outside concert June 26<sup>th</sup> at the Depot featuring Rabbit Stew. I hope you all come out for the annual parade during Florence Days and stop by our Historical Bank for our beer garden and music venue featuring Mike Brock.

The Foundation is constantly at work trying to keep up with the maintenance of all our Historic Sites. This is where our friends and members come into play. Your membership dollars help us preserve our Historic Florence and are tax deductible for the 2014 tax year.

Please consider sending your support again this year if you have not already done so to continue our efforts.

In the meantime, enjoy Florence Days!

Sincerely,

*Lynn L. Farris, Jr.*

President, Florence Historical Foundation

*The Circus ... continued from cover page.*

seemed to enjoy it as much as the people who watched them did. They sprayed water over themselves, and their riders were soaked by the time they crossed the river.

The circus people regrouped on the west side of the river by the ferry landing. The caravan then travelled down Main Street with a marching brass band and a calliope blaring as they turned to go to the North Market Square where the circus would set up.

It was a nice parade. The spectators were thrilled and could hardly wait for the show to begin. They watched in awe as the big tent was erected. They were amazed to see the elephants lifting the huge tent poles.

Some of the locals helped set up the tent in exchange for free show passes. The circus would be in town for about a week. They would stimulate the local economy by spending a lot of money while in Florence. The local merchants were delighted with the healthy increase in their sales.

The circus would play for three days. One right after another, the events would thrill the spectators. Hans the Human Cannonball would shoot overhead across the tent traveling more than 150 feet

through the air before landing in a giant net.

Rhoda the Acrobat was next. Riding a velocipede 50 feet above the crowd, she glided along a single thin wire that ran the length of the colossal tent. There was no net to protect her from a fall.

Black bears rode bicycles, and the lion tamer's tricks amazed everyone. Parents and their children would never forget the man on the flying trapeze or the pretty women on the big white horses as they raced around the center ring.

The ringmaster moved the show right along, and the clowns were funny. The show was over so fast the people did not know where the time went.

On the last day of the show they would have most of the animals locked in their cages and loaded onto the wagons before the final show was over. As people were leaving they started to take down the seats. Everyone knew what they had to do. The tent came down next, each section was folded and loaded onto the wagons. Local people were hired to help load the wagons. They were paid when the job was finished, and some were offered jobs with the circus. A few of the young men took them up on their offer.

Everything was ready to go now. In the morning, after breakfast, they would check everything once more before hitching the horses to the wagons, and be on their way to Omaha.

They should reach the fairgrounds by supper time, and get a night's rest before putting up the tent the next day. ❖

## When Building in Florence, Financial Safety Comes First

by Robert Sanders

Whether you are building a new company or a new home, do you take the precautions to keep your money as safe as one Florence business did?

If you were building a new apartment building, wouldn't a nice safe be a great addition? And what about a telephone company, or a grocery or laundry business, wouldn't a safe be a great addition? And more importantly, what about a bank? For a bank, it would be an absolute necessity.

To ensure the safe is "safe," you would need to protect it from any burrowing attempts from all directions. You surely would do that first before starting construction of the rest of the building. That is what happened 160 years ago when they built the Bank of Florence.

As soon as the bank vault arrived from Pennsylvania via steamboat, the bank construction could begin. First, a 3-foot platform was built of mortared brick for the base. Once the vault was secured to the base, thick walls were built around the safe and over the top. When complete, the bank building was constructed around the vault enclosure.

The vault protected whatever was inside but it could not protect the bank

from the financial panic of 1857 that closed the bank a few years later. After a 30-year hiatus, the building was again used as a bank but the Great Depression of 1929 started the decline that finally caused the bank to close once more.

After the bank closed, it was used later as a telephone company, a grocery store, a laundry business, and even an apartment building, ... with the largest safe around. Imagine welcoming guests or a door-to-door salesman. It might have seemed a little over-protective seeing the large vault taking up so much room on the first floor as you invited folks upstairs.

If you have not been inside the bank, make an effort to see inside the building at the upcoming Florence Days celebration in May. That vault is one of the first things that started our community. To this day, the bank vault hasn't budged a fraction of an inch, all very "safe" indeed.

The bank is one of many "treasures" in Florence covered on the [HistoricFlorence.org](http://HistoricFlorence.org) website. ❖

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*...the bank vault hasn't budged a fraction of an inch...*

VOTE

MAY 13

Diane •  
**Battiato**  
Assessor/Register of Deeds

She is the only candidate who can get both jobs done...  
Let her finish it!

Paid for by Committee to Elect Diane Battiato • P. O. Box 27814 • Omaha, NE 68127

CONGRATULATIONS

Celebrating our neighborhood for 55 years!

State Senator  
**Tanya Cook**  
District 13

HISTORIC FLORENCE DAYS

Pete  
**Festersen**  
CITY COUNCIL

660 Parkwood Lane | Omaha, NE 68132 | 402.554.1436  
[www.petefestersen.com](http://www.petefestersen.com) | [pete@petefestersen.com](mailto:pete@petefestersen.com)

Visit Often!

HISTORIC FLORENCE  
[HistoricFlorence.org](http://HistoricFlorence.org)

Florence Historical Foundation

Florence City Hall is the lifeblood of the Florence Historical Foundation. Help support your community by planning your next event with us. See our ad on page 13 or visit [FlorenceReceptionHalls.com](http://FlorenceReceptionHalls.com) for rates and details.

# The Cowbird and the Cardinal

by Vern Hauger

I woke up at 6:00 in the morning on the last Saturday of the month in June of 2010. After dressing I went outside to put the flag up. A slight wind was coming from the southeast and Old Glory had never looked better as she stood straight out flapping gently in the breeze.

I picked up the morning newspaper that was laying on the sidewalk and went back into the house. I was greeted by my puppy dog Brandi who has been my faithful companion for the past 13 years. I poured myself a cup of coffee and gave Brandi her morning pills. We went outside to sit on the deck while I read the paper and enjoyed my coffee.

It was a beautiful morning. I noticed a bird in the feeder that I had never seen before. It was busy eating and didn't seem to be bothered by us. It looked like a female house finch only it was three times larger than one.

A male northern cardinal landed on the feeder and the bird began to shake and opened its mouth so the cardinal could feed it. Even though I had never seen a bird like this before I thought that it must be a juvenile cowbird with its foster parent.

I am not a birder but I remembered hearing that cowbirds lay their eggs in other birds nest and let them raise their nestlings. I researched the cowbird on the internet and discovered that the bird on my feeder was a juvenile cowbird.



Photo of cardinal feeding young cowbird by Ann Telling, Townsend, Montana. [http://bitsandbytes.net/FEBRUARY\\_2013/02.14.13.html](http://bitsandbytes.net/FEBRUARY_2013/02.14.13.html)

The information I found was very informative. There are two different cowbirds in North America. The bronzed cowbird, which can only be found in the arid southwest, and the brown-headed cowbird. These birds don't build their own nest. They lay their eggs in the nest of other birds and depend on them to incubate their eggs and rear their nestlings.

Some have speculated that because of their nomadic lifestyle of following the grazing herds of buffalo they strayed too far from home to reach a nest in time to lay their eggs, so they evolved to rely on other birds nest.

When the herds of buffalo were eliminated the birds started to follow the herds of cattle.

Originally the cowbird might have been located west of

the Mississippi river in the open country. Now they can be found across most of North America. Female cowbirds check out nests in advance. Once she locates a nest she usually waits until the host has laid two or more eggs, but before incubation begins she will remove one of the host eggs and lay one of her eggs in the nest.

The female cowbird sneaks into the nest just before sunrise to lay her egg which only takes her a few seconds and she is on her way again.

Sometimes, if the female cowbirds' territories overlap, two or more eggs may appear in a hosts nest.

The cowbirds diet consists of 75% seeds and 25% bugs and insects. Hosts react differently to the eggs. Robins, brown thrashers, gray catbirds, blue jays, cedar waxwings, and northern orioles tend to recognize and reject cowbird eggs.

For some reason cowbird eggs often disappear in the house finch nests or the chicks die because of the finches all vegetable diet. Woodpeckers, nuthatches, chickadees, and bluebirds are seldom molested. Cowbirds prefer open cup nests, and the nests of other birds that lay speckled eggs like they do. About 40% of the song sparrow nests are parasitized. The cowbird hatches sooner than other birds do and they also open their eyes quicker.

This gives them an advantage over the hosts own young when it comes to being fed. All of the hosts nestlings eventually die of starvation. The cowbirds are a threat to the survival of some species that nest near forest edges, close to open country preferred by cowbirds. Cowbirds are native, so they are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

The next time you see a tiny sparrow frantically feeding a big bird about four times its size it you might be witnessing a juvenile cowbird being fed by its foster mother.

Our cowbird is no longer with us it went its own way to find its own species. No doubt it will mate and the same cycle will be repeated. ❖

Sources: Google and commons.wikimedia.org

## Did you know?

Florence is the oldest city in Nebraska and the home to some of the most historic sites in Omaha.

## Two Historic Museums Open on Parade Day

Open every Saturday and Sunday

Starting Parade Day | May 10, 2014

Bank for Florence Museum | 8502 N. 30th St. | 11am-3pm

Florence Train Depot Museum | 29th & Dick Collins Rd. | 11am-3pm



### The Bank of Florence

Established in 1856, The Bank of Florence is the oldest bank in the state of Nebraska.

Currently a museum, the bank is open for tours 11-3 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays from mid-May thru August 31.

**Call 402-453-4462**  
to schedule a private group tour.



### Florence Train Depot Museum

About 35 years ago the train depot building, then at its original location a few miles from where it currently sits across from The Florence Mill, was scheduled for demolition. However, the Florence Historical Foundation stepped in and in 1970 they purchased the building. Today, after loving care and extensive repair, the building stands proudly as a charming relic of bygone days. Visit the Florence Train Depot Museum from 11AM-3PM on Saturdays and Sundays beginning on Parade Day!

# Big Elk's Embargo Decides Florence's Future

by Robert Sanders

Why is Florence at this particular part of Nebraska? There are multiple contributors to the reason we are located at this spot; one of my favorite parts is Big Elk's contribution.

One significant contribution is that we know Mr. James Comly Mitchell chose the location due to having learned from the Mormons that camped here nine years earlier that there was a rock bottom in the Missouri River at this location and, desiring to have the ideal spot for the Transcontinental Railroad to pass through his town, there was no better choice.

But why did the Mormons choose this location in the first place? They had arrived way south of here. That is where Big Elk comes into play.

Big Elk was the chief of the Omaha nation during the time of the arrival of the Mormons in 1846. During the Corps of Discovery Expedition, the Omaha nation was situated farther up the Missouri River, close to the South Dakota border.

During the next four decades, the Omaha nation had migrated south, keeping close to the Missouri River. Being the enterprising chief that he was, Big Elk set up an embargo at the Missouri River here, charging anyone that wanted to go up or down the river. This exact location must have been as special to Big Elk as it is to us.

Meanwhile, the Mormons arrived at the Missouri River closer to Bellevue in June 1846. The only Missouri River crossing method was the ferry run by Peter Sarpy, who ran a fur-trading post near what is now Bellevue.

The first Mormons crossed using Mr. Sarpy's ferry but, realizing it was not large enough to handle the oncoming Mormons, decided to build a larger ferry. Peter Sarpy partnered with the Mormons



Chief Big Elk by George Catlin, 1832. Big Elk, also known as Ontopanga (1770-1846/1853), was a principal chief of the Omaha tribe for many years on the upper Missouri River.

to build the new ferry around present day L Street. By now, it was apparent to the Mormons that they could not continue on as originally planned due to needing to have some men return to Nauvoo, Illinois, to rescue others that had been run out of their homes by persecutors. In the interim, they needed to make camp.

Briefly, they camped around 60th and L Street, until a friend of the Mormons

negotiated with the U.S. government to allow them to stay on land that was controlled by the Native Americans.

The camp was set up at what is today near Mormon Bridge Road and Young Street. Twenty days later, about 150 chiefs and braves of the Omaha/Ottawa/Chippewa and Oto/Missouri natives came to collect the rent. A war nearly broke out when Brigham Young offered the Omaha/Ottawa/Chippewa natives the same rent as the Oto/Missouri natives. The Oto/Missouri natives had been in the area since the 1700s but the Omaha/Ottawa/Chippewa natives had been in the area for only three years.

At that point, Church leaders made an arrangement with Big Elk to move camp closer to the Missouri River. Big Elk had the power to take the rent collection into his nation only, leaving the others to collect nothing. Good for us.

Had that not happened, the rock bottom might not have been discovered by the Mormons, and this area not settled until much later. Regardless, the railroad crossing didn't work out because some underhanded dealings down in Omaha got the Transcontinental Railroad to cross the Missouri River there, but that is another story. ❖

You can read the full story on the [HistoricFlorence.org](http://HistoricFlorence.org) website, along with many other fascinating bits of our unique history.

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# A Day at the Train Depot



The Weisen Family (L-R: Shani, Ethan, Dillon, Tom, and Brandon) enjoying an afternoon last June while learning a bit about train history at the Florence Train Depot Museum.

Elwin Siebert, 42-year Miller Park resident, is the president of the Belvedere Point Neighborhood Association. Mr. Siebert is pictured here last June on his very first visit to the historic Florence Train Depot Museum.

Ponca Hills VFD continued from cover page.

money from the rural fire district. They are fortunate to have the fire chief they do. He has been a volunteer with the Ponca Fire Department for 39 years, and their chief for the past 14 years. He retired from the Omaha Fire Department as a battalion chief. He is a great asset for their fire department with his background and knowledge. All of the people living in the Ponca Hills Fire District should take their hats off to these dedicated people. Go to the Historic Florence Days Parade and wave and shout to these four founders of their fire department when they pass by, let them know you care. ❖



Ponca Hills Volunteer Fire Department Founding Members in 1982. Left to right – Dan Schmitt, Maurice Pond, Harold Hodges, Sr., Ron Pfeifer, Gerald Hodges, Jr., Ray Bena, Don Graves, Sr., Gerald Hodges, Sr., Glen Vlcek, Ray Stilen, Sr., Einer Swanson, Melvin Voss. Of the twelve pictured, four are still active members of the department, Harold Hodges, Sr., Gerald Hodges, Sr., Glen Vlcek and Ron Pfeifer.

# What is the Highest Ranking Florence?

by Robert Sanders

Here is something that people generally do not know about Florence. We are not officially a Florence any more, but we do very well in online publicity in spite of our supposed obscurity. Here is the explanation why.

If you were to travel the entire world and ask, "Where is Historic Florence?", the most common answer would be Florence, Italy. It is the Florence after all.

The name Florence has been used as the name of many cities, towns, and communities and, especially in the United States, every state has a place known as Florence. All are recognized as official names except for one state ... Nebraska. Florence, Nebraska was removed from the state map in 1917 when it was annexed as part of Omaha. Maybe officially, but the heart and soul of Florence could not be taken away. We like to refer to our community as Historic Florence.

Of all the places going by the name of Florence in our country, some are larger than others, and more commonly known. Florence, South Carolina is a well known place in the southeast. Florence, Arizona goes by the name of "Historic Florence" even.

Since we "officially" do not exist as a Florence anymore, imagine the competition for promoting our "Historic Florence" online with all the other places, and especially Florence, Italy. You might be surprised that a Google search for "Historic Florence" does not bring up Florence, Italy first, not even Florence, Arizona, or the others, but instead, Florence, Nebraska comes up at the very top of the search results. The HistoricFlorence.org website promotes Florence, Nebraska's attractions, events and the community



Mrs. James C. Mitchell with her granddaughter Florence Kilborn are seen in this undated photo. Florence was adopted and did not show up on the town's census as a birth, which has caused much confusion on how the town actually got its name. Photo reproduced with permission from The Omaha World-Herald.

with all sorts of historic artifacts and research.

If you do not know everything about our community, this is a great resource to start with. Do you know who lived in the Potato Heap? Do you know what Rock Bottom refers to? The website receives an enormous amount of traffic for our annual Florence Days celebration each year but most do not know why it gets so much traffic.

The HistoricFlorence.org website is one of the very few (less than one-tenth percent) websites that is totally Web Consortium validated for every page. Take advantage of this valuable resource to learn about our hidden treasures. Take a tour now by visiting [HistoricFlorence.org](http://HistoricFlorence.org). ❖

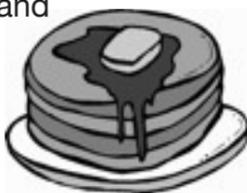
## Ponca Hills Volunteer Fire Dept. Events



**JUNE 7**  
Annual Dance  
featuring the Jason Earl Band

**AUGUST 17**  
Annual Summer BBQ

**OCTOBER 12**  
Pancake Breakfast



# A Tribute to Two Pillars of the Florence Community

Former Owners of Florence Hardware

by Steve Hamilton



Bruce and Marcella Hamilton last spring (2013) on their 52nd wedding anniversary.

This is a story about my parents C. Bruce and Marcella Hamilton, longtime Florence residents, former Florence Hardware store owners and community advocates -- true North Omaha folks through and through.

For 27 years, Dad, along with my mom Marcella (may she rest in peace), owned and successfully operated Florence Hardware until they sold it at a high point in 1999.

The first day my parents worked at Florence Hardware in the summer of 1972 was not even their official opening day. Dad and Mom decided the floors needed to be cleaned. However, they also thought, "Why not open the doors to see if anyone walks in?" Their first official/unofficial day produced \$150 in sales and the floors never were cleaned.

It was a mom-and-pop store like no other in Omaha. If you needed a fitting for your kitchen sink or a screen repaired, you went to Florence Hardware. You were always greeted with a friendly, "Hello, how may I help you?" followed by seasoned advice from loyal employees. This was true Americana.

Dad was (and still is) a man of extraordinary character. He never laid off an employee. Dad knew the business and Mom knew the numbers. She was really a driving force who was steadfast in doing the right thing. She would not even sell BBs to a kid unless she had spoken to his mother first.

My parents loved social gatherings. A potluck dinner was a tradition every Christmas Eve at Florence Hardware. Marcella would greet you with cup of hot cider before directing you to the banquet for ham, scalloped potatoes, and pumpkin pie.

Bruce and Marcella were a well matched pair. Mom was strong willed. She never wavered and she was incredibly well organized. Dad never said a negative word about anyone, but he always said what was on his mind -- with wit! When they served as Grand Marshals of the 1999 Florence Days Parade shortly after they sold Florence Hardware, then Mayor Hal Daub approached my dad and asked if his grandson (my son) would like to have his autograph. In true character, my dad said, "No, but you can have my grandson's autograph."

Lovers of community, my parents volunteered wherever they could. The love affair with Florence continues. However, Florence did lose one of its most ardent supporters, Marcella Hamilton, my remarkable mother and my dad's bride of 52 years when she passed after a brief but fatal illness this past September.

Dad, in spite of his own health challenges, is thriving. He acknowledges every day as a blessing. He is currently as active in the community as he's ever been.

You can find him at Harold's almost daily and he attends the Kiwanis Club of Florence every Wednesday.

Today, Fred and Vern's Everything store resides where Florence Hardware once lived and, since it's owned by his offspring (me and my family), C. Bruce Hamilton has taken as keen an interest in that business as he did his own.

I am eternally grateful to both of my remarkable parents for giving me a wonderful life. ❖

## Worship Times in the Community

**TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH:** ELCA  
6340 N. 30th St. | 402-453-4080 | Trinityomaha.org  
Traditional Sunday Service: 8:45 a.m.  
Sunday School for All: 9:45 a.m. | Praise Service: 10:45 a.m.  
Pastors Elizabeth & John Backus

**ST. PHILIP NERI CHURCH - BLESSED SACRAMENT:** Catholic  
8200 N. 30th St. | 402-455-1289 | www.saintphilipneriblessedsacrament.org  
Saturday Service: 5 p.m. | Sunday Services: 7:30 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.  
Rev. John Andrews

**PROMISED LAND WORSHIP CENTER & (S.O.S.) SAINTS OF SALVATION MINISTRIES**  
8019 N. 31st St. | 402-455-4883  
Wednesday Bible Study: 7-8:30 p.m.  
Friday Service: 7 p.m. | Sunday Service: 11 a.m.  
Pastors Gary & Denise Hopkins

**MOUNT OLIVE LUTHERAN CHURCH:** LCMS  
7301 N. 28th Ave. | 402-455-8700  
(Two blocks east of Godfather's Pizza)  
Sunday Service: 9 a.m. | Educational Hour: 10:30 a.m.  
Rev. Roland A. Jank, Jr.

**MAPLEWOOD UNITED METHODIST**  
3535 Maplewood Blvd. | 402-572-1430 | email: office@maplewood.com  
Sunday School: 9 a.m. | Sunday Worship: 10:15 a.m.  
Rev. Jim Johnson

**FLORENCE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
8314 N. 31st St. | 402-455-8343 | Florencepc.org  
Adults' Sunday School: 9 a.m. | Children's Sunday School: 9:15 a.m.  
Sunday Worship: 10:30 a.m.  
Pastor Al Zimmerman

**ST. JOHN LUTHERAN CHURCH:** LCMS  
11120 Calhoun Rd. | 402-451-2441 | stjohnomaha.com  
Sunday Worship: 9 a.m.  
Rev. Ronald Holling

**HIP HIP HOORAY FOR PARADE DAY!!!**



**JERRY NIELSON**

Lt. Governor 2013-2014, Division 19  
NEBRASKA-IOWA KIWANIS DISTRICT  
ne-ia.kiwanisone.org



6310 Lafayette Ave | Omaha, NE 68132  
Cell: 402-612-6057  
theCFOEdge@gmail.com

## WANTED



### FLORENCE MEMORABILIA

Anything relating to Florence History: Snap shots, newspapers to 1960, deeds and family history -- anything we need.

### STUFFED ANIMALS

**When you clean out the toy box, please think of us!**

For 25 years, the Florence Historical Foundation and Florentine Players have rented a bus during the holiday season and caroled for various nursing facilities and shut-ins throughout the Florence area. We pass out more than 200 stuffed animals every year. Small ones for the nursing homes and large ones for the Christmas Open House -- join us for a rewarding night. Details will be in the Holiday Flyer.

### FLAGS

From May thru September, we fly a 5'x8' flag at the Florence Depot. This is the size the government gives to deceased veterans' families. It takes a large flagpole to display these flags properly. We welcome any flag to display in veterans' honor. Please donate.

## REWARD

Our deepest gratitude!

PLEASE CALL **402-453-4463** FOR PICKUP

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[minnelusagaragesale@gmail.com](mailto:minnelusagaragesale@gmail.com)

## Get Ready for Summer @ Florence Library

by Emily Getzschman,  
Marketing Director, Omaha Public Library

The Florence Branch of Omaha Public Library (OPL) opened in 1923 when 600 citizens formed the Florence Improvement Club and hosted a fundraising event to raise \$100, resulting in the opening of the community's first public library at the Florence Building. Florence Branch was the fourth library to join the OPL system and the pride of the Florence community. In 1976, the current location (2920 Bondesson St.) opened in a new building shared with a community center, becoming the Florence Library-Recreation Center. Capital Improvement Project funds were used to remodel the branch in 2010, increasing its size by 1,500 sq. ft. The branch continues to be a priority to the Florence community today.

Florence Branch will celebrate summer reading with **kick-off party on May 31, 1-3 p.m.** Visit and get registered for the Summer Reading Program. Track your reading throughout the summer to earn great prizes! Join us for free fun programs for all ages this summer. There's something for everyone, including craft and storytime programs, book clubs, the CAPOW Science Show, gardening and food programs, and so much more! For more details about everything Florence Branch has to offer, stop in, call 402.444.5299, or visit online at [omahalibrary.org](http://omahalibrary.org).

## Hot Fun in the Summertime at Florence Community Center

by Sara Kolala,  
Recreation Supervisor, Florence Recreation Center

The Florence Community Center has been a staple on the corner of 29<sup>th</sup> and Bondesson since 1976. For the past forty years, the Community Center has offered patrons a variety of recreational activities throughout the year. This summer will be no different.

The Rec's Kids Club city-wide summer program will be the main focus throughout the summer. Running for 10 weeks from 12-4 p.m. Monday through Friday, kids ages 6-12 will get to experience a variety of fun activities

including games, crafts, special presenters, the climbing wall, swimming, and numerous field trips. The program is once again free, with the suggested donation of \$35 for the entire summer. During the morning hours, the Community Center will offer a variety of clubs for kids to participate in as well. Everything from Craft Club to Nature Club will be offered and provide lots of opportunities for kids to make new friends and try new things. Registration for all summer activities will begin on April 12, during our Spring Discovery Day open house from 10 a.m.-noon. Bring the whole family down for some fun!

The Community Center not only offers programs for the young, but the young at heart as well. The Florence Senior Center is going strong with their cards, bingo, Tai Chi classes, Fitness program, Merrymakers Musical Entertainment, and special presenters. Lunch is served through the ENOA program Monday-Friday at noon. Stop by the Center anytime to find out the schedule or call Kathy for more information at 402-444-6333.

The Florence Community Center, 2920 Bondesson St., has something for everyone. Stop by the Center or check out our website at [cityofomaha.org/parks](http://cityofomaha.org/parks), or call 402-444-5216 to find out all the latest happenings. Happy Summer! ❖

## Find Mother Nature's Gifts at Hummel Nature Center

by Sara Kolala,  
Recreation Supervisor, Florence Recreation Center

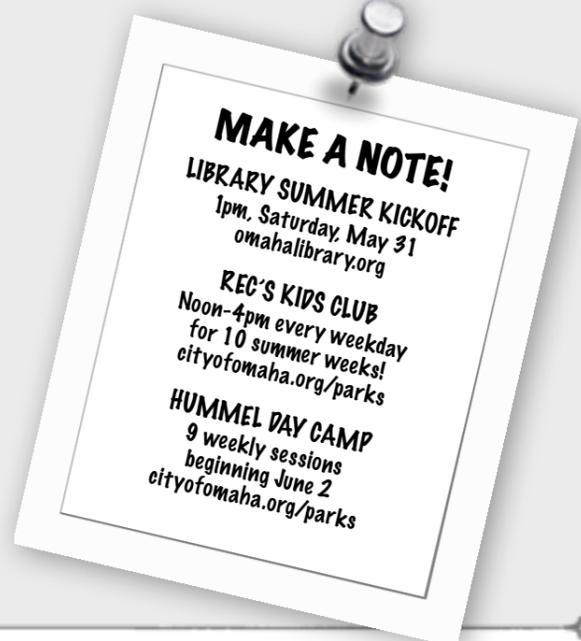
This summer will celebrate the City of Omaha's 65th summer running one of the best summer camps out there, Hummel Day Camp. Hummel Day Camp is a week-long day camp that brings kids back to the basics. Campers get to experience archery, wilderness skills, cooking over a campfire, singing songs, nature crafts and the fun of getting to explore the woods. Campers come home filthy and exhausted after non-stop days of hiking, playing, and water fights. Splashing down the slip 'n slide in the mud is always a highlight of the week. Camp runs from June 2nd-August 8th in nine weekly sessions. Bus transportation is provided from various schools and community centers throughout the Omaha area. Open registration begins April 12 either online or at any Community Center. The cost is \$95 and includes transportation, food, and the best week of your child's summer!

In 2011, the Hummel Day Camp was revamped with a brand new Nature Center and face lift for the rest of the park. Hummel Nature Center is now able to offer

programs year round including a kids' nature class every Wednesday and Thursday morning during the school year and open family nature center time every Saturday throughout the year. Family-friendly special events are



offered monthly. This summer the Nature Center will partner with the Henry Doorly Zoo for its 3rd Annual **Lightning Bug Party on Saturday, June 28th** from 7:30 p.m.-dusk. The Nature Center, 3033 Hummel Park Road, will also host its 2nd Annual Family Camping Adventure where families can bring their own tent and enjoy activities, outdoor cooking, and a fun campout under the stars. Stop by or visit our website [cityofomaha.org/parks](http://cityofomaha.org/parks) or call 402-444-4760 for more information. The **Camping Adventure will be July 26th & 27th**. Visit [cityofomaha.org/parks](http://cityofomaha.org/parks) to register. ❖



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# The Gossip About Eliza (a love story)

by Robert Sanders

It happened in Florence, Nebraska, 1860.

For months on end, every day Eliza slipped out the back door and made her way up the hill to a cave behind her house to be with the man she loved. Everyone in town knew she was doing it. It was the gossip of the century for the small community of Florence.

"Why on earth is she carrying on like this?" Eliza knew others talked about her. She didn't care. She knew it was wrong, but still she did not care. This is how things had to be, at least for the time being.

Initially, Eliza reconciled that she would be doing this until the day God took her last breath, but now she was starting to realize that it could not go on much longer. Church officials were starting to stop by more often to talk to her about it.

Even though she could hide inside her home, sooner or later they might come up to the cave. She could not bear the thought of someone seeing her in that situation. She knew eventually she would give in but, for now, she needed this time in her day to help keep her sanity, if she still had any.

The cave was dark so Eliza took a lantern with her. She could see James but he could not see her because he had been dead for months now. Eliza had him placed in a coffin sealed with a glass cover. Keeping him in the cool cave just made sense to a woman who, at 40, had now lost her second husband. She could not bring herself to put this one in the grave.

After talks with family, clergy, and concerned citizens, Eliza let Mr. Mitchell be buried in the old Mormon cemetery. Four months of daily visits to the cave finally ended. To this day, Mr. Mitchell rests in plot #2 in the Northwest corner of the old graveyard.

Mr. James Comly Mitchell was the founder of the Florence community named after Eliza's granddaughter, the child of her daughter from Eliza's first marriage. Mr. Mitchell met Eliza in Liverpool, England after she had become a widow for the first time. You can imagine how grief stricken the town's first lady really was. It wasn't because she was crazy; it was because she was in love.

Mrs. Mitchell never remarried apparently, although there is no doubt many potential suitors would have tried. She did remain in Florence for a while longer before moving down the road to Saratoga (about 24th and Miller Park area).

Her final entry in the U.S. Census records places her there. We do not know where she died or where she was buried. Perhaps she traveled the roughly 8,855 miles back to where she was born on the Elephant River, 250 miles north of Capetown, near Cape Good Hope, South Africa.

Either way, what a journey her life had taken her. We may never know the final story.

Disclaimer: This story is based on fact but starts out with a fictional aspect. The fictional aspects stop when we learn Eliza is visiting her dead husband, except we do not know if people gossiped or who visited her and talked to her about burying her husband. The remainder of the story is fact. The facts are Mrs. Eliza Mitchell did have her deceased husband placed in a coffin with a glass cover, then placed in the cave so she could visit him (for over four months). Our community's founder, Mr. James Comly Mitchell was buried in the Old Mormon cemetery. We also know Mrs. Mitchell's origins are about as far from Florence as anyone's could be; possibly more than any other person that ever lived in Florence. ❖

*The origin of this story was that Mr. Mitchell was not buried for over a year, however, death and burial records indicate it was closer to around four months. Regardless, I think you will agree, the story of our community's first lady and founder is quite unique. You can read the full details on the [HistoricFlorence.org](http://HistoricFlorence.org) website.*

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**HISTORIC  
FLORENCE**  
*HistoricFlorence.org*

## Claims Club: Vigilantes in Florence

by Vern Hauger



James Comly Mitchell, the founder of the town of Florence, was a very enterprising man. He owned and operated a merchandise store in Council Bluffs, Iowa when he began making plans for a new town on the Nebraska side of the river.

Mitchell realized there was money to be made with this land. When the Kansas-Nebraska

Act made the land west of the Missouri River available for settlement he was one step ahead of the game. Acting on the advice of Peter A. Sarpy of Bellevue, Nebraska, Mitchell had his plans all laid out.

He formed the Nebraska Winter Quarters Company, dedicated to resurrecting the area where the Mormon Winter Quarters had stood as a part of the new community. Mitchell was in control of this company and was soon able to attract the investors he needed to back him.

He had hopes that the Mississippi-Missouri Railroad would cross the river there since the river was narrow at that point and had a rock bottom, making it a perfect place to build a bridge. A railroad going through the town had the potential of making some people very wealthy.

Mitchell first considered calling the town Rock Bottom. But wisely, he conceded to his wife's wishes and named the

town Florence after her niece. A territorial government was set up and Mitchell became a territorial representative to the legislative meetings. The territory had no laws at this time. By an act of the Nebraska Legislature, claim clubs or settlers' organizations were granted quasi-governmental powers within their neighborhoods.

Each club had its own elected officers, and its own constitution and bylaws. A club could arrest, hold court, render a verdict, and enforce that verdict on members and non-members using whatever means it felt appropriate.

Of course, James C. Mitchell was elected leader of the Florence Claims Club. He handpicked people to serve as officers. The remaining members were mostly followers.

Although Mitchell was small in stature, he was known by some people as a mean person who was becoming more and more like a Vigilante with his gang of bullies who would torture someone to get information from them or force them to do whatever the club wanted.

The citizens of Florence knew that the Claims Club went outside of its jurisdiction and made illegal arrests.

They also knew that club members were terribly abusive and often misused their authority when meting out so-called justice. The citizens didn't seem to care as long as it didn't directly affect them.

When James C. Mitchell died at the age of 49, some eulogized him as a kind-hearted man, while others remembered how ruthless he could be with his frontier-style justice.

Little has been recorded about his dark side except for one time when they went outside of their jurisdiction to arrest an Irish lad in an area of Omaha called Gophers-town.

The Gophers-town residents ran them out of town twice that day. The first time by chasing them with clubs and shovels. That night, the Claims Club returned with reinforcements but, when they were met with gunfire, they bolted back to Florence -- and never returned to Omaha.

After that night, the Claims Club folks seemed to have lost interest in the Irish lad from Gophers-town. ❖



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[www.omahaseniorcare.org](http://www.omahaseniorcare.org)



# An Eyesore Became His Canvas

by Cynthia Vana



Photos by Cynthia Vana - April 2014

Jeff Mesenbrink told me that from the early 1960s (around the time Interstate-680 was constructed), until last summer, a huge mound that once served as the foundation for a train trestle and tracks was now a ten-thousand-some-square-yard pile of ugly earthen debris.

What to do?

After exploring a number of expensive options to haul away the eyesore, Mesenbrink, owner of the property, proprietor of Omaha Tree, Inc., and proud Florence resident, decided to tackle the insurmountable task on his own. He managed to level the ground with the help of man who purchased the tons of dirt and hauled it away. Mesenbrink then got even more creative by painting the "Historic Florence" sign on a remnant of the old concrete trestle. Finally, he laid a concrete slab on which he positioned a refurbished antique wagon. Now it looks great!

Mesenbrink also plans to landscape the area and plant trees on each side of the sign which sits just off McKinley Road between 48th and 30th Streets. Thank you, Jeff Mesenbrink, for your generous contribution in helping to make historic Florence yet a little more visible. ❖

# North Omaha Commercial Club Works for the Community

NOCC WELCOMES ANYONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO HELP CONTINUE IMPROVEMENTS IN THE FLORENCE COMMUNITY

by Mele Mason

Tangible results of some of the efforts led by the North Omaha Commercial Club include, but are not limited to, the recent streetscape improvements along the North 30th Street corridor in Florence.

Wider parking spaces, storefronts made more attractive with cast-iron decorator benches for pedestrians to relax. Planters. And more. No small feat.

In order to accomplish these goals NOCC first had a vision, then they organized Town Hall meetings and coordinated with Florence Futures to raise money for a Master Plan to submit to City Hall.

Then they worked with the Mayor, City Council and Planning Board to secure funds for the streetscape. We are now enjoying the results.

For more than 70 years NOCC has served the Florence community by living by its motto "To Further the Interests of North Omaha."

This motto is promoted through NOCC's 10-point program:

1. To insure an orderly growth comparable to that enjoyed by other sections of Omaha.
2. A better business climate in which to work and grow.
3. The development of new residential and shopping areas.
4. Increased recreational facilities for both children and adults.
5. The upkeep and improvement of our beautiful residential areas with proper and reasonable zoning regulations.
6. Better educational opportunities for all.
7. The location of new business and industry in our area.
8. Better employment opportunities for all citizens.
9. The improvement and rejuvenation of sub-standard housing and business areas.
10. Greater co-operation between all of our business and professional groups for the common good.

The NOCC traditionally meets on the last Monday of the month (excluding holidays).

The NOCC team currently meets at Harold's Koffee House on 30th and State Streets. Every meeting kicks off at 6 p.m. with a casual 30-minute social time followed by a yummy dinner prepared at Harold's. Special hourlong speaker events begin at 7 p.m.

NOCC also awards The Community Betterment Award each December to a person or group who has impacted the community in a positive, enriching way.

Membership is open to anyone interested in supporting the growth and development of Historic Florence and the businesses that make Florence the amazing community it is. We welcome newcomers!

Annual dues, billed each January, are \$50 per year. A significant portion of the annual dues is used to pay for printing and mailing the monthly newsletter and facility fees for holding Town Hall Meetings.

For more information, please contact NOCC President Mele Mason at 402-455-9422, meleason@aol.com. ❖

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Photos from the archives of the Historic Bank of Florence Museum.

The old Bank of Florence building has had an interesting history. Among other enterprises, it served for many years as a telephone company with the Florence Telephone Company switchboard residing on the second floor of the bank. For other fun facts, you'll enjoy the R. Sanders' "Financial Safety" article on page 2. The old bank is now a museum that attracts historians, school groups, and tourists. It's open for tours 11a.m.-3 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays from mid-May thru August 31. Call 402-453-4462 to schedule a private group tour.

The Florence Historical Foundation continues to restore and maintain the 1888 Florence Depot Museum, the 1856 Florence Bank Museum, the 1905 Keirle House, the Mormon Bridge Toll House and the 1888 Florence Fire Barn. The Florence City "Reception" Hall is the original site of Florence's City Hall, jail and fire station back in the 1880s. The Florentine Players continue to be a part of the fundraising arm of the Florence Historical Foundation by performing several times during the year. The facility was built by your donations and is truly a "community building". The Hall was built by this community for everyone's benefit and usage. We take pride in what we've built and hope you do, too, when using the Florence City "Reception" Halls.

Plan your events at  
[FlorenceReceptionHalls.com](http://FlorenceReceptionHalls.com)

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Sat - Sun: 6:30 AM - 8 PM



# Genealogy Among Most Popular Hobbies

Until the late 19th century, family histories were almost exclusively of interest to persons who had obtained their wealth or rank by inheritance. Other people, who had inherited nothing, might, in extreme cases, suppress their family history as a matter of shame.

In societies such as the United States or Australia, there was, by the 20th century, growing pride in the pioneers and nation-builders. Establishing descent from these was a concern in groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and helped differentiate those descendants from later immigrants with lower status.

In Nazi Germany, family histories were compiled to affirm individuals' affiliation with the "master race" and to adhere to legal requirements for marriage.

Genealogy received a boost in popularity in the late 1970s with the television broadcast of *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, Alex Haley's account of his family line. Modern family history explores new sources of status, such as celebrating the resilience of families that survived generations of poverty or slavery, or the success of families in integrating across racial or national

boundaries. Some family histories even emphasize links to celebrity criminals, such as the bushranger Ned Kelly in Australia.

The growing interest in family history in the media, coupled with easier access to online records, has allowed people with a curiosity to start to investigate their ancestry. This curiosity can be particularly strong for those with lost family histories, for example, because of adoption or separation from family, perhaps as a result of bereavement.

Today, genealogists or family researchers have an abundance of reliable resources available to them. Right here in Florence, one can tap into the resources available at the Mormon Church of Latter Day Saints or the Greater Omaha Genealogical Society or the 8,300 items available in Omaha Public Library's reference collection. With a library card, you can even access HeritageQuest and Ancestry databases for free. No need to pay subscription fees -- your public library has already done that for you. Check out [omahalibrary.org/books-and-resources/genealogy](http://omahalibrary.org/books-and-resources/genealogy). ❖

*Source: Much of the information in this article was retrieved from Wikipedia at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genealogy> on April 7, 2014.*



**THE MORMON BRIDGE TOLLHOUSE** building was originally located at the west end of the Mormon Bridge. Proceeds collected from the tolls helped pay for construction of the bridge. The tollhouse eventually moved to 3010 Willit, just west of the 1856 Bank of Florence.

Also known as the Florence Ferry Tollhouse Collection Building, the old tollhouse has since been refurbished and is now home to a business called Dick's Place, owned by none other than a man named Dick Brown, a longtime advocate of promoting Florence history, an active board member of the Florence Historical Foundation, and coordinator of the Florence Days Parade and newspaper. Thank you, Dick, for all you do! ❖

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Meetings held at **Olive Crest United Methodist Church**  
7180 N. 60th St., about a mile north of Sorensen Parkway

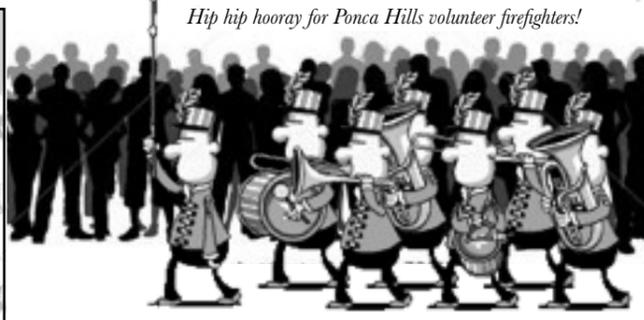
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Hours and event info at [DouglasCoHistory.org](http://DouglasCoHistory.org)

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Trinity Lutheran Church  
Free Hot Dogs & Drinks 11AM-12:30PM

Universal College of Healing Arts  
Free Chair Massages Noon-1PM

Florence Mill  
Open House During & After Parade

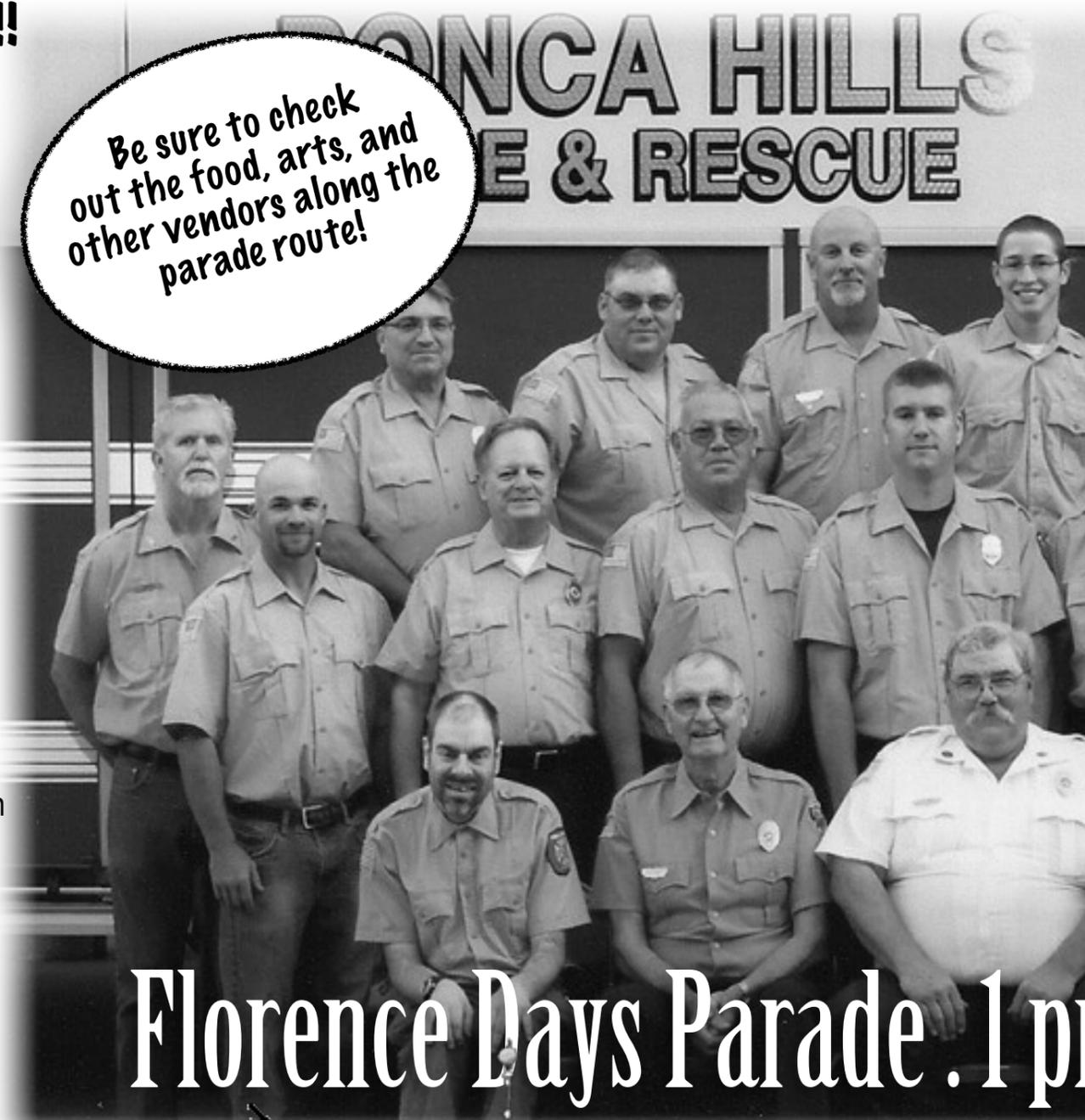
Florence Community Center & Library  
Nature Hike and Craft 10AM-Noon

Mill Creek Mercantile  
Sidewalk/Store Sale,  
Scotty's Go-Go Grill  
St. John Lutheran Church  
Free Popcorn

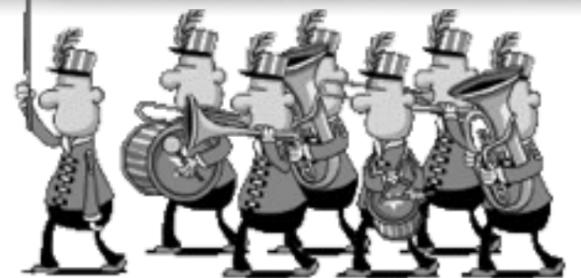
Mormon Trail Center  
Concert in commemoration of the Mormon  
Pioneers and their trek across the West

Ponca Hills VFD Water Fight  
Mormon Park, 31st & State  
After Parade

Be sure to check  
out the food, arts, and  
other vendors along the  
parade route!



**Florence Days Parade .1 p**



**Come one, come all! Parade begins at Mill**

**Water Fight!**

(water fight sponsored by ponca hills VFD)

immediately following parade, at 31st & State

**Beer Garden**

(beer garden sponsored by florence historical foundation)

**Live Music**

(3-6PM) featuring **MIKE BROCK**

**Bar-B-Que**

(bar-b-que sponsored by the north omaha kiwanis)

---- Be there! (or be square) ----

May 10, Noon-6 pm at 30th & Willit

(behind the Bank of Florence Museum)



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# PARADE ROUTE

Parade begins at Miller Park and proceeds north to McKinley.

Check out the food, arts, and other vendors along the way!

## MUSEUMS OPEN

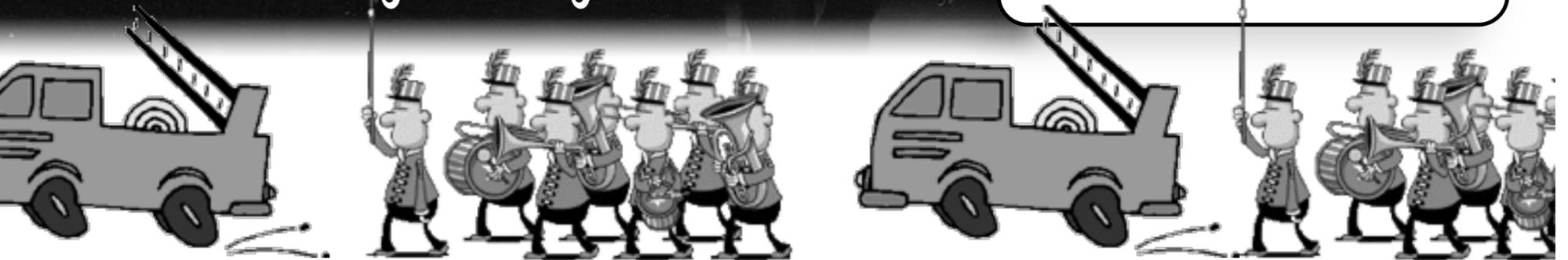
Bank of Florence | 8502 N. 30th St.  
Florence Depot | 9000 N. 30th St.

Open 11am-3pm  
Saturday, May 10

## Mormon Cemetery Information Center & Museum

34th & State Streets  
**FREE TOURS:** 9am to 9pm

m. Saturday. May 10. 2014



er Park and proceeds north to McKinley.

**THE FLORENTINE PLAYERS PRESENT  
THE 50TH ANNUAL FLORENCE DAYS**

# MELODRAMAMA

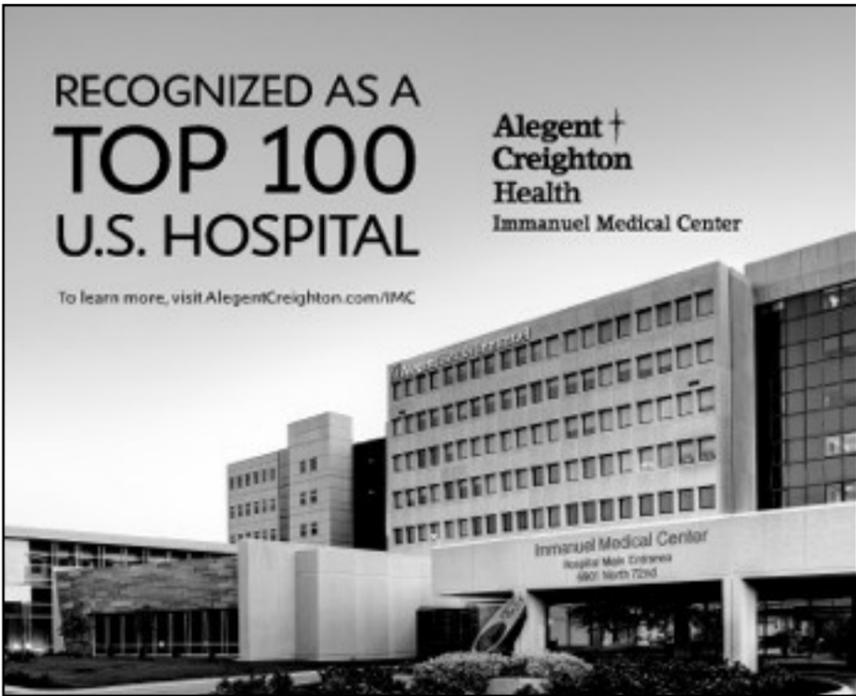
*"WHERE IS MY WANDERING GIRL TONIGHT  
OR WHO'S YOUR HERO?"*

MAY 8th, 9th, 10th, 2014  
7PM  
Florence City Hall

**Featuring:** Heroes, Villains, Heroines,  
and Can Can Dancers of Melodramas past

The Florentine Players logo features two theatrical masks (comedy and tragedy) with the text 'THE FLORENTINE PLAYERS' and '50th Anniversary' below. There are also circular logos with a top hat and a group of dancers.

mily ... all day and into the evening!



# Kiwanis of Florence Embraces New Citizens

by Marc Magisana

They spanned the globe: from Burma to Nepal, Mexico to Brazil, Britain to Ethiopia.

It doesn't take long to discover that family is the common thread uniting this diverse community, one that transcends cultural differences. Whether for job, education, or to rejoin loved ones, family is at the beginning and the end of the journey to citizenship as they join the American family.

Just as they currently do, the Kiwanis Club of Florence welcomed dozens of new United States Citizens at a reception in the Douglas County Courthouse last year. A group of immigrants had finished a naturalization oath-taking ceremony and several members of the Kiwanis Club of Florence greeted these brand new citizens with smiles, hand shakes of congratulations, and refreshments.

"We started this tradition more than 10 years ago," explained Kiwanis Club of Florence past president and longstanding club secretary MaryLouise Buckwalter. "It's a wonderful way for our new citizens to feel welcomed and celebrated."

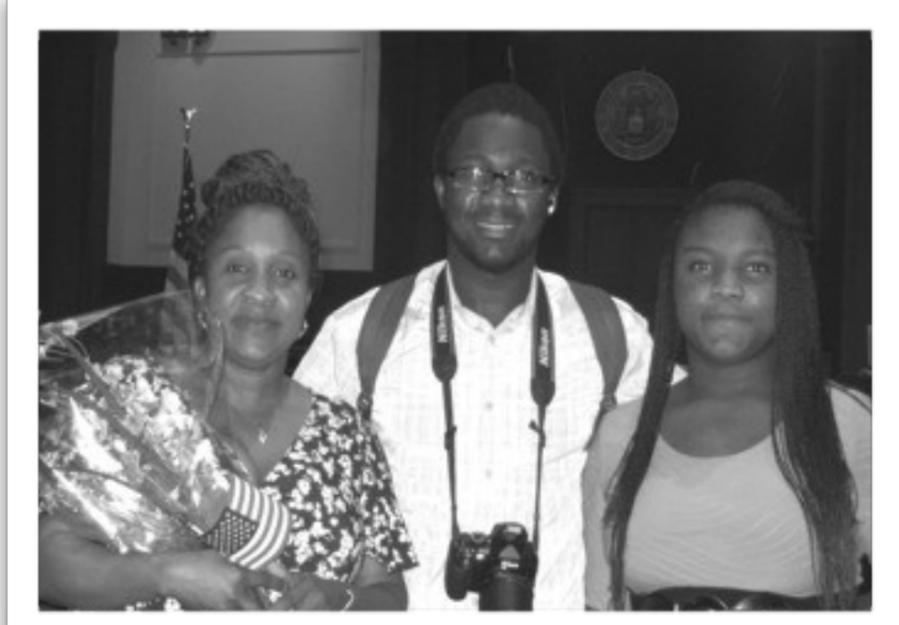


Photo of new citizen with family members by Sophia Magisana, 2013.

Juan, a former citizen of Mexico who has been working in Omaha as a chef, received hugs and kisses from his daughters and son, already citizens and students attending Omaha Public School. Juan plans on pursuing a mechanical engineering degree, "Language is the most difficult part of the process and the most necessary for opportunity," he explained. "It's the one thing that holds new citizens back who are unable to communicate in English."

A tall and soft-spoken Sudanese woman with twin daughters in tow expressed mild frustration at the difficulty in adjusting to her new home in Omaha. "In Africa it was not so difficult to get to appointments and I had people I could leave my children with," she explained. "Here, I am always driving to take them to school or doctor visits, and, like today, I have to bring them with me if I go out."

New citizens are required to renounce alliance to any foreign state government, however, presiding District Judge John M. Gerard encouraged the group to preserve their language and heritage which "enriches America."

Judge Gerard said that this was the part of his job he most enjoyed doing and congratulated these new citizens on an achievement requiring great perseverance and dedication.

On behalf of the Federal Courts, Judge Gerard thanked the Kiwanis Club of Florence for hosting a reception for one of the most significant events in the lives of so many. ❖

-----  
The monthly Naturalization Ceremony receptions are graciously sponsored by the Kiwanis Club of Florence. Hy-Vee Drug in Florence also supports the receptions by providing 10 dozen fresh baked cookies for each event.

The public is invited to help the Kiwanis of Florence welcome new citizens at 2 p.m. on a select Friday each month -- the next four Naturalization Ceremonies are scheduled for **May 9, June 20, July 11, and August 15** at the Roman L. Hruska U.S. Courthouse, 111 S. 18th Plz. in downtown Omaha.

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# In a letter, Florence native Beverly J. Quartoroli White shares her early life in Florence

by Vern Hauger

No doubt there are many people living in Florence who remember her. The Quartoroli family moved to Florence in about 1938. Her father Joseph Quartoroli was employed by the Metropolitan Utilities District at the water plant, and they lived in one of the ten houses built on the MUD Property to house the 24/7 on call duty employees. Her father was one of those employees. He worked his way up the ladder from stoking the huge furnaces to Stationary Engineer. He worked there from Jan 1928 until his death in April 1959.

He was awarded posthumously for designing an escape route in the ice plant after a terrible accident in which some deaths occurred. With her father instructing her, she was able to draw up the plans for him. Her brother Joe, Jr. was the oldest, and her brother Robert (Bob) was the youngest. They all went to Florence Grade School, Joe went to Tech High, and she and Bob went to North High.

Her letter brought back so many memories for me. I went to North High at about the same time she did. She wrote about how she learned to swim in the wonderful big fountain at the waterworks. My wife also learned to swim there as did a lot of the Florence kids. The fountain is now located on the ConAgra Foods Campus on South 10th Street on the South side of the lake. It is turned on each summer and it is still as beautiful today as it was then.

She wrote about how her neighbor Mr. Keir and his bulldog were an attraction when he walked the dog down the street. Mr. Keir was missing a finger and he told all of the children that his dog bit it off. Beverly wrote she still believes him. She wrote about her mother, Orlanda (Al), who worked in the cafeteria at Florence school for years, and how she was The Red Cross air raid warden in her neighborhood during WWII. When there was an air raid practice her mother would put on her white helmet, grab her first aid equipment and go from house to house making sure everyone had their lights turned off and black-out shades drawn. A stretcher and other items



basement. She wrote about the war years and about how they put up fences around the MUD property with guards and gates. Italian POWs were housed there and her father, who was Italian, would talk

with them through the fence. I enjoyed her letter and wish I had more space in the paper to share all of it with you. Beverly now lives in California, she moved there in 1964. She had two sons. The oldest died in 1987. Her other son Larry works for the movie and TV studios as a set dresser.

Her mother passed away in 1999 and her brother Joe still lives in Omaha. His son Joe, Jr. works for Bakers Market. Her brother Bob passed away in 2006 and his children live in Omaha. She says she can still see the inside of the Florence Variety store where all of the candy was displayed, and she remembers the Hershey candy bars Keibler's Drug store gave to the kids on Halloween, Sam's Super Service gas station, Ted's Bar, Nick Nigro Shoe Repair, the old Florence Gym, Reid's ice-cream stand, Michael's grocery store, and the recreation park where she played baseball. She wrote about the flood of 1942 and how the water came up to the corner of her street at the end of Florence Blvd. and how her mother and other women worked for days delivering food to the workers who were holding the flood waters back.

My father worked for days moving people out of the flood area with a huge company truck until the water got too deep and he had to quit. After the water receded he took my brother and me to see what a flood can do. Some houses were gone, washed away, only their foundations remained as a reminder of where a house once stood and a family lived. Other houses were upside down on their roof tops. I will never forget the stench from the brown silt that covered everything, and what I saw that day.

Beverly, I want to thank you for sharing your "Early Years In Florence" with us. It brought back a lot of memories for me and a lot of the people who live or once lived in Florence. ❖

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# From Ruin to Recognition

by Linda Meigs

Do you remember the dilapidated old pink building that looked like it was falling into Dick Collins Road?

It was a Winter Quarters landmark in the newly chartered territorial town of Florence in 1854.

It was a different kind of landmark in the twentieth century as it leaned into disrepair.

Many instructions on how to get to the airport involved, "Turn at the old Pink Mill."

People still meet at the old Mill. But it's no longer pink.

People meet at the Florence Mill to discover pioneer history and Nebraska history in the Winter Quarters Mill Museum.

They meet at the Mill to explore an old wooden grain elevator like they remember from small towns of their youth. Come find the 1915 bucket elevator!

Meet at the Mill to view artwork in an unusual alternative setting. Visit the second story ArtLoft Gallery with its changing exhibits and an October Pottery-Tour!

Come to the mill for historical and cultural programs. New this year, the Florence Mill is hosting a play for Metropolitan Community College's Great Plains Theater Conference. A playwright in New York is currently writing a play specifically to be staged in the rustic old Mill towards the end of May!

Folks meet at the Mill to buy farm-fresh, local produce and artsy crafts at the Florence Mill Farmers Market! Neighbors gather at the Mill just like, days of yore...but now on Farmers



Market Sundays you will find First-Sunday-Pony-Rides and Miss Joan's Craft-Table, and weekly visitors such as alpacas, sheep in the meadow or old-time bluegrass musicians! Gather at the Mill this summer for learning, for creativity, for fun and healthy eating!

The Florence Mill is a National Register Historic Site and a "Save America's Treasures Project of the National Trust."

In the last 16 years it went from a sad ruin to recognition as a "Hidden Treasure of Heritage Nebraska."

It functions as a unique cultural attraction that connects Agriculture, History, and Art.

The old Mill is also a treasure of Historic Florence as the only remaining building to span the eras of Overland Pioneer Trails and Territorial Settlement of Nebraska. It witnessed a significant evolution of our nation's history.

Stop by the Florence Mill for Florence Days from 1-5 p.m.!

Gather at the Florence Mill Farmers Market starting Sunday, June 1, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The season starts with pony-rides and family-friendly fun.

And make it your healthy Sunday outing through the end of September.

The Florence Mill is located just south of I-680, Exit 13, at 9102 N. 30th St.

Hours are 1 to 5 pm. Wednesday through Sunday, and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Market Sundays: June through September.

Open by appointment at 402-551-1233.

Check out the Florence Mill Facebook page...and finally...a website! (currently under construction) [TheFlorenceMill.org](http://TheFlorenceMill.org). ❖

*A playwright in New York is currently writing a play specifically to be staged in the rustic old Mill...*

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# Universal College of Healing Arts

The first thing you notice as you enter the Florence Building on the northwest corner of 30<sup>th</sup> and Clay is the aura of peace and quiet. This old brick building that years ago was the Florence Library and community center once filled with the sounds of basketball, dances, receptions, parties and plays has, for the last several years, been the home of The Universal College of Healing Arts-Massage Center. The College now invites you to relax in peace and quiet and experience one of world's oldest health care modalities...massage therapy. The College has a massage clinic opened to the public. You can receive a massage treatment at a reduced rate from a student. The clinic also has several licensed massage therapists with specializations in rolling, trigger point, and bodyart therapy.



Meet the College's owner and president, Paulette Genthon. She currently lives in Florence, too. Paulette took off to Nebraska in 1971, relocating from Clifton, New Jersey. She raised two sons here and now has nine grandchildren. Paulette has a Master's Degree in Adult Education and Bachelor's Degree in Health Education. As a licensed massage therapist for 35 years, she teaches the fundamentals of massage therapy at the College.

After starting the school in 1995 in Benson and later moving it to Dundee, the need for larger quarters to accommodate the many students from around the country became apparent. Driving past the empty Florence Building every day, Paulette began to see its potential and, even though business friends felt a move west a better location, she chose Florence. A good decision that was validated when Notre Dame nuns came to welcome them with a delicious chili supper as they were moving in.

The College is a teachers dream come true—where students arrive and take charge of their lives, becoming healthy through movement, nutrition, meditation, self-awareness, and—oh yes—massage. It offers a flexible schedule for busy adults.

The College has developed its own campus with the empty lots on the block, making it a 'Healing Greens' classroom. There is a community garden and the beginnings of a showcase for urban ecology.

Students from not only Nebraska, but other states, and other countries, come to learn the art of massage therapy. The College is accredited by ABHES, the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools. One can receive a college degree at UCHA.

So, for your health needs or just general relaxation, check out the Universal College of Healing Arts for an hour of affordable massage....or possibly consider learning a new career in massage therapy. ❖

*Washday... continued from cover page*

soap while Mom carried the hot water to fill the washing machine. Mom inspected the soap we cut. If it wasn't sliced thin enough it wouldn't dissolve properly and globs of it would stick to the clothing. She wasn't happy when that happened. She let us start the engine. It had a foot pedal kick starter that you stepped down on and it spun the fly wheel to start the engine.

The engine was a one cylinder two (stroke) hit-and-miss type meaning it only fired when the engine revs dropped below a certain speed -- this would send it rotating again. Once it slowed down it would fire again and so on. A governor in the flywheel controlled when it sparked and the crank shaft had heavy weights on it to keep it spinning longer at a set speed once it fired. It is a strange sounding engine. Once it reaches its desired speed there is only one bang for five revolutions of the flywheel. The exhaust was a long metal flex hose with no muffler. It was loud and it smoked a lot.

I loved to watch that engine run and listen to the sound it made. The first loads through the machine were the white clothing. While the first load was washing, Mom would take a soapy rag and wipe down the clothes lines. When the first load was through washing, Mom ran it through the wringer into the first tub of rinse water. She rinsed the clothes then ran them through the wringer into the second tub of rinse water.

Mom ran them through the wringer a final time into the laundry basket and then hung them on the clothes line. She washed the light colored clothing next and then the dark colored ones last. Mom still had to take them down from the clothes line after they dried and everything had to be ironed in those days.

Sometimes a rain shower would come before the clothes were dry and it would be a mad scramble to get the wash off the line and into the house before it got rained on. Mom hung what clothes she could on floor dryers in the house then and it seemed like they took forever to dry.

My brother and I drained the washing machine, washed it out with clean water and wiped it down before we put it back in the old

smokehouse where it was kept. We dumped the wash tubs and washed them out before drying them. They had to be clean for our Saturday night baths. The tubs and the boiler were also stored in the smokehouse.

The smokehouse was still operational but it had not been used to smoke anything for years. It was located close to the well, making it an ideal location for Mom to keep the laundry equipment.

Washday was a lot of work back then when one compares it to how we do it today. But when one compares it to what our Grandmothers had to do, it was easy. They had to do everything by hand. They were still using a hand operated washing machine that was invented in 1797 which they called the scrub board.

Some people still use them today only they are now called wash boards. They rinsed the clothing and wrung the water out of it by hand since the hand operated wringer was not available yet.

They had to heat their water over an open fire. It is understandable why they didn't wash their clothing more often in those days.

However, this was an improvement over the days when they still washed their clothing in the creek. If they didn't have a tub to wash their clothes in, they would put their laundry in a big bag and tie it to something so it couldn't float away downstream and leave it there to soak in the water overnight.

The next day they would remove one item at a time from the bag and rub or slap it on a flat rock. If the clothes were real dirty they would beat them with a hand sized stone to knock the dirt out of the material.

They wrung out the water the best they could and hung them up to dry or draped them over a hedge or bushes.

Sometimes they laid the clothing on the grass to dry. I don't recall ever hearing anyone referring to that time period as the good old days. ❖



*...it would be a mad scramble to get the wash off the line and into the house...*



## Florence Historical Foundation

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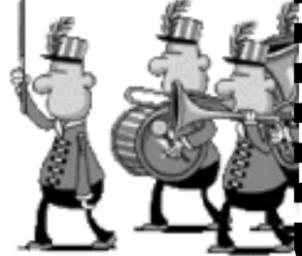
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# Mormon Pioneers' Rich History Who's Your Hero?

by Elder Dean Cleverly

**The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** (whose members are often referred to as Latter-day Saints or Mormons) operates more than a score of historic sites across the country to preserve and interpret the history and westward movement of this unique American religion. Two such sites exist here in the metro area to tell the story of the Latter-day Saints in this area during the mid-1800s.

**The Mormon Trail Center at Historic Winter Quarters** is located at 3215 State Street in the Florence area of Omaha. Visitors can catch glimpses of the 1840s migration to the Great Basin area in the Rocky Mountains, where the Mormon pioneers settled in the Salt Lake Valley. They can learn of the faith, devotion, and sacrifice of these pioneers as they were driven from Illinois, crossed Iowa, and established nearly 100 temporary settlements in the Middle Missouri Valley, including Winter Quarters,

the holidays. The theme of this year's festival will be "An Old-Fashioned Christmas."

**The Kanesville Tabernacle** is located at 222 East Broadway in Council Bluffs. The original tabernacle was built by the Mormon pioneers in just two and a half weeks in December 1847 and is the site where Brigham Young was sustained as the second prophet and president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

A reconstructed tabernacle and a small visitor center interpret this historic occasion as well as the story of the remarkable infantry march of the Mormon Battalion from Council Bluffs to Santa Fe and on across the desert southwest to San Diego, California. The recruitment of the Mormon Battalion by the U.S. Army came at a time when the Latter-day Saints could ill afford to give up 500 of their most able-bodied men (and a few women) to go fight a war with Mexico. Their



Members of the Mormon church recreated the journey their ancestors made a hundred years before. Dressed in pioneer clothing and their cars dressed to look like covered wagons, they started their trek in Nauvoo, Ill., and ended in Salt Lake City. The caravan assembled at the gates of the hallowed ground of the Mormon Cemetery. More than a thousand people met them at Miller Park, where the travelers set up camp while in Omaha. This photograph was taken on July 17, 1947. JOHN SAVAGE/THE WORLD-HERALD. Photo used with permission from OWH.

where the center is located.

In addition to the permanent exhibits, the major attractions at the Mormon Trail Center during 2014 include an art exhibit by Julie Rogers showcasing a collection of paintings from the life of the Savior and of the Mormon pioneers. The show runs from June through the summer. The annual quilt show will run during October. The 29th Annual Gingerbread Festival will run from mid-November through

trek holds the record to this day as the longest infantry march in U.S. military history.

The 10th Annual Gingerbread Festival at the Kanesville Tabernacle will also run from mid-November through the holidays. The theme of the festival in Council Bluffs will be "Christmas Blessings."

Both sites are open year round and are free to the public. ❖

## 2014 Florentine Players Melodrama

by Kelly Adams, Director

That's the theme of our upcoming Melodrama. This year I have been asked to be director of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first melodrama done by the Florentine Players. To call this an honor would be an understatement. The year of history that is associated with this is really astounding. To encompass that history we had our work cut out for us in putting this show together. And I believe we have done just that.

You will enjoy seeing a few fresh faces, a few old ... I mean *experienced* ... actors from the Florence stage and, simply, a whole lot of fun. The original play performed was **Where is My Wandering Girl Tonight?** We have adapted it a little while staying true to the original story. You might even see someone from the original show!

A little bit about the show ... it's got the usual suspects: hero, villain, heroine, villainess, and of course a bunch of sidekicks -- "unique characters" and characters from the past giving advice to the new villain, hero, and heroine. As far as the plot and what happens ... well, come to the show.

We also will have a slideshow before the performance to commemorate this special event with photos of many past shows and actors. And there will be a special treat as a couple of descendants of a couple of Florence legends sing a special number dedicated to them and all the past players who have graced our stage.

Make plans to see it. Call in your reservation. Tell your friends. Get a group and be part of a historic event in historic Florence! I promise you will not be disappointed. Unless I happen to be on stage... then no promises.

## Where is My Wandering Girl Tonight?

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# The Rock Bottom Saloon

by Vern Hauger

This is a story about the robbery of the Rock Bottom Saloon that allegedly occurred shortly after one o'clock in the afternoon on April 14, 1862, in the town of Florence, Nebraska.

A lone rider on a dapple gray horse rode into town. He was wearing a dark colored wide-brimmed hat and a long, bulky, dirty brown duster. He wore two six-shooters on the outside of his duster.

He dismounted in front of the Rock Bottom Saloon on Main Street. After tying his horse to the hitching rail he looked up and down the street both ways before entering the saloon. The owner of the mercantile store across the street from the saloon watched the man get off his horse and go into the saloon. He didn't like what he saw. Something just didn't look right to him so he told his son, who happened to be in the

The stranger stood by the stove until he was warm before he continued over to the bar and drank his whiskey. The bar owner asked if he wanted another one. He said, "No, I want all of your money now."

The bar owner stepped back in disbelief as the robber shoved a revolver into his face. "Give me your money now or I'll blow your head off!" The owner gave him the money sack.

Just then the customer at the end of the bar started to stand up and the robber fired a round in his direction. He told the man to lie down on the floor if he didn't want to get hurt. The man did as he was told. The robber then told the owner to get down on the floor.

When the owner got on the floor, the robber ran out of the saloon, a gun in one hand and the sack of money in the other.

He untied his horse, put his left foot in the stirrup, grabbed the saddle horn and swung himself up on his horse.

The town constable, the mayor, and an off duty deputy sheriff were across the street from the saloon in the mercantile store talking to the owner when they heard a gunshot come from inside the saloon. They ran to the front of the store just in time to see the robber run out of the saloon with a gun in one hand and the money sack in the other.

When he mounted his horse, his back was to them. They came out of the store with their guns drawn. They opened fire, shooting at the robber, each getting off six rounds. The robber seemed to rise up, then fall backwards, rolling off the horse as one of his boots caught in the stirrup.

The horse panicked and ran north on Main Street, dragging the bandit with it. The horse finally stopped north of town after the man's foot broke loose from the stirrup.

The scoundrel had been shot thirteen times in the head and back. The authorities never learned who he was. They listed



store at that time, to go down to City Hall and tell the town constable about the stranger they just saw go into the saloon. Only a gun slinger or outlaw would wear his guns strapped on the outside of his drover coat the way this man did.

Inside the saloon, the owner was busy doing the books and getting ready to make his bank deposit. There was one customer sitting at the far end of the bar drinking a beer.

The stranger entered the saloon and warmed himself by the pot-bellied stove. He ordered a whiskey. The bar owner poured the whiskey and set it on the bar.

him as John Doe and buried him in an unmarked grave west of town.

Since there are no records of the robbery, the story may be fiction.

However, the story could be true. One may never know for sure if the story is fact or fiction. ❖



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Sincerest Gratitude from *Mikki Barna* and *Dick Brown*  
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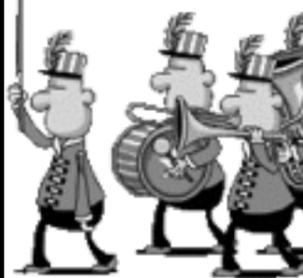
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