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# Historical Society

## Pottawattamie County

*Member Journal*

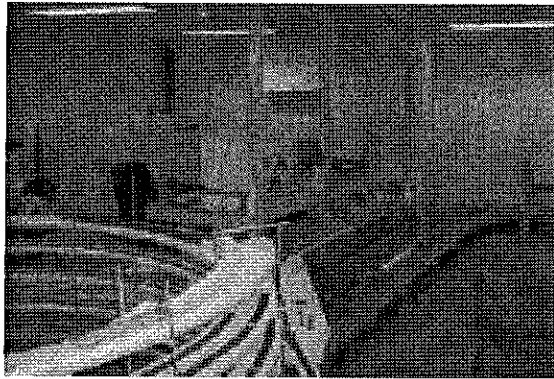
May/June 2011

### *GOSOME Hosts Monthly "Members Only" Event*

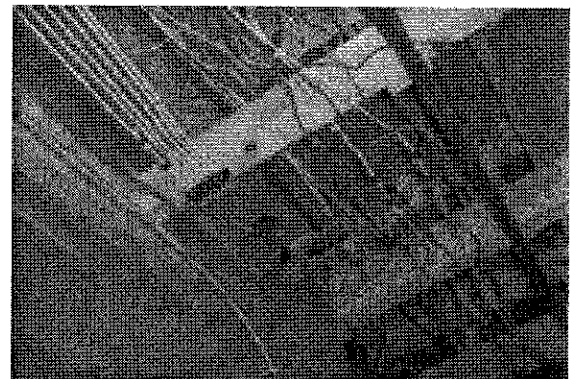
Watching a model railroad operate is fun, but there's a great deal of complexity involved in train movements and a lot of the technological wizardry needed to make it happen. HSPC members have a chance to get behind the scenes and learn some of those tricks at the Greater Omaha Society of Model Engineers Member's Nights.

RailsWest Museum Coordinator Carla Boraigla has been working with GOSOME to establish enhanced benefits for HSPC members. The behind-the-scenes event will be held the third Thursday of each month until further notice. Visitors can drop by anytime between 7:30 and 9:00 p.m. Members of the model railroad club will be on hand to provide a behind-the-scenes tour and explain what goes into designing a layout; weather permitting the Society's outdoor railcar display will be open as well.

The RailsWest Museum is located in the Rock Island depot at the corner of South Main Street and Sixteenth Avenue in Council Bluffs. There is no charge, but admission requires Historical Society of Pottawattamie County membership.



*(Left) Behind-the-scenes staging area for model trains is on the second floor of the depot.*



*(Right) Some of the extensive wiring needed to make the layout functional.*

### *Hitchcock Marks Twenty Years of Preserving Prairie and Loess Hills*

Twenty years ago the future of the loess hills and prairies that now make up Hitchcock Nature Center were anything but secure. Hikers today can still see cuts made by the bulldozers in a plan to tear down the trees and turn the area into a landfill.

As a part of the Society's spring lecture series Chad Graeve, Conservationist at Hitchcock, will describe the challenges, from the citizen's group the DumpBusters through the expansions that have brought the nature center to 1,248 acres today. The presentation will be held at the Western Historic Trails center auditorium, 3434 Richard Downing Avenue in Council Bluffs Sunday, May 15, at 2 p.m. Admission is free and Historical Society members are encouraged to bring guests.

*The Historical Society of Pottawattamie County thanks our corporate members:*

**Red Giant Oil Company**  
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**Council Bluffs Chamber of Commerce**

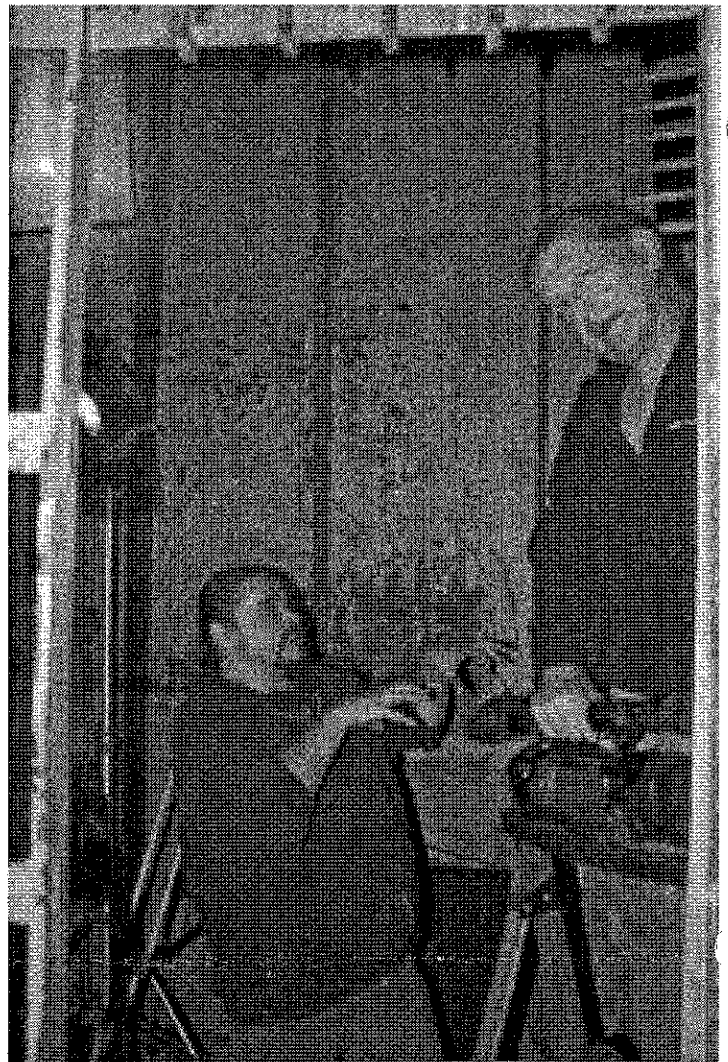
# "Squirrel Cage" Jail Plays Host to Music Video

Having been around 126 years it's tempting to think the "Squirrel Cage" jail in Council Bluffs had pretty well witnessed just about everything. But maybe not-- at least until last month.

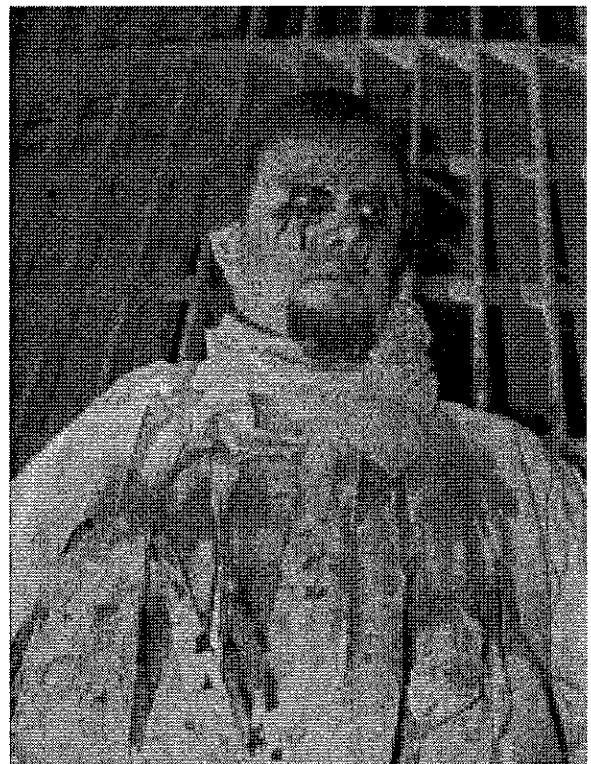
The Historical Society was approached by a rock band from Grand Island, Nebraska, for permission to use the former Pottawattamie County jail as a location to record a rock music video. HSPC president Deb Hestness met with the production company and assessed their plan for protection of the historic structure and artifacts. All video shooting was to be done overnight so as not to disrupt the daily museum schedule. The board granted its approval and Ms. Hestness stayed with the group during their entire time in the facility.

The project was staged by Independent Gorilla Productions of Omaha and features Grand Island artist Bruce Warlock with a song entitled "Ode to Bast." The video includes a scene in which Bruce Warlock is chased by an Egyptian Cat Goddess in the jail. The finished music video will be released soon; check the Society's website for the latest updates.

HSPC President Hestness says she was extremely pleased with the care the production crew and talent took of the Society's property. While observing the project she was surprised to be invited to take a small role in the production herself. She plays a nurse who helps a character in the video "that ate some bad jail chow."



*HSPC president Deb Hestness wound up doing more than staying up all night to safeguard the Society's property when the producers invited her to take a part in front of the camera.*



# Indian Creek in History...

Indian Creek, the paternal ancestor of Broadway, was not always known by that name to the people of Council Bluffs.

With that aptitude of expression and fidelity to nature that is a national American trait the early pioneers gave it another name. According to the *Council Bluffs Bugle* of Friday, June 9, 1854, "between 50,000 and 75,000 emigrants have passed down Broadway and camped along the creek within the last eleven months." The stream was only referred to in print and in polite society as "The Creek" but in the rough, truthful vernacular of the street it was called "the Lousery" without a blush or a challenge to the correctness of the appellation.

The washing of the garments of more than 50,000 emigrants in the stream in one season undoubtedly gave ample foundation for the selection of the name. The time when the name ceased to be deserved and was changed to the present is not known, but must not have been until a new generation had arisen who had never seen the discoveries the emigrants had made on washdays along the creek bank.

Yet, the name of Indian Creek appears in the earliest literature of the town. Odd as it may now seem, it was the name applied to the larger stream now known as Mosquito Creek. The *Bugle* of June, 1854, is ample authority for the statement, for it contains numerous references to Indian Creek, a beautiful stream flowing nearly 100 miles through western Iowa," and in a lengthy advertisement luring settlers to "The Beautiful Village of Iranistan, situated forty-five miles east of Council Bluffs City, on either side of Indian Creek," the stream is described as furnishing water power "as ample as near Council Bluffs City." But the classic name for the Mosquito must have perished with the "Beautiful village of Iranistan," and it earned its present name in the same way as did the little stream in town. With tens of thousands of emigrants following its course for miles, seeing no Indians but attacked by millions of mosquitos, no other name than "The Mosquito" could survive. Changed civilization has not changed the name-creating conditions, and the mosquitos will continue to perpetuate their ancestral fame in maintaining the justness of the name.



(Above) Indian Creek downtown prior to the concrete channel.

("Indian Creek in History" taken from May 23, 1909 *Nonpareil*; contributed by Darlene Vergamini.)



Celebrate our region's rich railroad heritage and spend July 16 and 17 at the five best railroad-themed attractions that Council Bluffs and Omaha have to offer. The theme this year is "Railroaders: Then and Now." Influential railroaders from the Civil War to modern times will be featured at five museums: The RailsWest Museum, Historic General Dodge House, and Union Pacific Railroad Museum in Council Bluffs and the Durham Museum and Lauritzen Gardens in Omaha.

Admission is \$15 per family and allows admittance at all five museums for the weekend. The family ticket includes admission for two adults; a \$5 pass is also available for an additional adult with purchase of a family pass. Museums will be open from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. both days. Visitors can park their cars at any of the five locations; transportation will then be provided between the venues. The admission fee for the event can be paid at any of the five sites. In addition to their normal exhibits the attractions will each feature special programs or displays. Railroad Days is an annual event sponsored by the Union Pacific Railroad.

## Feedback and Questions From Our Readers...

Nancy Pope, curator and Historian at the Smithsonian Institution's National Postal Museum writes, "We have an item in our collection, a token given to a traveling railway mail dog in the 1890's that is marked "Ogden House / 20 / Council Bluffs" – it appears to be a room key tag from the Ogden House. Do you have any basic information about the second Ogden House, the one that would have been standing in the 1890's? I'm just looking for items such as the name of the hotel owner or proprietor, if the building is still standing, or when it closed, etc. Thank you."

The Ogden House at 173 West Broadway was built in 1869 and named after William Ogden, Chicago's first Mayor and the first president of the Union Pacific. Ground breaking was in May, just two days after the driving of the golden spike in Utah. The original Ogden House burned in 1874 and was rebuilt two years later.

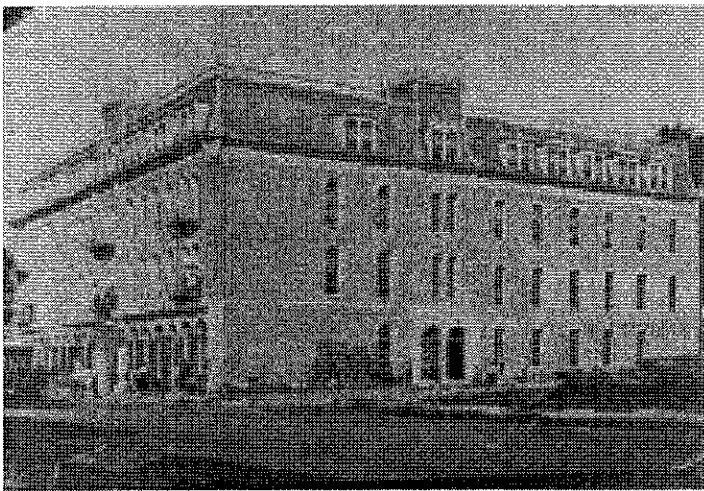
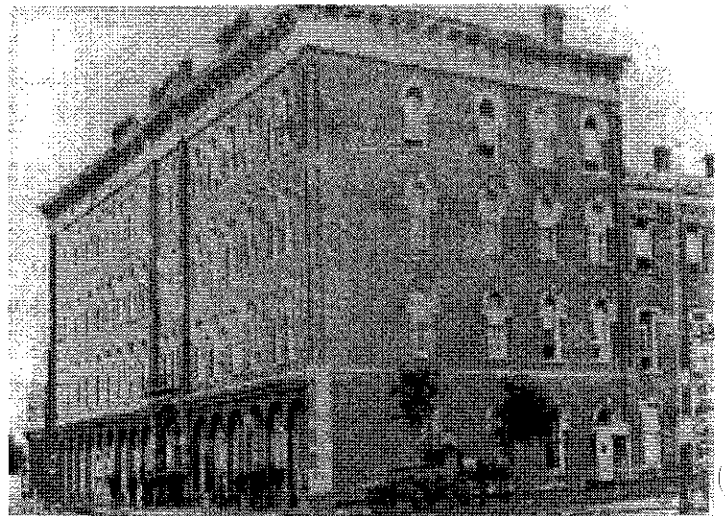
The rebuilt hotel and the original actually look very similar. The tip off is after the hotel was rebuilt the fourth floor was only over the front half of the building, not the entire building, as was originally the case. News articles from the time depict the hotel as a rather elegant place.

Over the years the hotel evolved into renting to longer term residents, thus becoming more of an apartment house.

In 1975 the Ogden lost its hotel license because of plumbing problems, but apartment residents and the businesses on the ground floor were allowed to remain. A short

time later concerns over fire safety caused the city to order it closed entirely. It sat vacant for a couple of years, as late as 1979 efforts were being made to attract investors to bring it up to code and turn it into luxury apartments, shops, or restaurants. Unfortunately there were no takers, so it was demolished in 1980.

A reader asks, "How many operators did it take to run a streetcar?" We put this question to some of our members who actually had experience riding them and learned the answer is "it depends." Small feeder lines typically had just one staff person, a motorman, who collected fares as well as operated the vehicle. Busier routes, such as the Omaha to Council Bluffs line, had a conductor as well as a motorman. We put a couple of pictures of streetcars going about their business on the thoroughfares of Council Bluffs in our "As it Was" feature on page 6. We also found a 1938 photo of streetcar conductor Buz Gano (below) in the archives. The last streetcar in Council Bluffs ran September 25, 1948.



*The fourth floor is the key in determining if an Ogden House photo is from before the fire of 1874 or after. The pre-fire picture is on the left.*

## Railroad Slang Terms

- Black diamonds- company coal
- Blackie, Hoghead, Hogger,  
Pig Mauler, or Pig Jockey- locomotive engineer
- Blazer- a journal box packing on fire
- Blockhead- brakeman
- Boomer- someone who worked for many railroads
- Brain plate- a trainman's hat badge
- Bullhead, Skipper, Captain, Brains- conductor
- Chase the red- Go back from a stopped train to protect it
- Clean the clock- emergency air application
- Clean the slate- release the air
- Glow worm- diesel streamliner
- Dancing the carpet- explaining to the boss
- Deadheading- Getting a ride and not working; also working without a union card
- Frog- X-shaped track where one line crosses another
- Gandy dancers- track repair gangs or track workers
- Guns- track torpedoes
- High ball- signal to proceed the track is clear
- Hot box- overheated journal bearing
- In the hole- train on a siding

*(From "Trains Across America" by Rudolph Daniels)*

*Don't Miss Out!*

*If your Historical Society membership has expired this is your last issue of the "Member Journal"! You will receive a letter if your membership has expired.*

## Need some history now? Here's what's happening...

**National Train Day-** RailsWest Museum, Saturday May 7, 10-4.

**Chipper's Spring Adventure-** Saturday May 7, 10-3; Free or reduced price admission at all historic Council Bluffs attractions.

**RailsWest Museum-** Open 10-4 Tuesday through Saturday and 1-4 Sundays.

**"Squirrel Cage" Jail Museum-** Open 10-4 Tuesday through Saturday and 1-4 Sundays.

**Historic General Dodge House-** Open 10-5 Tuesday through Saturdays, 1-5 Sundays. New exhibit: "In Memory Of... The Art of Mourning."

**Union Pacific Museum-** Open 10-4 Tuesdays through Saturdays

**Heirloom Plant Sale-** Saturday, May 14, 8:00 a.m. to noon at the Historic General Dodge House.

**The Farmall-Land USA Museum (Avoca)-** Open April 11 through Oct 11, 2009. Museum hours are Tuesday-Saturday 10 am to 5 p.m., Sunday Noon-5 p.m.

**Western Historic Trails Center-** Open daily 9-5

**Nishna Heritage Museum (Oakland)-** Open 9-4 Monday through Saturdays, 1-4 Sundays

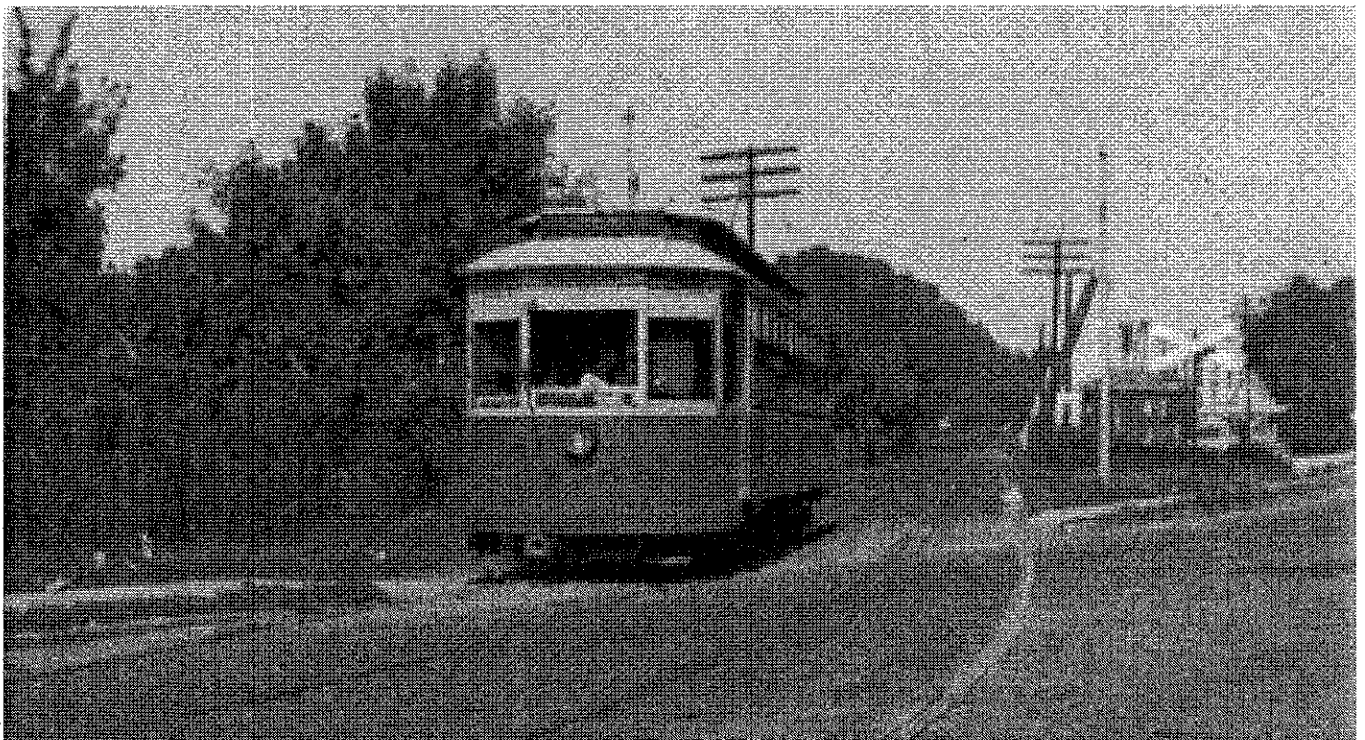
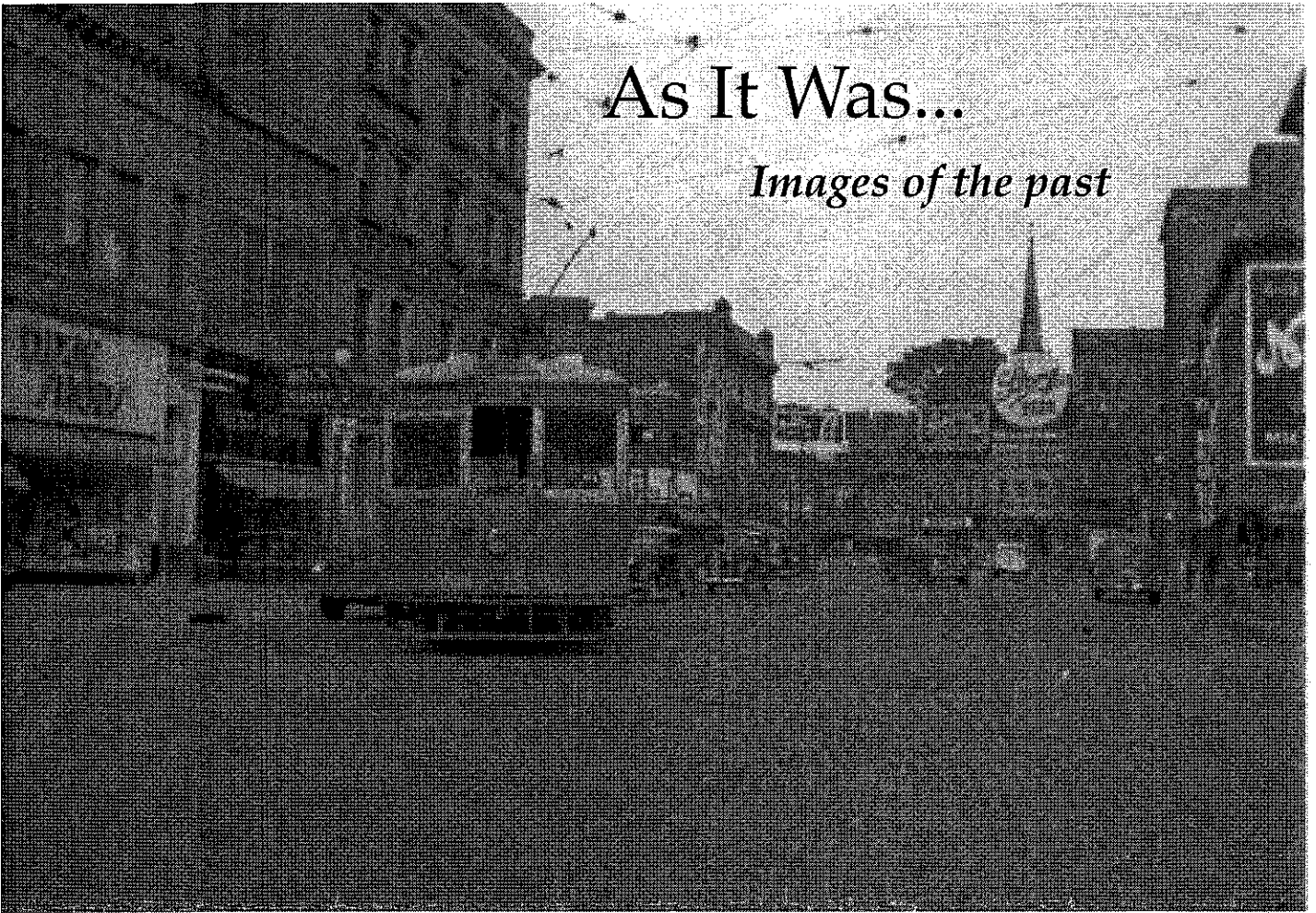
**Preservation of the Prairies and Loess Hills** by Chad Graeve, May 15, 2 p.m. at Western Historic Trails Center auditorium.

**Sweet Vale of Avoca Heritage Museum (Avoca)-** Open 1-4 daily (after Memorial Day)

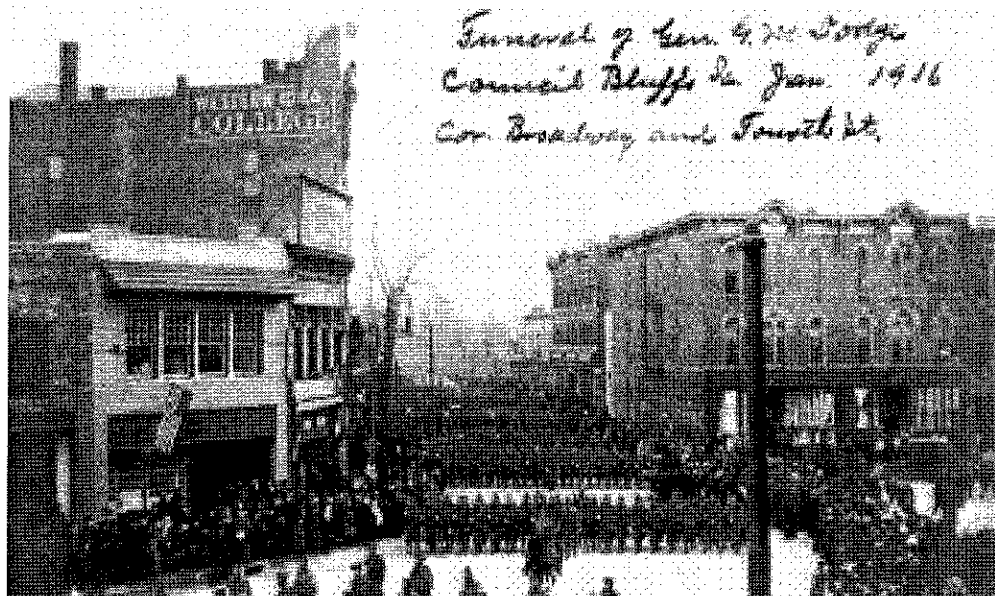
**Memorial Day Celebration for GM Dodge-** Special event at the Dodge Family mausoleum in Walnut Hill Cemetery in honor of 95th anniversary of his death, May 28 from 10:00 a.m. - noon.

# As It Was...

*Images of the past*



**(Right)** The funeral of Civil War general and architect of the Union Pacific Railroad Grenville M. Dodge filled the streets at Fourth and West Broadway in this photo from January, 1916.



*Funeral of Gen. G. M. Dodge  
Council Bluffs Ia. Jan. 1916  
Cor. Broadway and Fourth St.*

**(Left)** Streetcars go about their business in these late 1940's photos. Note the Playland Park roller coaster in the lower photo.



**(Above)** The Hughes Block at 201 West Broadway became Danish Hall in 1900 and the new home for the Danish Brotherhood, Danebo, and Danish Social Society and associated auxiliaries. At the time there were almost 5,000 Danish immigrants and their descendents in town. The photograph also shows "Suzibelle" which inspired a long-running court battle between city officials and Lyle's Discount Tires until 1991 when Judge Heath decided that she did not violate any city ordinance but was "more or less a work of art."

**(Right)** The spire of St. Peters Church provides a good landmark for placing the location of Richman Gordman Volume Shoe Center at 15 South 4th Street in this early 1970's photograph.



**Historical Society of  
Pottawattamie County**

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712-323-2509

**Inside...**

*Elvis wasn't the only one to go to a party in the county jail. There was some serious jailhouse rocking right here in Council Bluffs. Read more about it on page 2.*



*Was your uncle a blockhead? In a railroad town like Council Bluffs you might very well have relatives that were just that. Learn some lingo on page 5.*

*If folks wandered along Indian Creek for miles and never saw a single Indian but saw plenty of mosquitoes would they change the name of the creek? And if they did that would leave the "Indian" name available to give to another creek whose common name wasn't mentionable in police society. That just might work. See page 3.*