

NEWSLETTER
RICHARDSON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.
1401 CHASE ST. - PO BOX 45
FALLS CITY, NE 68355

Website - <https://www.negenweb.net/RCHS>

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Issue #39

Facebook: Richardson County Historical Society Museum

Fall 2025

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Email: rchs@sentco.net

Greetings from the RCHS Board of Directors -

At the Annual Meeting on August 23 officers were elected as follows: Leon Wilhelm, president, and Austin Duerfeldt, treasurer will continue in their positions. Richard Meinzer as vice-president and Jan Deckinger as secretary, will replace John & Rita Seeba. We thank John and Rita for their many combined years as officers.

The museum buildings were the site of many gatherings and events this past year. We frequently answer requests for area history and genealogy help, and visitors often are seeking information about county family connections.

We participated in the NE State Historical Foundation Wander Nebraska Program.

Thank you to those who served as docents and hosts for events: Terry Stradtman (lead), Jan Deckinger, Jean McNeely, Barb Parrish Sickel, Kathy Perkins, Norma Thompson, Joan Zoeller, Mary Jane Weinert, Mary Beth Gibson.

Improvements to our facilities this year included construction of a sidewalk from the street to the AG II Building, installing an outdoor faucet and updating to LED some of the lighting at the main building. Updates to the three glass-fronted display rooms in Prichard Auditorium are complete. Be sure to look when visiting.

Thank you to Barb for keeping the decorations seasonal and to Mary Beth for maintenance. Thank you to John Seeba for yard maintenance, delivery of large items.

Volunteers are continually needed for two-hour afternoon shifts, so please consider being part of this group, even if as a substitute. It is an opportunity to learn from visitors as they see what we have.

Thank you to all who have contributed through memberships, donations, and memorials. Please continue to help with the upkeep of our buildings and expenses and program offerings. Our Board of Directors continue to use your gifts wisely and apply for grants when possible. If you have not paid your Sept.1, 2025-Sept.1, 2026 dues or wish to make a contribution, please do so. A form is included in this newsletter for your convenience. Questions? Call the museum, leave a message, or contact one of your board members.

At the RCHS Annual Meeting August 23, we were entertained by David Seay of Avoca, NE with his program - "*Train Songs and Tales.*" He performed on a variety of instruments. We received funding from Humanities Nebraska's Speakers Bureau for this. The committee served root beer floats and cookies. Railroad items reflecting the county's history of two railroads were on display from the Museum's collection.



On our grounds the same day we welcomed an antique tractor and engine show organized by Justin DeBusk. Over 30 tractors participated as part of Falls City's Cobblestone Days.



"Lady's Got Back,"
The Evolution of the Victorian Bustle."



One of Rayma's props was this beautiful pink and cream interior traveling trunk that she obtained from descendants of the McMullen family of Stella.

The Museum hosted a Christmas Tea in December. The guests were entertained by Rayma Volkmer from Wymore, NE, who creates all her program gowns on a treadle sewing machine. The delicious food was prepared and presented by Mary Yoesel and Kristi Copeland. The program was partially funded by a Nebraska Humanities grant. The funding also helped us purchase a 65"- Smart TV and rolling stand. The TV has been used for several presentations by our society and groups that meet here. **There will again be a Christmas Tea December 6, 2025.**

A Few Acquisitions This Year

- Sixty scrapbooks of Community Hospital history compiled by Lee Ferguson
- Weaver family documents and pictures
- Aerial photos of Rulo Bridge and a hand pump used to pump air to men working underwater on Rulo bridge
- About 40 Falls City Sacred Heart and many other county HS Yearbooks and other county history books
- Nebr. & Iowa State Swine Show ribbons won by W. R. Holt 1904.'05,'06,'08 sewn into banners
- 1848 Watts hymn and psalm book belonging to Susanna Cline Logan (1828-1879), ancestor Steve Holland, RCHS charter member/past president. Marvin Holland WWII Army RR in Algiers documents

County 1925 High School Graduates

Falls City	Sacred Heart	Salem	
Bode, Marietta Bowers, Fern Leola Brown, Helen Irene Bunch, Daris J. Camblin, Marian M. Cook, Cathrena E. Cranston, Ocie Bell Ernst, John R. Faidley, Clifford V. Fergus, Claude L. Fritz, Gertrude F. Gwinn, Frank W. Halbert, Minnie M. Harmon, David Sinclair Harris, Maude Genievieve Hilgenfeld, Clarence F. Hoppe, Milo H. Hoppe, Pierce L. Hughes, Alma M. Keller, Frederick Woodson Kirk, Elouise Koehler, John William Koepke, Lena A. Margrave, William H. Martin, Zelma E. Merritt, George H. Miles, Joseph H	Moeser, Barry R. Morgan, Mary Helen Morris, Gladys Adeline Mulligan, Neal G. Parrack, Ermel Pointer, Maude Preusse, Frances H. Reed, Fay Ryan, Frances Eulalia Sauer, Louisa Saylor, Florence Irene Schneider, Melvin L. Sharpe, Doris A. Steadman, William Allen Sympson, Kathryn Taylor, Fern E. Thomas, Avice Lodema Tubach, Martha A. Tubach, William S. Tucker, Gladys Fern Uhlig, Merle C. Uhlig, Philena G. Vogt, Madeliene Weaver, Martha C. Woods, Faye Yoesel, Laura E.	Babb, Mable Babb, Margaret Cover, Elizabeth Herold, Irma Pendegast, James Putnam, William Timothy, Raymond Werner, Martin Whalen, Elizabeth <div align="center" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Humboldt</div> Arnold, Dale Arnold, Lenora Beck, William Beutler, Florence Beutler, Leonard Bruun, Lewis Bullis, Mildred Chandler, Loretta Chandler, William Frey, Verna Green, Elizabeth Kostecka, Julia Lydick, Albert McCoy, Hazel Mitchell, Pearle Montgomery, Worthy Moore, Marian Parli, Lydia Reid, Glenn Rhodes, Glenn Rist, Lawrence Sanfort, Lola Schuetz, Gertrude Seely, Charles Shaffer, Lyle Stalder, Verda Stephan, Hermina Sutorius, Florence Vrtiska, Rudolph, Jr. Wanrow, Bernice Watzek, Bryan Webster, Harry Wilson, Clarence <div align="center" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Honey Creek</div> Broady, Doris Lee, Rachel Mendenhall, Merle Mendenhall, Theda Morris, Paul Smith, Opal Wittwer, Nadine Wittwer, Thorvald	Boyd, Charles Browne, Anna Heskett, Daisy Huston, Harry Inks, Madge Inks, Margaret Johnson, Harold Kelly, Irene Martin, Glenn Mason, Mildred Mullins, Alfred Pearson, Dora Schmitt, Mae Schulenberg, Alice Shildneck, Cleo Shildneck, John Wickham, Clarence Woods, Alida <div align="center" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Shubert</div> Boatman, Delbert Coop, Edna Evans, Edith Harris, Merna King, Carmen King, Wilda Lambert, Lucile Shook, Eleanor Shubert, Iva Vice, Edith Watton, Ralph Wilson, Goldie Wright, Noel Wright, Vera <div align="center" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Dawson</div> Alexander, Lenore Clancy, Cecil J. Dappen, Theodore Dougherty, Ethel Georgi, Henry McGuire, William Muster, Dorothy O'Grady, Margaret Ryan, Catherine Smith, Sibyl Underkoffler, Esther Whitney, Neoma Wuster, Fred
Verdon	Stella		
Bauer, Hazel Elam, Frances Fritz, Rosa Harden, Ena Heineman, Keith Johnson, Mildred Jones, Violet Nedrow, Theodore Otto, Hazel Swisegood, Isabelle Walker, Dale White, Cora	Allemand, Genevieve Burns, Hazel Ruth Doss, Edith Gergens, Glen E.F. Gilbert, Fred Lyle, Jr. Hall, Freda Leone Hicks, Clara Belle Hoppe, Catherine Joy Keyser, Clarence Vernon McMullen, Joseph Rankin Shellenbarger, Blanche Shellenbargr, Vivian Tynan, Catherine Carmelita Winfrey, Lawrence Harper Winfrey, Melma Mae Young, Lydia Thelma Young, Neola C.		
Bratton Union	Rulo		
Clark, Nora Frerichs, Laura Holman, John Charles Keister, Don Maxcy, James W. Reagan, Allene Standeford, Guy Whitfield, Vern	None		

Annie M. Reavis Gist
First Lady of the Richardson County Historical Society's Home

The central building and home of the Richardson County Historical Society at 1401 Chase Street in Falls City was a house first occupied by the Thomas J. and Annie M. Reavis Gist family. The house was most likely built in 1888. Judge Isham Reavis and Anna M. Dorrington Reavis had owned the "Reavis Block," where the house sits, since 1865. Annie was the eldest of five children born to the Reavises. The house and its lots were given to Annie and her husband by her parents on the event of their wedding on September 5, 1888. The house was thereafter known as "The T. J. Gist House."



Annie Minnie Reavis (Gist) was born in Falls City on April 7, 1865, two days before Lee surrendered to Grant, and seven days before the assassination of President Lincoln. The headboard and footboard of the bed that she was born in is on display on the second floor of the RCHS Museum. Several of her illustrious father's belongings, including his desk, are also on display on the first floor of the museum, along with a dress belonging to her mother.

Annie's father Isham was an Illinois and Nebraska lawyer, early Nebraska state senator, Nebraska district judge, and Arizona territorial supreme court judge. Born near Beardstown, Il, Isham studied law in Illinois and later moved to Falls City in 1858, becoming an important figure in the town's early history. He was integral in the establishment of Falls City as a town and county seat, and also in the early statehood of Nebraska. His acquaintance with President Abraham Lincoln is a well-known connection.

Annie's mother Anna (also known as Annie), was the daughter of David and Ann Dorrington, the "Father and Mother of Falls City." Anna Dorrington met her husband Isham in Falls City shortly after she moved there from attending Elmira College in New York, to be with her family. Anna and Isham married in 1864.

Annie was schooled in Yuma, AZ and Falls City before attending the College for Women at Jacksonville, Ill, graduating with highest honors in the "classical course." She was a member of Pi Beta Phi sorority when it was known as the I.C. Sisterhood, before it became a Greek letter sorority. She also studied in the musical conservatory connected to that college. For a time, Annie was music instructor at Methodist College at York, NE, before it became Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln.

Annie's husband, Thomas Jefferson, "T. J." Gist, was the son of Silas P. and Margaret Black Gist. The Gists were early county residents who migrated from Kentucky and settled in Salem. Silas was a merchant in Salem, and helped organize three of the first banks in Richardson County, in Humboldt, Salem, and Falls City. T. J. worked with his father in the mercantile business, helped organize the Falls City State Bank, and then was the manager of the

Leo-Greenwald Vinegar Co. before once again entering into the banking business. T.J. served on the city council and the local school board. He also served as president of the Falls City Chamber of Commerce.

The couple raised four children, Isham Reavis Gist, Silas Frank Gist, Annie Margaret Gist (Morehead), and Elisebeth Webster Gist (Burton). In addition to being an active mother to four children, Annie was involved in just about everything she could take on in the community and was one of the most prominent club women in Nebraska. She was a dynamic woman who was possessed with great energy and sense of civic responsibility.

Among her activities, Annie was a prominent member of the Nebraska Federation of Women's Clubs, and served it in many offices, including state president. She was the General Federation's state secretary, served on its state and national committees and was Nebraska's reporter for the General Federation Magazine. She was the first president of the local American Legion Auxiliary, founder of the Reavis-Ashley chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, charter member of Sorosis, and was a member of the Eastern Star, Falls City Women's Club, the Shakespeare Club, the library board, the Richardson County Historical Society, and was active in the Red Cross. She was listed in *Women's Who's Who of America* (vol 1), as well as appearing in the *Blue Book of Nebraska Women*. She was a Gold Star Mother, having lost her son Isham Reavis Gist while he was serving in World War I, due to the Spanish Flu epidemic.



Annie was a prolific writer, writing and reporting for *American Motherhood* and other periodicals. In later years, Annie was a contributor to the *Falls City Journal*, writing articles about pioneer days in Richardson County.

According to *Music of the Pioneer Days in Nebraska*, the first piano in Falls City was in 1860, and was owned by her mother. The first pipe organ in town was installed in 1893 in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Annie was the organist in that church for over thirty years.

A gifted musician, Annie performed on piano at various events and often accompanied the local vocal performances of her brothers, David, Frank, and Burt. She often hosted gatherings and youth dances in her home. The house was always lively and accommodating to family and guests. **Submitted by David Kentopp, Great Grandson of Annie**

A Few Other Recent Acquisitions



Large clock from Prichard Auditorium - We want to find picture of it on the front wall!



One of two hand-drawn carts of Shubert fire fighting equipment



12-in. manual gauge for measuring number of 5-gal. cans used to fill farm tanks by Morris Skelly at Stella

May Day Art at the Museum



On May Day, May 1st, the museum invited members of the "City of Art" community to come **See** the extensive works of on display throughout the main building **and Learn** about the artists through a slide show presentation. Several of the artists had been students of Luella Miles Weddel. Mrs. Weddel (1907-2004) was a registered nurse for 25 years, organist for two churches, public school teacher in Maryland and Falls City, talented composer, artist, and writer. She conducted painting classes.



Her husband, C.A. Weddel was a long-time educator and school administrator. He also painted. Their daughter, Bonnie Weddel Caplan, also has been a painter and a well-known professional musician - harp, organ, piano, and percussion.



Also that May Day, we were able to display a beautiful Tom Palmerton bronze, *The Good Shepherd* donated by the family of Paul Weinert. It had been given to Rev. Paul & Donna Weinert by the Brownville and Nemaha Methodist Churches for 25 years of faithful service in 1995. Paul, a long time RCHS supporter, was a HS history teacher, active in state education, in city government and many service organizations, and a farmer.



This is My Story

I am a Civil War era sewing table. I belonged to Linda Seymour Giannini. She married Mariano Giannini in Atchison Co, MO, in 1878. They were the parents of Eva (Mrs. William) Holt. The Holts were charter members of the Richardson County Historical Society when it organized in 1940. When Mariano came to Falls City in 1883 from near Fairfax, MO, he sent for his wife and children to join him. When she came to a flooded river, presumably the Missouri, she could not find a captain to take her across. She found a boat, transferred what would fit, and rowed herself across. After Eva's death her daughter, Nellie Lee Holt Bok and granddaughter Rachel Bok Goldman emptied her house on Lane Street, and took me to Philadelphia. Nellie Lee was overheard muttering, "I can't take it east. I can't take it east." Rachel promised her mother that she would return me to Nebraska. She honored the request last month by sending me to the Museum all the way from Camden, MA.

Other Acquisitions

- Piece of 1901 Carnegie Steel RR Rail and detailed maps of FC and Preston near depots in 1930s
- Beautiful handiwork and craft work by Elma Grace Hanika Cook & Paintings by local artists
- German history, school, and religious books
- Donald Clark police jacket, holster, and picture of him and other officers
- Military uniforms and memorabilia

The Fruit Salad of Nebraska

Not many today are aware that Richardson County once could be regarded as the “fruit salad” of Nebraska. Early settlers of the Arago area were impressed with the numerous trees along the Missouri River and reasoned that fruit trees would also do well. Gust. Duerfeldt, a leader of the Arago settlement, as a latter-day Johnny Appleseed, about 1860 sent East for apple and other fruit trees. For the next decade small orchards were planted along the many streams throughout the county.

After 1870 small commercial orchards developed with men like Henry W. Shubert and Henry C. Smith taking the lead. About 1880 these local orchards, consisting of apples, pears, peaches, plums, apricots, and later cherries, strawberries, grapes, and raspberries could supply local needs. Later, even dew berries and currants were cultivated. These products were soon joined by tomatoes, pumpkins, squashes, and string beans.

With the advent of the railroads, it was possible to supply markets further away so orchards increased in size and number throughout the county. County apples were said to rival those of Washington state and the Northwest.

With the number of county orchards increasing, the necessity of supporting facilities also grew. Such front-end businesses as small nurseries to supply new trees, pruners, maintenance and pest control, as well as providing ladders for fruit pickers were established. Some examples were Jacob & C. Forney Co.’s Fairview Nurseries north of Falls City (1871), James Wickham’s Nemaha Valley Nursery at Salem (1872), S. G. Mower Nursery of Falls City (1885), L. Mohler & Bros. pruning of Falls City (1897), and Paul Nemechek Nurseries near Humboldt (1901). Wright Lumber Co. of Falls City added fruit ladders to its inventory (1911).

While fruits such as apples could be loaded and shipped via railroad, some produce had to undergo more preparation and preservation before shipment, so canning plants had to be established. The Falls City Canning Factory was established in 1886 by Jacob Waltemeyer near the depots to handle fruits and vegetables such as tomatoes, pumpkins, and squash. This business went through several managers and eventually succumbed to financial mismanagement and went out of business about 1904. At this time a canning plant was established at Barada by John H. Morehead using some of the Falls City equipment. This Barada facility was in business canning primarily tomatoes until 1913. About 1912-13 there was talk of Joseph Lang establishing a canning factory at Shubert, but nothing ever came of it. It was reported in 1914 that there were no longer any canning facilities in the county.

Besides canning plants, there were numerous apple cider plants scattered around the county, many run by individuals, but some, like those at Shubert and Falls City, were large operations. Others were the J. H. Smith & Son plant at Humboldt (1912) and the Salem Cider Mill (1913).

The Alex Leo Vinegar Factory opened at Falls City in 1906 producing apple-cider vinegar. It served as a depot for the culls and windfalls of the local orchards. The facility at Shubert was the county’s major apple center consisting of a packing house, cider mill, and vinegar plant as well as a cooperage. These plants served a wide area and took in fruit from the many large orchards.

Some of the major county orchards were those of Shubert Bros., the largest, (consisting of 16,000 trees), the Forest Hill Fruit Farm run by Henry C. Smith and Charles Wileman east of Barada, the Nap De Mers Fruit Farm near Falls City (he also raised bees for pollination), the L. W. Slayton Orchard southeast

of Salem, the Alfred Ahern Orchard near Shubert, the Allen Franklin Fruit Farm near Barada, the Everett Smith Orchard north of Verdon, the Bowen Bros. Orchard near Shubert, and Weaver Bros. and Towle Orchards west of Falls City.

These county orchards, while consisting of primarily of apples, included other fruits to insure grower's profitability as weather would affect some fruits while not harming others. For example, one year might be bad for apples but not so bad for peaches. Growers had to deal with drought, pests, hail, freezes, etc. Some examples from contemporary newspapers:

1910 Peach crop not good at Humboldt, but better at Barada.

1913 Peach crop heavy at Shubert, apples ½ normal.

1925 Good cherry, strawberry crops.

1926 Peach and pear crop small, but good cherry crop.

1928 Peach, apricots, plums, pears lost to freeze, apples and cherries survived.

1933 Apricots, pears, plums suffered, good crops of cherries, berries, and grapes.

Besides weather, orchardists had to deal with pests such as rabbits, mice, and insects. Henry C. Smith, being a "knowledgeable horticulturist," was the first county orchardist to adopt spraying. Others had quickly followed his example.

Despite all the uncertainties of weather and pests, county fruit production was increasing and things looked very promising. That is, until November 11, 1940, when devastation took place. What became known as "the Great Armistice Day Freeze" took out 90% of the county's fruit trees. Orchards were virtually wiped out. The majority of fruit trees died. The question became "what to do with all these dead trees?" A *Falls City Journal* article written seven years later and looking back summed up the attitude. Commercial raisers had to "grub them out and call it a day."

Ads for Suppliers

FRUIT TREES!
Fairview Nurseries,
 SIX MILKS NORTH OF
Falls City, Richardson County, Neb.
Fruit and Ornamental Trees
 WE invite all who wish to set out Orchards, Vineyards and Ornamental Trees to come and examine our trees, now growing in the Nursery. We have on hand a fine lot of the best varieties of two year old Crab Apple. Also a fine lot of Mountain Ash and two year old Apple Trees, from \$5 to \$15 per hundred.
 Also a fine breed of Poland and China hogs
 228-4 **JACOB & C. FORNEY & Co.**

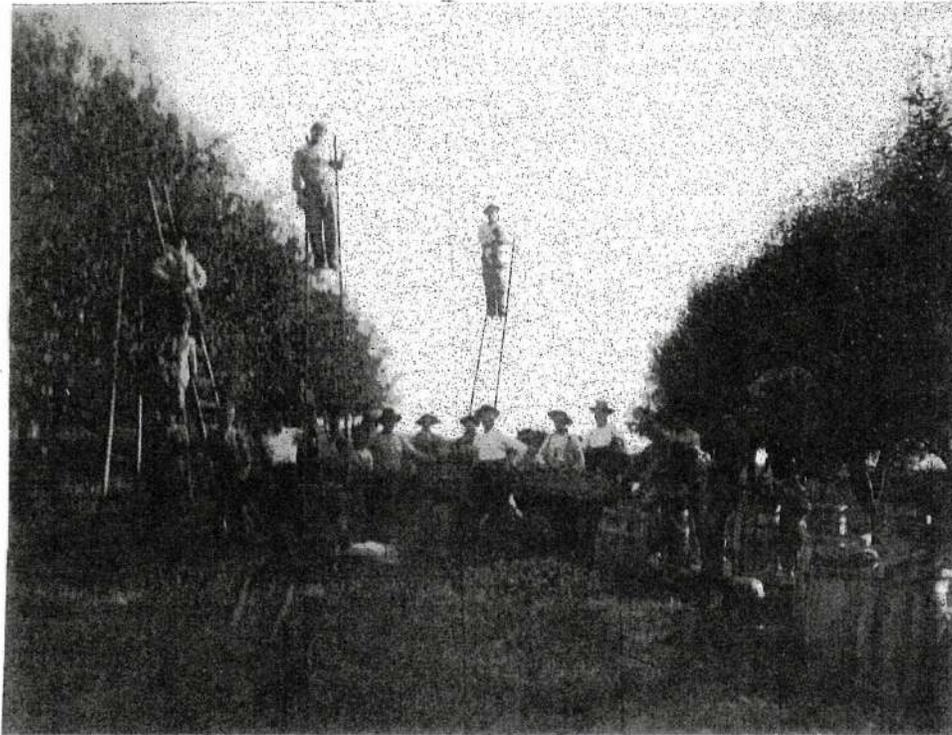
Nemaha Valley Journal
 Falls City, Nov. 21, 1872

A SURE WAY TO GET AN ORCHARD
 We will grow your orchard on contract, giving it regular nursery collection, annual pruning, protection from rabbits, mice and borers. Guarantee a solid stand of living trees at close of contract. Respectfully,
L. MOHLER & BROS.

Semi Weekly Times
 Falls City, Nov. 23, 1897

FRUIT TREES!
 OF ALL KINDS
AT REASONABLE PRICES
HUMBOLT NURSERIES.
 HUMBOLT NEBRASKA.

Dawson News Boy
 Dawson, Apr. 12, 1901
 (Nemechek Nurseries)



Scene in Austin Grant Shubert's 40 acres near Shubert about 1910

He was a "pioneer fruit man of Nebraska."

**We have just received
consignment of
Pointed Fruit
Ladders For
Apple Picking
GIVE US A CALL
WRIGHT
LUMBER
COMPANY**

Falls City Journal Oct. 18, 1911

Peaches & Grapes
NOW READY
 Peaches 75c Bu.
 Grapes \$1.00
 Now Packing Wealthy Apples
 Come to Packing House in Shubert. We Have
 Cheaper Grade for Immediate Use.
Shubert Bros. & Shubert
Orchards Co.
 Nebraska's Largest Fruit Growers

Falls City Journal Aug. 19, 1931

"NEBRASKA'S BEST"

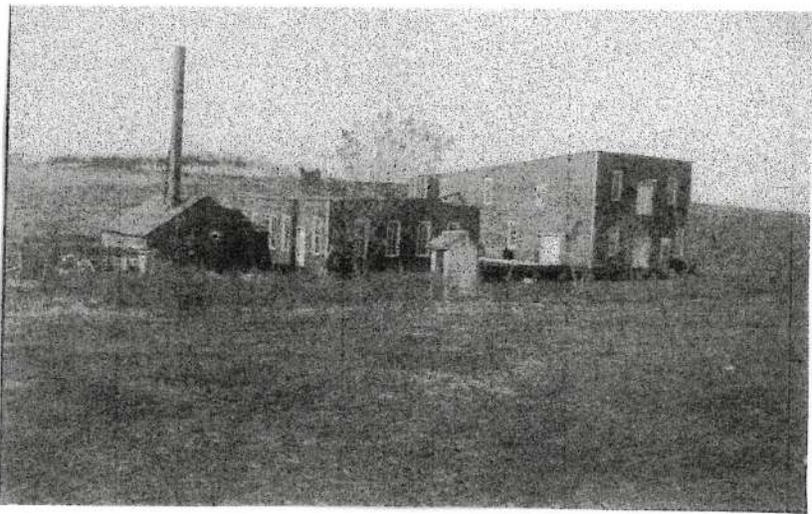
"Shubert Apples"

Grown by
**Shubert Bros. & Shubert
 Orchards Co.**

Employing 150 men—handling 125,000 bush-
 els of apples this season. Visit our packing
 house in Shubert. Complete washing, sizeing
 and packing equipment.

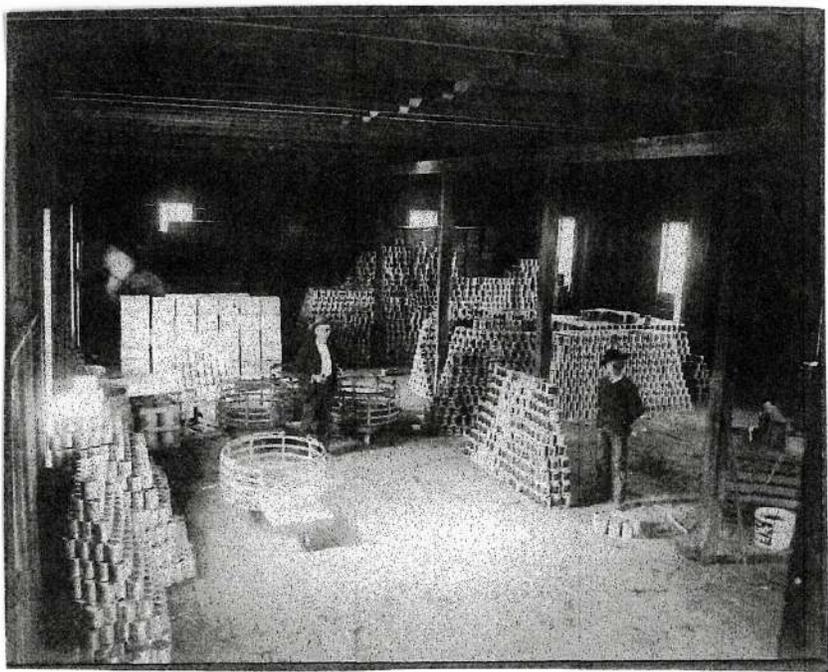
Falls City Journal Oct. 5, 1931

Barada Canning Factory



Located just west of Barada
 1904 - 1913

Interior of Canning Factory
 Ludlow and Walter Morehead
 with finished product.



BULK RATE
U. S. Postage
P.A.I.D.
Permit #39
Falls City, NE 68355

Richardson County Historical Society
P. O. Box 45
Falls City, NE 68355

We welcome volunteers and suggestions for programs. Open Wed., Thurs., Friday 2-4 April – October, but we will gladly arrange a showing at other times. Consider having your group meeting at the museum or arrange a tour.

We invite you to visit our Museum & other museums in the county - Quad County Museum in Humboldt, Penn Colony/Community Museum at Dawson, Collections Museum & Underground Railroad Interpretive Center, John Philip Falter Museum, and the Military Museum in the Courthouse.

This and past newsletters are available in color at:

<http://www.negenweb.net/RCHS>



New sidewalk from street to AG II Building
View from the balcony of the Main Building

Support for mailing this newsletter graciously provided by Falls City Care Center.