



Sweeten your Coffee Break with these Voices and Views from the Valleys of the Nemaha Rivers.

This publication will donate
10% of new advertising revenue
received in December 2025 to
Child Cancer Research.
Ad rates are on page 10.

Merry
Christmas



November 22 was a good day at the Loess Bluffs National Wildlife Refuge. More images on page 17.

CONTENTS

Your “Window With a View” of Small Town and Rural America

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Photos | 1,3,4,5,6,11,15,16,17 |
| “December” | 2 |
| PSC Sports Photos | 3 |
| Brownville’s Cultural Life | 4 |
| “Haunted?” | 5 |
| Peru Community Christmas Notice | 6 |
| Peru Mayor’s Letter to Residents of Peru | 7 |
| “Peru Community Christmas” by Marty Peregoy | 8 |
| “Chatelain Takes Command...” by John Chatelain | 8 |
| DiAnna’s Tuesday Club Book Review | 9 |
| ♥ Valentino’s Coupon for up to Six! | 10 |
| Historic Fiction; <i>Prairie Love, Letters, & Westward</i> | 12 |
| Sheila Tinkham’s “ <i>Absalom Absalom</i> ” | 13 |
| “ <i>Wild Colorado circa 1875</i> ” by Stephen Hassler | 13 |
| Nebraska City Morton-James Public Library Calendar | 14 |
| “December” by Bruce Madsen | 15 |
| Devon Adams’ Poetry & Portraits | 18 |
| Merri’s Diary | 19 |
| “ <i>Window On Fifth Street</i> ” | 19 |

Christmas

IN BROWNVILLE

The Brownville Historical Society
invites you to Celebrate
Christmas in Brownville
Saturday, December 6th

Bake Sale - 2:00 to 4:00
Santa Claus in the Wheel Museum - 4:00 to 5:00
Soup Supper - 5:00 to 7:00

“Your Country Neighbor” is delivered to the following communities in Southeast Nebraska & NW Missouri.
Auburn • Brownville • Cook • Falls City • Johnson • Julian • Nebraska City
Nemaha • Papillion • Peru • Rock Port • Syracuse • Tecumseh • Verdon

Your Country Neighbor

Voices and Views from the Valleys of the Nemaha
Publisher & Photographer, Stephen Hassler

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Peru, Nebraska 68421

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www.yourcountryneighbor.com

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This Month’s Writers & Contributors

Devon Adams 18
John Chatelain 8
Stephen Hassler 13, 19
Merri Johnson 19
DiAnna Loy 9
Bruce Madsen 15
Morton-James Public Library Calendar 14
Katy Novak 7
Marty Peregoy 8
Sheila Tinkham 13

Thank You!

*“Do not go where the path may lead, go instead
where there is no path and leave a trail.”*
Ralph Waldo Emerson

*“People will forget what you said, people will forget
what you did, but people will never forget how you
made them feel.”* Maya Angelou

*“Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very
important that you do it because no one else will.”*
Ghandi

December

by a country neighbor

If December doesn’t rush—it settles in quietly. The fields lie still now, the last traces of harvest covered by frost. Roadsides are lined with weeds bowed, and smoke rises straight from chimneys on calm evenings. The days are short, the light soft and fleeting, as though the sun itself has grown weary from the year’s long work.

Each December seems to hold a mirror to the years that came before. The faces around me have changed; some are gone, others new, yet the season carries the same gentle tug toward gratitude and remembrance. Maybe that’s what December is for — not just celebration, but for taking stock of how far we’ve come and how much of life we’ve managed to hold on to.

Inside, warmth takes on a different meaning. It’s found in the glow of a Christmas tree, and the hum of conversation. Each familiar carol, each old ornament, brings a memory that softens the edges of time. We remember those who once filled our tables and give quiet thanks for those still near.

Finally, the year’s end — not that I’ve been impatient for it to come. Still, December always stirs something familiar in me, a tangle of nostalgia and warmth from family Christmases long past. The tree lights alone can lift the mood, their soft colors flickering through the evenings, the pine scent mingling with memory. As gifts began to gather beneath the branches — a few at first, then one or two added each week — they carried a steady current of joy right through to Christmas morning. Even afterward, the tree’s quiet presence helped soften the edge of winter. Then came the ritual farewell — dragging its dry, spindly frame to the snowbank out back, a few silvery icicles clinging stubbornly to the branches. That sight always marked the end of December’s glow, a gentle reminder that once joy has run its course, there’s room for what comes next.

So I’ll welcome this December for what it is — a soft closing of the year, a pause between what was and what’s next, an ending and a beginning. When the lights come down and the house feels a little too quiet, I’ll take comfort in knowing another cycle will begin soon enough, and with it, new reasons to be grateful.

December holds both an ending and a beginning—the turning of the calendar, the brief pause between what was and what’s still possible. It asks for reflection, but it also offers hope, the kind that flickers like a porch light on a snowy night, reminding us there’s always a way home.

To our readers, friends, and advertisers who have walked through this year with us, thank you. May this season bring you peace, good company, and a touch of wonder. And from my place in these hills between the river and the prairie, to your corner of your valley or town — Merry Christmas, and may the coming year treat you kindly.

Merry
Christmas



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November 8, 2025

A come-from-behind win for PSC over St. Ambrose University 27 - 24.



Women's and Men's basketball seasons are under way at Peru State College.



December 2025

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The Brownville Village Theatre, November 7, 2025

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Canada Geese snoozing on a Muskrat Lodge.

Haunted?
by a wandering neighbor

The Meriwether Lewis Dredge

When the Captain Meriwether Lewis Dredge settled into its final berth at Brownville, Nebraska, it carried with it more than steel plates, diesel lines, and the memory of Missouri River mud. Over the years, visitors and staff have given it something else to haul: a reputation for being one of the most quietly haunted places along the river.

The stories aren’t loud or theatrical. They’re subtle, persistent, and consistent enough that they deserve a closer look.

A Museum with a Murmur

Built in 1931, the Meriwether Lewis worked the river for decades before retiring as a museum. Anyone who’s spent time aboard the vessel will tell you the place has atmosphere: narrow passageways, metal decks that echo too easily, and dark corners shaped by years of hard labor. It doesn’t take much imagination to feel watched. But some reports go beyond atmosphere.

The Piano That Plays Alone

The most frequently repeated account involves an upright piano still housed on board. More than one staff member has claimed to hear faint piano notes after hours—simple, tentative, and gone as quickly as they arrived.

A few visitors swear they’ve heard the same thing on quiet afternoons. No prank, no loose hinge, and no stray vibration has ever explained it. Whether the old dredge simply settles in musical ways, or something unseen has taken a liking to the keys, is up for debate.

Footsteps, Doors, and a “Presence”

Footsteps in empty corridors show up in nearly every retelling. They’re described as deliberate—slow, measured, and sometimes passing directly behind someone before falling silent.

Doors that are locked at closing have been found unlatched the next morning. Lights switched off mysteriously flick back on. More than one museum worker says there’s a sense of being observed, particularly in the upper cabins at dusk.

These aren’t dramatic claims. They’re matter-of-fact, offered by people with no reason to embellish.

An Old-Fashioned Figure on Deck

One of the more striking stories comes from a former visitor who reported seeing a tall man in outdated river attire and a dark coat standing near the stern. The figure was described as calm, silent, and accompanied by a large dog. Moments later—gone. No one has produced a photograph, but the account has become part of the dredge’s folklore.

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Sunday, December 7, 2025

10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Breakfast Buffet available at KJ Whitehorse

3:30-4:00

Kids, meet Santa and get your photo taken in the gazebo south of the bank

4:00-5:00

Kids' Activities in City Hall: cookies and cocoa, crafts, ornament-making, games, and gifts.
Parents are encouraged to stay with younger children.

5:15

Public tree lighting and caroling around the Rob Walker Memorial Christmas Tree
in the lot south of the bank

**PERU COMMUNITY
CHRISTMAS**



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A Letter From Katy Novak, The Mayor of Peru, Nebraska

To My Peru Neighbors,

As I come upon one year from being elected and sworn in as your mayor, I find myself reflecting. Not just on this past year, but on my lifetime of loving this town and the people in it. Reflecting on Nick's and my choice to relocate our family here, and the work that all four of us have tried to do in our corner of the world to make a positive impact.

I'm reflecting on my childhood in this town – I didn't know anything else but Peru for the first 18 years of my life. Life in Peru was carefree for me. I would ride my bicycle into town and never worried, because someone I knew was always close by. If I fell and scraped my knee, or accidentally put my dad's truck into a ditch swerving to avoid a bunny (sorry, Dad!), it wouldn't be long before someone would come by and offer help. I began my professional career washing dishes for Becky at the Cottonwood, and made my greatest tips during the Sunday buffet, where I would see many of the faces that shaped my childhood.

Like so many young adults, I didn't fully appreciate how special this place and the people who choose to build their lives here are. I was here for 18 years and gone for 20. During those 2 decades of college, young adulthood, and beginning my family I lived in a lot of places. Everywhere I went, I entered with the assumption that neighbors helped neighbors, that people asked about how you were because they cared, not to pass judgement. I searched high and low for the kind of community that welcomes newcomers while remaining committed to the legacy and traditions that make it a special place for so many people.

And then, in the summer of 2023, I came back to town for Old Man River Days. I met up with my classmates from our Peru Elementary School days and we had an amazing weekend. But I saw my hometown struggling. Not simply from the flood and COVID-19, which had caused a culture shift in so many places, but I heard about the tension that was building at City Hall. I could hear in people's voices the worry that the town had been irreparably changed.

Something in me changed that weekend. I no longer looked at my town only through my childhood, rose-colored lens, but through the lens of a leader facing a problem. I knew in my heart that it would take work and vision to help Peru get back on her feet, and I knew I wanted to be part of that change. Lucky for me, my small-town husband and kids already know that when I get a crazy idea it's best to just go along with it, and here we are. We are all-in for Peru with our lives, energy and hearts. This love for Peru has guided every single decision I've made as Mayor. It's why I've prioritized transparency, not as a buzzword, but as the foundation for rebuilding trust. It's why I've focused on treating everyone with respect, because I truly believe that every person in our city deserves to be heard and valued.

This approach means asking hard questions, even when it's uncomfortable. This past summer, we faced an unexpected \$10,000 cost to clean our water tower in the middle of a drought. I felt my responsibility as Mayor was to ask: "Is this the necessary path?" I brought that question to the Council, and after a public discussion, we collectively agreed it was the right decision for our town's health. That process of transparency, respect, and fiscal responsibility is an example of delivering on my promises.

There has been public discord lately. It has been a painful reminder of the tensions that called me home two years ago. Regardless of the outcome, as long as I am your Mayor I will continue to fight for the potential that I see in Peru.

But the truth is that serving as Mayor of Peru only has meaning to me if all of us believe in ourselves. I worry that too often, the loudest voices, though not representative of the majority, are the ones that drive good people out of public service. I believe Peru to be a town that values hard work, trusts in transparent processes, and chooses to build each other up rather than tearing each other down.

The work that I've started, and that I believe we can accomplish together, is a testament to that belief. I truly hope that we are able to continue the work. Not for my sake, but for the future of this town and community that we all love.

From my family to yours, we wish you a season of peace and a new year filled with hope.

**With gratitude,
Katy Novak**

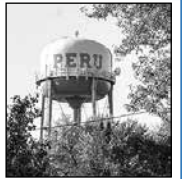
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Peru Community Christmas December 7th

Submitted by Marty Peregoy, Peru

The celebration will start off with the opportunity to enjoy one of Kim's great breakfast buffets Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at K.J. Whitehorse Bar & Grill, 605 5th Street in Peru.

Starting at 3:30 p.m. the Peru Volunteer Fire Department and Santa will be meeting kids and their families at the gazebo south of Western National Bank, 622 5th Street, where Santa will listen to their wish lists. Grace Hulsebus will record the cherubic faces of all the good girls and boys by taking photos, which will be uploaded to the PCIG Facebook page for free download by families.

Josie Coatney and Shirley Robbins of Western National Bank will begin serving hot cocoa, cider, cookies and other treats to kids in the Peru City Hall at 614 5th Street as they finish up with Santa. Kids can put on their thinking caps as they guess the numbers of candy pieces in the holiday jar for a chance for the best guesser to take it home. They will then eat their snack and have a brief independent activity as we wait for everyone to finish up with Santa.

Starting at 4:15, kids will get started on the annual Christmas tree ornament, cross their fingers, and hope to win one of the two giant inflatable ornaments, play a couple of fun games, and then receive a canvas bag for hauling all that loot back home.

Christmas *Continued on page 9 >>>>*

Chatelain Takes Command At The National Park Service

John C. Chatelain, Omaha

Verne E. Chatelain was born at Waco, Nebraska on July 22nd, 1895. The Chatelains moved to join French speaking people around Brock in 1896. In 1898 the family settled in Peru to be close to the college. 1 From kindergarten on, Verne was a product of Peru's educational system. After graduating from college in 1917, he fought in France during WWI. In 1919 he returned to the states and married his college sweetheart, Celia Group of Louisville, Nebraska. Verne had been teaching in the Omaha Public Schools when he was selected to join the Peru State College History Department in 1925. Chatelain earned a master's degree from the University of Chicago and his doctorate from the University of Minnesota.

Verne professed his love for Peru from the beginning. "That country in which I was born reeks with history – western trails, the story of Lewis and Clark and the Missouri River, and the development of the railroads west of the Mississippi River; the Indian story, the Civil War, in relationship to Kansas, the underground railroad into Nebraska . . ." 2

On September 15, 1931, Chatelain arrived in Washington, D.C. as the first Chief Historian of the National Park Service. On October 19th of that year, he traveled to Colonial National Monument at Yorktown, Virginia for the re-enactment of the final battle of the Revolutionary War. The monument was formally received into the National Park Service by the Secretary of Interior, with President Hoover giving the dedication speech. Franklin D. Roosevelt was also in attendance. 3

By early 1932 Verne was focused on the battlefield at Morristown, New Jersey, the site of General Washington's winter headquarters, which had been under the management of a local historical group. "In studying the Morristown thing, I came to discover that Washington had spent more time in Morristown than any other place in the American Revolution, that Valley Forge was just a one winter shot, while Morristown was involved over several winters, and that Morristown strategically, close to New York City, was a natural for us." Dr. Chatelain lobbied for legislation creating the Morristown Historical National Park. "But Morristown was a pioneer effort in many respects, don't you see? I knew that if we got one park going, and located strategically, this was a natural because it was close to New York City and very heavily populated, and if we could get the right kind of things going at Morristown, we would be able to make progress other places." 4

With more money and personnel, the scope of Chatelain's work rapidly expanded during FDR's New Deal, including supervision of projects at numerous other battlefields, such as Fredericksburg, Richmond, Kings Mountain, Cowpens, Gilford Courthouse, Chickamauga, Shiloh, Vicksburg, Gettysburg, Saratoga, Lake Champlain, Fort Ticonderoga and Lake George. 5

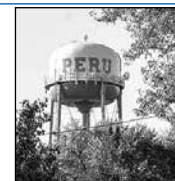
From 1936 to 1942 Chatelain directed the restoration of St. Augustine, Florida for the Carnegie Institute of Washington, featuring the contributions of the Spanish to southeastern culture. He authored *The Defenses of Spanish Florida, 1565 to 1763*. From 1945 until his retirement in 1964, Dr. Chatelain served as Professor of History at University of Maryland. He died at age 96, October 19, 1991. 6 Verne and Celia Chatelain are buried in Evergreen Cemetery, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. I recall those family trips back to Washington D.C. As he showed us points of interest, Uncle Verne's devotion to History was phenomenal. For him, historic sites were alive. He seemed to be part of them, as if to transcend the barriers of time and space.

1. A History of Nemaha County, 127-128; 2. National Park Service Oral History Interview by Herb Evison, August, 1980, p.2; 3. Ibid, pp.10-11; 4. Ibid, pp.14-16; 5. Ibid, pp. 21-22; 6. Washington Post, October 23, 1991

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Tuesday Literary Club Reads

DiAnna Loy, Tuesday Literary Club

The Tuesday Literary Club begins our new year in November and this year we will be sharing history and historical fiction to “Celebrate our American History.” I started our year off with talking about *Hotel at the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* by Jamie Ford. This book is set in Seattle, Washington in 1986 with most of the novel being a reflection by our main character, Henry Lee of the year 1942 when he was 12 years old.

We meet Henry outside the Panama Hotel where the boards that have sealed the hotel since 1942 are finally coming off and the new owners are announcing that they are going to remodel the hotel to bring it back to its former glory. They also announce that they have found the belongings of 30-40 families in the basement. Belongings they believe were left behind when the Japanese citizens of Seattle were rounded up and placed in internment camps in 1942. The owners of the hotel hope to locate the owners of these belongings. Henry doesn’t know who owns all of the items in the basement but he knows who some of them belong to. He wastes no time in contacting the new owners and gaining permission to look through the basement.

Henry is aware he will need help in his endeavor; he looks for that help from his son Marty. Henry’s wife Ethel passed away six months ago. Henry took early retirement to care for her so he has plenty of time to spend on this mission. Henry relates the story of his 12th year to his son and his son’s fiancée as they look through the basement and as they spend time together getting to know each other better.

When Henry was 12, he had two best friends: Sheldon who was a black jazz saxophone player and Keiko a Japanese girl he goes to school with at the English school where they are both on scholarship. Sheldon is like a big brother to Henry, giving him advice and looking out for him. Keiko is his best friend and they have many adventures together. Henry meets Keiko’s family and they are quite fond of him. Henry’s family knows nothing about Keiko. Henry’s father is against everything Japanese. He lived in China during the war with Japan and still has many bad memories. Henry’s father insists Henry wear a button on his clothes that declares “I AM CHINESE.” Henry’s father doesn’t want anyone to think he is Japanese.

When Japanese people start to be rounded up and sent on rail cars to internment camps, Keiko’s family is sent away along with everyone else. Henry tries to think of ways to save her family but there isn’t any way to save them. He finds a way to visit them at the internment camp, Camp Harmony, two hours south of Seattle. When Keiko’s family is sent to a more permanent camp in Idaho, he finds a way to visit her there once with Sheldon’s help. Even though Henry and Keiko promise to write to each other, the letters become less regular and eventually cease to come.

Eventually Henry meets Ethel. They marry and have one son; sharing a long life until her death from cancer. Henry had no further word of Keiko until the belongings are found in the basement of the Panama Hotel. As Henry tells this story of his young life to his son, Marty is amazed that he had no clue of his father’s past. Henry’s story doesn’t end there; he has more life to live.

There were more internment camps in the United States for Japanese citizens than just Seattle and Idaho, but there was not one in Nebraska. If this book relating a period in America’s history interests you, there is a copy available to check out at the Auburn Memorial Library.

Happy reading!

<<<< Christmas Continued from page 8

But before they’re done for the evening, we are hoping that community members will join them around the Rob Walker Memorial Christmas tree at 5:15 p.m. for a few Christmas Carols and the lighting of the tree. You don’t have to sing well to participate. Everyone gets credit for enthusiasm. The event is expected to be finished by 5:30 p.m.

Parents should stay with their children as they get their photos taken and then immediately walk them to City Hall. We can use the parental help in getting kids seated, supervising their snack, assisting them with the craft activities and games and making sure they have all their things before walking them back over to the Christmas tree.

If you’d like to help Kelly Adams and my son and I with decorating the lot south of Western National Bank, that is expected to occur on the nicest day possible slightly before or after Thanksgiving. It’s always handy to have extra muscle to lift the heavy wooden pallet decorations, scale the ladder, string lights around the gazebo, and trim the tree in the gazebo as well as the official live Christmas tree.

If you want to help, let me know at peregoymarty@gmail.com, so I can keep you up-to-date on our decorating plans.

Peru City News

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and Pride in the Peru Community.
Thank you to all who contribute.



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AKRS Syracuse
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Part of the marsh at Loess Bluffs National Wildlife Refuge east of Rulo, Nebraska. Room for more Snow Geese. See page 1.



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A Prairie Love

Chapter Nine: Spring Marks – April 1924

The rains came early, not in sheets, but in a steady whisper that soaked the fields and filled the creek to its brims. Cora walked the muddy path to school each morning with her skirts pinned up and her boots caked by the time she reached the door.

Her students had spring fever—restless hands, wandering eyes, dreams of kites and planting. She let them tuck marigold seeds into jelly jars, lining them like hope along the windowsill.

Lyle’s visits grew more frequent, but quieter. He didn’t ask questions he wasn’t ready to hear answered. Instead, he showed up with lumber, fence nails, and once, a battered harmonica he claimed had belonged to his uncle. He couldn’t play it worth a lick, but he tried.

One warm Saturday, they worked until dusk, setting the foundation stones for the cabin. As the sun lowered and frogs began their chorus, Lyle straightened and wiped his brow. “It’s starting to feel like something real,” he said.

Cora looked around at the rough outline, then at the horizon, pink and gold. The old windmill turned slowly in the breeze, its creak like a knowing nod.

“It already is,” she said.

They sat on the steps of the barn, not touching, but close enough to feel the warmth shared between them.

“You know,” he said, “when I was a boy, I used to think love was a thunderclap—sudden, loud, something that knocked you down.”

“And now?”

He smiled. “Now I think it’s more like a steady rain. Doesn’t make a show, but it soaks in deep.”

She didn’t answer, but she didn’t have to. Her hand brushed his, and they stayed that way until the fireflies came out.

To be continued...

Letters from the Prairie

April 4, 1888,

Nemaha County, Nebraska

Eighth Letter from Anna Wilhelmine Bauer to her sister Klara in Germany

My dear Klara,

The first thaw has begun—not yet spring, but a softening of the edges. Ice along the eaves drips steadily in the afternoons, and I spotted a patch of earth near the barn yesterday, brown and stubborn beneath the melting snow. It smells of promise.

Johann has begun repairing fence posts while the ground is still frozen enough to walk across. The children play outside again, their cheeks pink from the wind but joyful in their freedom. Jakob fashioned a kite from old muslin and a willow branch—it never flew, but the trying mattered more than the success.

Inside, I’ve begun sorting the seed tins, though it will be weeks before we can plant. Still, there’s hope in the sorting. Each bean and kernel feels like a prayer folded into the soil. We had a difficult week when little Lena came down with a fever. I spent three nights by her side with cool cloths and murmured lullabies. She is better now, eating porridge again, but it left me weary in body and spirit. I thought of Mama during those nights and how often she must have done the same for us. Perhaps I did not thank her enough. One bright note—Mrs. Weber lent me a novel from her trunk, in English. It’s slow going, but I feel proud each time I understand a whole page without reaching for the German-English reader. What a strange thing—to become someone new and still remain yourself.

How I long for your voice. Please write again soon and tell me of the first signs of spring there, if they’ve come.

Your loving sister,
Anna

Ninth Letter

My dear Klara,

The snow is gone, and our boots sink into the thawed earth like they’ve never known such softness. The first crocuses have pushed up near the woodpile—shy things, still unsure, but brave. I almost wept when I saw them. After such a long winter, color feels like a miracle.

Johann has begun clearing the fields, and the plow makes a different kind of music now—less toil, more rhythm. We are weeks from planting, but the preparation feels like exhaling after holding breath too long.

The children made May Day baskets from scrap paper and filled them with dried rose hips and prairie grass. They hang them on the neighbors’ doors and run away laughing. These little customs tie us to the old world, and I find comfort in that thread that has not broken.

I mended the hens’ enclosure and discovered that one of the younger hens has taken to hiding her eggs under the ramp. I praised her cleverness aloud, though it means crawling under on hands and knees most mornings.

There was sadness, too—Mrs. Reitz, who helped me when Lena was born, passed away quietly last week. Her husband said she left a pot of stew simmering and was gone before supper. She had a gentle laugh and knew every herb that grows on the prairie. I hope to keep some of her wisdom alive in our own kitchen garden.

Klara, if you could see this land now—its openness, its promise—you might understand why we stay, even through the storms. I carry you with me always, in memory and in hope. With love blooming again, Your Anna

To be continued...

Westward With Lewis & Clark

Chapter Seven: Late Summer, 1804

Still above the Nodaway River, Missouri Territory. We’ve been forced to hold in place two full days.

Captain Lewis says it’s due to the currents ahead, swollen from upstream rains, though I believe he’s giving Reuben Field time to mend. His right arm remains wrapped, tight from shoulder to elbow, and he grits his teeth when rising from sleep. He claims it’s nothing, and perhaps it would be for a lesser man, but among us, Field is known for his strength.

Clark has assigned him lighter duties: sharpening tools, recording game sightings, and roasting meat when we manage to shoot it. He does not complain, though he speaks less than usual and drinks more coffee than anyone I’ve seen. Camp life has a strange rhythm—half necessity, half invention. The men chop wood, mend clothing, clean weapons, and scrub their gear with river sand. It is honest labor, but not without tension. A quarrel broke out yesterday over a missing flint pouch. It was resolved without fists, though not without raised voices. Private Shields, always level-headed, offered up one of his own to settle the matter. No one declined. York has taken to storytelling in the evenings—sometimes true, sometimes not. The men don’t mind. His tales make the fire crackle louder and the night air feel less wide.

Clark remains diligent. He walks the perimeter twice a day, sometimes more, checking for signs of wild animals or wandering strangers. He has an eye for prints in the mud that I envy. “Elk passed here not six hours ago,” he said this morning, pointing to nothing I could see. I nodded like I understood.

Lewis, meanwhile, writes. He has a way of withdrawing even when present—his eyes fixed on the slope of a hill or the patterns in a bird’s flight. He took a sample from a strange vine this morning, cutting a section with his knife and tucking it into one of his wax-sealed tins. “May be medicinal,” he said.

There is little ease here, though no man expected it. Still, the pause has given us room to breathe, and that, too, is part of the journey. Last night I heard coyotes call across the river, their voices sharp and eerie. They sang to one another, or perhaps to us.

We answered with silence. — Elias LeGrand

To be continued...

Absalom Absalom

Sheila Tinkham, Lincoln

My soul cries for what is gone
Absalom Absalom
Memories and family ties
Like king David I mourn
Absalom Absalom
David had a hundred plus children
Yet he pined for the one who was no longer
Absalom Absalom
Mourn and let go
Move on
This new year, embrace what is Now
Who is your life now
Don't look back like Lot's wife
Don't become a pillar of salt
Absalom Absalom
No longer

Florida

American Legion Post 116

Willis V Rowan

VFW 10069

Sheila Tinkham, Lincoln

Courtney cute and friendly greets you
A library of books, waiting to be lent
Friendly faces Donna and Mike and Barbara
Wednesday night burgers and fried fish served
with a side of laughter and lettuce and tomatoes,
maybe a pickle or two
This is the friendliest post in Florida
Port St. Joe, Florida
Great beaches and great food
Meet together at the VFW
And maybe a dollar jello shot too!

Your Country Neighbor
Your “2-cups-of-coffee”
companion including
local photos and articles
with the flavor of
Rural America.

Wild Colorado circa 1875, A Fictional Reflection

Stephen Hassler, Peru

Jim doesn't remember how he got there, only that he was somewhere in Colorado. The air felt high and thin, the kind that makes a man believe new things are possible. He was standing in a quiet house with strangers, and yet he didn't feel entirely like a stranger. There was a woman there — kind eyes, unhurried voice — and Jim found himself wishing she'd join him for a drink. Nothing more urgent than that. Just a drink, conversation, maybe the beginning of something.

There were other people in the house. A piano played somewhere in the background, soft, almost like a memory. In another room sat a businessman and a young couple signing papers — an offer on a home, perhaps. Legal documents on the table, full of signatures and promises. Everyone seemed to be negotiating a new life.

Then there was that other guy. The man standing too close to her, disturbing her. Not hitting her, exactly — but touching her in that slow, mocking way that said he could if he wanted to. “I'm not hurting her,” he said, as if the absence of bruises proved his innocence.

Jim had seen that sort before — the quiet cruelty that hides behind a grin — and he told him to stop. The man pulled a gun, so Jim hit him.

He doesn't remember a lot, only that his fists knew where to go — the mouth, mainly, because he wanted him silent. People shouted, chairs and tables moved, the building almost shook with it. Then it was over. The other guy was down, and Jim was standing there, heart pounding like a drum against his ribs.

She looked at him — not afraid, not grateful, just... steady. She said she had to leave and told him he couldn't follow, not on foot, not with the way she moved, because her gray horse was fast, and Jim could never keep up. And before he could answer, she was gone — her horse galloping down the dusty road like a bird disappearing into the distance.

Even though he cared, even though he fought for her — he watched her leave without him. She left quickly and independently — and Jim was left standing still. He fought, he won, but he still lost her. Everyone else was moving on with their negotiations, but Jim was still trying to make sense of his own. Too often, caring isn't enough.

ARBOR CITY NEWS

Morton-James Public Library Calendar of Events December 2025

All activities held at Morton-James Public Library (unless otherwise noted*), 923 1st Corso, Nebraska City, NE 68410
For questions call 402-873-5609 or visit morton-jamespubliclibrary.com

All Programming is Free and Open to the Public

Lego Club

Monday, Dec. 1 3:30-5:30PM

Free build with Lego's at the club or bring your own sets to work on. Ages 8 and older. No registration, free to attend.

Story Time

Wednesday, Dec. 3 10:00-11AM

Join us to read Reindeer stories! We will also sing songs, learn a few signs in American Sign Language and we will have holiday coloring pages. Story Times are geared toward children ages 2-6. Families welcome! No registration.

Yarn Crafters Club

Wednesday, Dec. 3 1:30-3:00PM

This is for all levels of crafters. Bring your own hooks, yarn, needles, whatever you need to make your yarn craft. Club members will be here to help those beginning, and MJPL will have some patterns available. Free to attend. Everyone is welcome who is 15 and older!

Story Time NEW TIME!

Thursday, Dec. 4 4:00PM

Join us to read Reindeer stories! We will also sing songs, learn a few signs in American Sign Language and we will have holiday coloring pages. Story Times are geared toward children ages 2-6. Families welcome! No registration.

Humanities Nebraska – Marci Broyhill

“Christmas Stories and Christmas Blessings”

Thursday, Dec. 6 7:00PM

Paint Together - Cardinals

Saturday, Dec. 6 10 AM-12PM

Paint a cardinal for the holidays! Free to everyone 8 years and older. Must have a partner to paint for class.

Registration required in groups of two. **Call the Library at 402-873-5609 to reserve your spot!**

Library Board Meeting

Wednesday, Dec. 10 4:00-6:00PM
14 December 2025 Your Country Neighbor

WINTERPALOOZA at the VETERANS MEMORIAL BUILDING Saturday, December 13

***810 1st Corso 9:00AM - 12:00PM**

Join Ms. Amanda and Mr. Nick for the 5th Winterpalooza celebration. Free pictures with Santa, grab bag, toy drawings, craft, cookies, and more! Held at the NC Veterans Memorial Building. All ages welcome, no registration. Hosted by the Morton-James Public Library.

Lego Club

Monday, Dec. 15 3:30-5:30PM

Free build with Lego's at the club or bring your own sets to work on. Ages 8 and older. No registration, free to attend.

Holiday Craft and Color

Wednesday, Dec. 17 10:00 - 11:00AM

Join us for a Craft & Color at the Library. Kids of any age can make an ornament then color holiday coloring pages. Free, no registration.

Evening Book Club

Wednesday, Dec. 17th

5:30 - 6:30PM

“Listen for the Lie” by Amy Tintera

Anyone can join and there is no registration. New members are always welcome! Book lists for the year are available at the Library.

Holiday Craft and Color

Thursday, Dec. 18th

4:00 - 5:00PM

Join us for a Craft & Color at the Library. Kids of any age can make an ornament then color holiday coloring pages. Free, no registration.

Chess Club

Every Thursday in December EXCEPT 12/25

4:30PM - 6:00PM

Library will be closed December 25-27.

ARBOR CITY NEWS

News from Nebraska City

December

Bruce Madsen, Nebraska City

Christmas time is coming soon
I'm already humming Christmas tunes
Everyone feels good about what they might get
As most of us still believe in 'Santa' just a little bit

There's always lots of gifts stacked under the tree
The kids are excited, plus Mom and me
Anticipation is at it's height, it's hard to subdue
As the gifts are opened and the wrapping paper thrown askew

Everyone is happy, or so it seems
As their smiles form and their faces beam
Excited and grateful for what they got
Thankful to 'Santa' for all that he brought

But, as the kids grow up, things tend to change
We start with toys, then clothes, then money fits the exchange
Then when the kids have kids and there's little ones again
It all starts over and just maybe, the idea of family and
Christmas will continue to remain

As for me, I'm happy as I hum my tunes
Thinking about family, the meaning of Christmas, and why we commune
And if everyone stays safe and happy as the years go by
Well, that's a much better gift than socks and a tie



J.J. Palmtag
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Christmas Dinner Table at the Arbor Lodge



Every December, there's a Cardinal somewhere.
YCN Archives, 2012

ARBOR CITY NEWS

News from Nebraska City



Still work to be done.



City Sidewalks

To see some wildlife videos, visit my Channel on YouTube
www.youtube.com/@yourcountryneighbor

16 December 2025 Your Country Neighbor




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Nemaha County Courthouse -- Auburn, Nebraska, November 2025.

Merry
Christmas



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Visit us on Facebook

November 22 was a good day at the Refuge. The weather was almost ideal, sunny, about 60 degrees, and no strong winds. The snow geese have begun to arrive and there are still Trumpeter Swans in several of the marshy pools, as are Canada Geese. See page 5. I hope to have photos of Bald Eagles in the January issue. December is usually a good month for their arrival=.



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by Devon Adams, Nebraska City

ICE STORMS

Remember the time the rain came before the ice and the ice came before the snow? It was a warm Autumn until it wasn't warm. The wind pushed the wet, green, leafy branches into a frenzy of motion that only got worse when the temperature came down bit by bit, as the wind grew into a monster that was alive with destruction. Rain froze on the loaded branches, as the sounds of trees cracking and splitting sounded like a war. Power went out. Wood stoves were a distant memory. The snow wrote the miserable end to that chapter. And it can happen again. This year!

VALLEY FOG

Fog was creeping into the valley like snakes slithering around the trees. Thin and wispy fragments floating in first, playing with the light, erasing images that were gone in an instant and then were back again once more. As the last of the day lost the light of its life, the trees seemed insubstantial and devoid of substance. They were ghosts in a world of dreams, seeming to move, branches reaching out and trying to touch the winter walker. The line between real and unreal became too close to call, until he reached the safety of his familiar cabin and the light of home.

THE DAY AND TIME

There is a day that is older than Christmas. As our world turns, it goes around and comes around again to our shortest day, when the darkness is longer than the light. It is a mark of change and a beacon of hope that we are on the path to brighter days, and better luck. That belief has power in itself, a helping hand from a hidden, eternal fountain of faith.

STARSHIPS

They are out there in the dark of deep space, running like silent sharks through the empty places of the universe, powered by forever fuels and controlled by quantum brains. They are super spooks, knowing all the hidden hollows and worm holes that lurk between unseen other universes. If you wake in the dark and see a ship parked in the yard, stick out your thumb and hitch a ride with a space witch on her modern broom!

By Artist, Devon Adams

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Send to:

Devon Adams

1220 Oak Street, Apt. A, Box 9
Nebraska City, NE 68410

adamsdevon07@gmail.com 402-209-9377

WHO IS WINNING?

Deep in the dark of the infinite black that is space and time is a little planet dancing around the sun at the center of a solar system. Spheres of matter have formed into a family of rocks that are tied to the center hot spot with strings of gravity. But the pretty blue-green one has a special feature. It is a population of beings, called humans, who think they are the smartest item ever to exist. But they spend most of their time arguing and trying to kill each other. Not a good plan.

BORN IN A BARN

Down in the depths of winter weather, as icy winds whipped the trees and covered all objects with layers of snow blankets, a tiny angel was born in the back of a barn in a stall with all the hay for a baby to be warm. Mom was a horse, of course, but every birth is a sacred celebration of life and grace.

Your Country Neighbor

**Your "2-cups-of-coffee" companion including
local photos and articles
with the flavor of rural America.**

Window On Fifth Street

Stephen Hassler, Peru

I'm sitting here trying to coax out a Christmas "Window," but the view isn't doing me any favors. The trees along 5th Street are nearly stripped bare—just a few stubborn leaves clinging on—and the rest of the world is swallowed in fog. Not exactly a spark for festive imagination. But fog, bare trees, silent birds—stillness is part of the season too, even without decorations. December has a way of forcing everyone to slow down.

No tree up. No snow yet. I've long given up eggnog. I don't send many paper Christmas cards anymore—a few "Merry Christmas" emails to friends. I did send out a note about my new YouTube channel:

www.youtube.com/@yourcountryneighbor

I'm a novice at the whole YouTube thing (or at least I feel like one), but I'm learning as fast as I can. I'll have more to say about that in the New Year. Until then, please consider subscribing. It's free, and it helps "Your Country Neighbor."

As for this season, aside from roasting a turkey, mainly to fuel future sandwiches, I'm waiting for inspiration to pull me into the usual traditions. In the meantime, I'll keep an eye out for the familiar winter birds at the feeder and whatever crosses my lens at the refuge.

I'm confident I'll find snow geese and bald eagles this month to photograph and share with you in January. What I'd really like, though, is the classic shot—the bright red cardinal perched on a snowy branch. The forecast says we're in for a warm, wet winter. Wet usually means snow. We'll see.

Well, you've stuck with this publication for another year, and I sincerely appreciate it. What I hope to share in 2026 are more photos of wildlife, more stories from the prairie, more articles from your favorite volunteer writers who provide genuine, heartfelt messages to those of you who live in our country neighborhood, and to others who are passing through. And of course, I hope to share more views from my Window on Fifth Street.

So put this paper on the table, put away that cup, and do something Christmasy. Let the Spirit move you. And I hope you have a Merry Christmas!

Diary of a Part-time Housewife

Merri Johnson, Auburn

There's a lot of talk about the cost of living these days. While we may not be able to do much about the price of items in the store, we do have choices about how we manage our money.

Hubby, as you may know, does most of our household shopping, including groceries and the steady stream of whatever arrives from Amazon almost daily. When it comes to food, Hubby is not inclined to scrimp. He likes his meat, so much so that he is on a first-name basis with the meat guy at Fareway. When meat is on sale, he stocks up. He waits for a good deal on chicken and makes his own bone broth and shredded meat for soup. He buys ground beef in bulk and re-packages it in meal-size amounts. If you pay attention, you can get pork loin for less than hamburger. Decades ago, I used to study the ads for both grocery stores every week and plan meals around whatever was on special. I am glad I don't have to do that anymore. I don't remember the last time I bought Hamburger Helper or chicken pot pies. Perhaps the easiest way to save money on food is to simply not waste it. Even Hubby is now paying attention to using up leftovers. Will wonders never cease?

Many people stock up on paper products and canned goods. If we had an actual pantry, I might do that, too. It isn't like we don't have space in the basement for storage, but stairs are not my friend these days. Perhaps I could make space somewhere on the first floor if I just got rid of things that don't really need to be on the first floor. Things like craft items that the grandkids outgrew years ago, and story books that the grandkids outgrew years ago, and an antique bread machine that hasn't been used in years, and a stack of large, disposable food containers with lids that I've been keeping because they might come in handy someday, and a box of winter gloves and scarves that would do more good going to a clothing charity. Whether I would actually save any money by having pantry space on the first floor is debatable. But, I would be more organized!

Other ways to economize come to mind. Here's a real money-saver. Lately Hubby has taken to ripping sticky notes in half instead of using the whole thing. I don't know what has gotten into him. I just make a point of not scribbling all over the middle of the note. If you write at the top, you can just cross that out and use the clean lower half for another message!!

For my part, I've been saving money on furniture polish by swearing off dusting. I confess that my motivation may not be entirely economic.

Lest anyone think I am making light of the challenges many households are facing, I assure you I am not. In this season of giving and gratitude, I encourage all who are able to donate to their local pantry or look for ways to adopt a family for Christmas. Be generous to those in need near and far. Your own Christmas will be enriched when you do.



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| Final Price | \$28,700 |



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