



*Nebraska History* posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

Article Title: World War II Boomtown: Hastings and the Naval Ammunition Depot.

For more articles from this special World War II issue, [see the index to full text articles currently available.](#)

Full Citation: Beverly Russell, "World War II Boomtown: Hastings and the Naval Ammunition Depot," *Nebraska History* 76 (1995): 75-83

Notes: Hastings, which had welcomed 20,000 people in a peaceful celebration of its history in 1939, had become a community in which residents called one another names in the local newspaper in 1942. The Naval Ammunition Depot built during the ensuing years had caused the relatively insular community to suddenly accommodate a huge increase in population that brought with it diverse social and ethnic groups for which it was unprepared.

URL of Article: [http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/1995\\_War\\_04\\_Hastings.pdf](http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/1995_War_04_Hastings.pdf)

Photos: Aerial view of the Naval Ammunition Depot; downtown Hastings 1944-45; Caveat Emptor flyer regarding rent gouging; Sioux depot workers in 1942; dance held at the opening of the service center for Africal American troops; Pleasant Hills Trailer Camp in northwest Hastings; Hastings map during World War II

# WORLD WAR II BOOMTOWN

## Hastings & the Naval Ammunition Depot

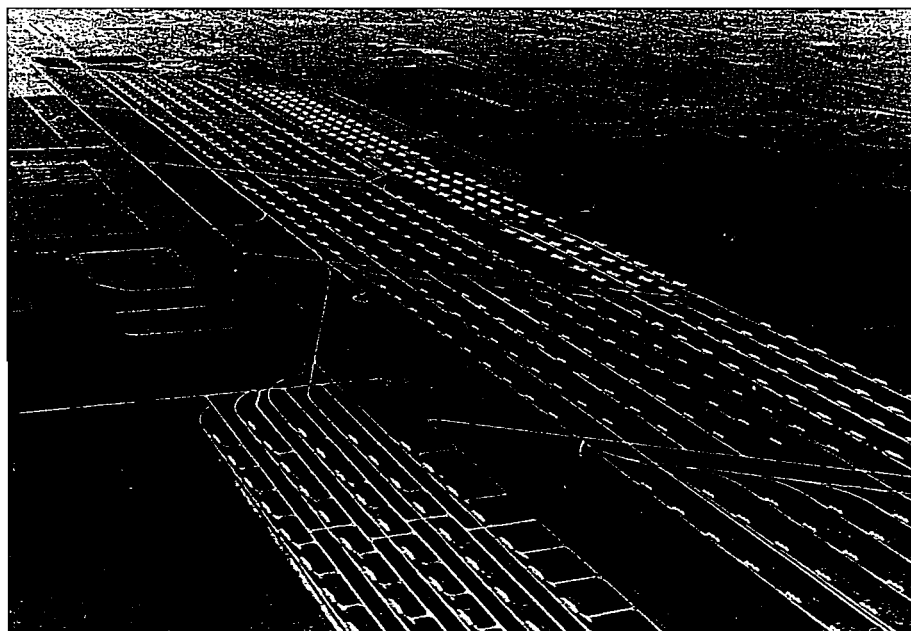
*By Beverly Russell*

Jubilee Days — “The best outdoor show ever put on in Hastings. In fact, it was the best show of its kind ever put on in Nebraska.”<sup>1</sup> So said Hastings resident Lawson Wehrman about the 1939 community observance in which the community celebrated its heritage. Jubilee Days saw 5,000 people watch the “Nebraska Cavalcade” historical pageant, 1,400 view the dedication of a new museum, and more than 20,000 enjoy one of the biggest parades in Hastings’s history. The Hastings Police Department managed these huge crowds without extra assistance, and the only crimes reported were two pick-pocket incidents.<sup>2</sup> During Jubilee Days people enjoyed themselves and exulted in their community and its past. Three years later in 1942 the proud, harmonious community of Jubilee Days had changed. In the “Vox Populi” section of the *Hastings Daily Tribune*, a letter from two newcomers to Hastings described “hostile citizens” and “small town morals squads” who were herding newcomers into “concentration camps,” by which they meant government trailer camps. Furthermore, said the writers, they were loyal Americans who were doing their part “to win the war.”<sup>3</sup> “A Native of Adams County” responded that people of this ilk, living in trailer camps, were “like Hitler” because they wanted to force long time residents from their homes.<sup>4</sup> Finally, in a third letter, another Hastings resident called “Native” a “nincompoop.”<sup>5</sup>

Hastings, which three years earlier welcomed 20,000 people in a celebration of its history, had become by 1942 a community in which residents called each other names in the local newspaper. The establishment of a large defense installation nearby caused this change. The Naval Ammunition Depot (NAD) forced the relatively insular community of Hastings to accommodate a huge increase in population that brought with it diverse social and ethnic groups and major alterations in lifestyle. Although the city tried to cope, friction developed when Hastings found itself inundated with “outsiders.” Economic self-interest, unfamiliarity with people of different races and backgrounds, and apprehension about rapid social

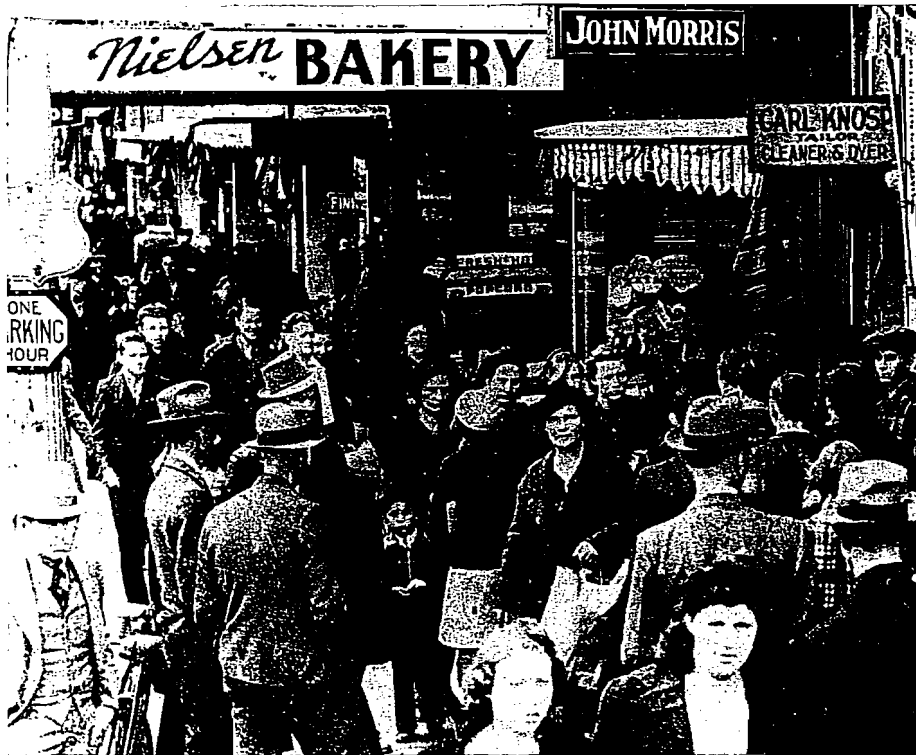
change shaped community responses. During 1942-43 Hastings, a small rural city proud of its heritage and previously insulated from the outside world, developed several communities within the booming city.

Before World War II population stability and racial homogeneity helped create strong community bonds in Hastings. From its founding in the 1870s until the 1940s the population grew gradually except for declines during the depression decades of the 1890s and the 1930s. The racial make-up of Hastings unified residents as well. The native-born white population predominated while the foreign-born white population gradually decreased. The black population stood at less than one



An aerial view of the Naval Ammunition Depot. NSHS-K81:47

*Beverly Russell holds an M.A. in library science from the University of Iowa, and is finishing her M.A. Ed. in history at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.*



Downtown Hastings during the boom years of 1944-45. *Hastings Daily Tribune/Adams County: The Story, 1872-1972* (Hastings: Adams County-Hastings Centennial Commission, 1972)

percent, with other races statistically insignificant.<sup>6</sup> The dramatic population increase sparked by the Naval Ammunition Depot changed this small, neighborly community into a city bursting at the seams with people.

World War II provided communities emerging from the Depression with an opportunity for rapid economic recovery. As war production geared up, Nebraska's senators and congressmen successfully campaigned for the location of several defense plants in Nebraska. Hastings, hard hit by the Great Depression and losing population, reacted enthusiastically to the June 10, 1942, announcement by Senator George Norris and Congressman Carl Curtis that the U.S. Navy would build a \$45 million ammunition depot southeast of town.

The community recognized the economic boost this facility would provide and the growth potential it offered. Bank deposits provide an indication of

the improvement in Hastings's economic health. From December 1941 to December 1942 bank deposits increased 100 percent and grew another 45.8 percent by June 30, 1943. Statewide deposits gained 21.3 percent for the same period. In 1939 Hastings banks held deposits of only \$4.5 million, but by 1944 deposits totaled \$12.8 million.<sup>7</sup>

The process of purchasing 48,753 acres of land from 232 owners began immediately, and construction on the depot commenced on July 14, 1942. The initial phase of construction extended over eighteen months and employed more than 5,000 workers. At its peak capacity in 1945 the depot employed approximately 2,000 military personnel and 6,692 civilian production workers as well as about 2,000 civilians still involved in construction. The Naval Ammunition Depot, one of the largest installations of its kind in the United States, eventually covered seventy-five

square miles and at one time supplied 40 percent of the navy's ammunition.<sup>8</sup>

Such an enormous project impacted the community immediately. On July 15, 1942, the *Hastings Daily Tribune* reported fifty-five new families had arrived in town during the first two weeks of July, and by August 11, 1942, the Newcomer's Bureau listed more than 300 new families.<sup>9</sup> The *Daily Tribune* set the population of Hastings at 19,875 in February 1943, while the 1944 city directory estimated the 1943 population even higher at 22,252.<sup>10</sup> Depending on which figure is used, population increased either 31 or 47 percent from the 1940 census. Those figures, compared with a 33 percent increase in population during the decade of the 1920s, provide some sense of the staggering influx of people.<sup>11</sup> Local residents' responses to these hordes created divisions between them and the newcomers.

Hastings tried to ease the absorption of plant workers. In addition to the Newcomer's Bureau, which welcomed newcomers to Hastings, civic organizations and churches sponsored programs about issues raised by the influx of workers as well as providing activities for them. The city established the Hastings Area Emergency Committee to address community needs such as labor shortages and the housing crunch. Women, old and young, volunteered to serve as hostesses at the servicemen's centers and greet troop trains as they traveled through town. Hastings College sponsored dances and a canteen for servicemen.

The city government expanded public services to accommodate federal trailer camps and housing areas. The public library extended service to the housing areas, and the Hastings Recreation and Parks Department sponsored a summer recreation program for children. The major effort to accommodate plant workers, however, came from the federal government through its funding of many of the programs and services that the community provided. Some of these included the servicemen's cen-

ters, a new elementary school, support of the summer recreation program, and a child care facility for the children of depot workers.<sup>12</sup>

It is not surprising that many local people, who so recently had endured the Great Depression, reacted in their own economic self-interest when the population skyrocketed. The tremendous increase in population created a housing crisis in Hastings. Rents doubled almost overnight, causing an immediate division within the community as depot workers resented being gouged by Hastings landlords. Apartments, which rented for \$35 a month prior to the announcement of the depot's coming, increased to \$60 and \$70 a month or an increase in some cases of 100 percent. Stating that 250 new homes needed to be built to accommodate workers, R. M. Thompson, secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, deplored the unreasonable rent increases and warned that government rent control was a possibility. In time, the War Production Board (WPB) approved construction of three hundred new private homes for occupancy by war workers, which proved to be a boon for local private contractors. Several new housing additions sprang up at various locations in the northern and eastern parts of the city.

The problem of rent gougers did not go away, however. Lt. Cmdr. W. B. Short, overseer of depot construction, addressed Hastings churches, stating that the enormous rent increases were "decidedly not Christian." The situation of school teacher Reba Yeakle probably represented that of many others. She took an extra job at the depot mail office to compensate for increased rents.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, *Tribune* apartment and house rental ads no longer included the rental rates.

The *Daily Tribune* estimated only five to ten percent of Hastings landlords charged exorbitant rents, but the situation was bad enough that depot employees circulated a flyer, "Caveat Emptor," to warn workers about rent gougers.<sup>14</sup>

FIRST ISSUE

# CAVEAT EMPTOR

Caveat Emptor (let the buyer beware) makes its appearance as the first in a series of issues. We hope the issues will be limited, very limited. The necessity for having to go to press with a paper such as this does violence to our sense of patriotism.

We do not, however, intend to duck the issue. When, as, and if the necessity arises, we shall publish again and yet again until each case is brought to the attention of our employees.

The following data has been supplied by employees, and while the information is not guaranteed, it has been obtained from sources which we believe to be reliable:

An apartment located at 318 East Seventh Street and owned by R. D. Gaston, proprietor of the Gaston Furniture Market located at 521 West Second Street, Hastings, was rented as recently as April, 1942, at a monthly rental of \$35 per month. The apartment at that time consisted of a living room with roll-away bed, dinette, kitchen, and bathroom. At the \$35 figure the bathroom was restricted to the use of the occupants of that apartment. We are advised that the rental currently asked for this same apartment, but with the stipulation that the bathroom must now be shared by others, is \$75 per month.

We do not wish to influence anyone in his decision to rent or not to rent, but we do believe that these facts should be made known to you in helping you to arrive at a decision.

(This is published by and distributed to employees engaged in the construction of the United States Naval Ammunition Depot.)

**Depot employees circulated this flyer warning about rent gouging.** Adams County Historical Society

Obviously, workers resented unreasonably high rents, which contributed to a divisive atmosphere when some Hastings landlords saw depot workers as a group to be exploited.

Some Hastings residents formed an anonymous group, the Fair Rents Committee, to try to control exorbitant rents.

The committee persuaded fifty landlords to sign a rent control pledge. The Hastings Real Estate Association also endorsed these efforts. Economic self-interest, as well as fair play, influenced these initiatives as the threat of government rent controls loomed. Eventually the Office of Price Administration

(OPA) imposed rent controls in 1943.<sup>15</sup>

Not all landlords reacted with aversion to the housing crisis. Many individuals opened their homes to the newcomers. Reba Yeakle remembered, "Almost everyone who had a big house made it into apartment living. . . . They would do anything possible to accommodate people."<sup>16</sup> Lorena Smith, a Hastings housewife, described living in a house with eight other people while another couple lived in the backyard chicken house. All shared the two bathrooms but the chicken house people used the spigot outside for water.<sup>17</sup> One resident, Ruth Mullen, rented a room in her house to a Mr. Weber, a civilian depot worker. To show his appreciation, Weber brought her rationed coffee and sugar that he acquired at the plant.<sup>18</sup> When Hastings residents became acquainted with plant workers on an individual basis, they often came to regard them as friends, rather than as people to be exploited or resented.

Economic self-interest was not always divisive. Business people tried to accommodate the workers, and many merchants began tailoring their newspaper advertisements with the depot and its workers in mind.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, retail stores extended their hours on September 17, 1942, to accommodate construction workers; banks and professional people followed later. *The Powder Keg*, the NAD newspaper, encouraged plant personnel to take advantage of the extended hours.<sup>20</sup> Apparently the depot command desired good relations with the business community. Business people also recognized that catering to depot workers would be good for business.

Nevertheless, some business people resented the plant workers. Former depot employee Elaine Hatten remembered that some workers felt it was because the NAD's pay scale and benefits were better than those available in Hastings. By 1944 the depot offered a base wage of \$.74 an hour for men, the highest allowed by the government, with time-and-a-half for overtime and a

fifty-four to sixty-four hour work week. Other benefits included accumulated sick and annual leave, low rents through the government housing project, and transportation to the depot.

Labor shortages created by the war also proved more severe for local businesses because of the depot's high pay. Finally, in 1944 the War Manpower Commission (WMC) declared Hastings a class one labor shortage area, the only city in Nebraska to be so designated. A letter in the *Tribune's* "Vox Populi" blamed Hastings's low "hand-to-mouth" wages for the labor shortage in private industry. This correspondent viewed the Naval Ammunition Depot as a "god-send" to people with households to support, stating that experienced stenographers, clerks, bookkeepers, and sales clerks received only \$16 to \$20 per week or \$.40 to \$.50 an hour from private employers.<sup>21</sup>

Depot employees also believed at least some businesses discriminated against them because of where they worked. Many thought they were overcharged if they shopped while wearing their NAD badges.<sup>22</sup> Just how pervasive this treatment may have been is unclear. Plant workers perceived unfair treatment, however, which created ill-will between them and the local businessmen, further dividing the community.

Along with the sudden increase in population came an alteration in the racial makeup of Hastings. Initially, white construction workers arrived in droves; by November 1942 the construction company imported about one hundred Chippewa and Sioux Indians to work at the construction site. Then the navy announced in December 1942 that about four hundred "colored" sailors might be sent to the depot and later announced that black civilian workers would also be employed.<sup>23</sup> For a predominantly white community this represented a significant change. Racially homogeneous Hastings residents, unfamiliar with other racial groups, became apprehensive. Housing and recreation for African

Americans were to become divisive issues.

During World War II racism was casually accepted in America.<sup>24</sup> School teacher Reba Yeakle's comments provide insight into the attitudes of some local residents:

With people moving in from everywhere, there was Indians, colored people, and oh, so many kinds of people living there [referring to the trailer camp at the fairgrounds]. Then farther south, on 11th Street, they moved in 500 units there, which was a better class of people.<sup>25</sup>

Native American, African American, and Mexican children attended Hastings schools. According to Ms. Yeakle, "It was quite a sensation to have these children." She felt they were accepted because, "You'll accept most anything during the war."<sup>26</sup> According to Lorena Smith, Hastings was not used to having African Americans around. Many people refused to sit beside them on the bus.<sup>27</sup> Elaine Hatten agreed, "It was something different to see minority people . . . their presence was a little uncomfortable for some residents in the community."<sup>28</sup>

Latent racism in Hastings caused residents to assume that different racial groups needed separate housing and separate recreational facilities. A newspaper article, announcing the arrival of the first group of Sioux workers from the Rosebud Reservation, referred to them as "braves" and described them as being "on the warpath."<sup>29</sup> Its heedless, condescending tone is apparent. This group of Sioux lived at the plant in tents. Apparently, the depot provided no recreational facilities for them. Reba Yeakle recalled that Indians lingered around the lobby of the post office building where as a "federal people" they felt safe.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the Sioux preferred to live in camps as a separate community; however, the end result was the same. The Sioux as a group were disconnected from the larger white community in Hastings.

Racial prejudice became more apparent when the navy announced that

## Hastings and the NAD



This photograph of Sioux depot workers appeared in the November 26, 1942, issue of the *Hastings Daily Tribune*. *Hastings Daily Tribune/Adams County: The Story*

black sailors and civilians would serve at the depot. Issues of housing and recreation for African Americans aroused concern among white Hastings residents. In December 1942 the city council discussed recreation for black sailors. Navy representative Lt. Cmdr. J. C. Heck, who had previously been stationed with black sailors at Fall Brook, California, assured the council that in California, "businessmen commented on the good behavior of the men," and his "experience and observation is that colored troops have been well behaved."<sup>31</sup>

During the discussion of recreational facilities, council members asserted that they preferred white troops; however, they acknowledged the need for a separate recreation center for the "Negroes" if they came. Unlike the city of Kearney, Hastings welcomed the opening of a separate center for African American servicemen, although the council preferred that no tavern be associated with it. To Hastings residents the most important issue was that the center remain separate from the one for white servicemen. Although no action was taken at that time, eventually the city, with the aid of a federal grant, opened a separate



The opening of the service center for African American troops was celebrated with a dance. *Hastings Daily Tribune/Adams County: The Story*

center for black servicemen at 624 West First Street, which regularly scheduled activities and dances. As time passed, this area along First Street gained a reputation for rowdiness as it catered exclusively to African Americans with both legal and illegal businesses.<sup>32</sup>

Before the center opened, recreation created a problem for African Americans in Hastings. Elaine Hatten remembered that there was not much for "colored" people to do with their time off. Every Friday afternoon depot officials provided "cattle trucks" with benches

on the side, usually used to transport workers, to take black workers to Omaha where there was a sizeable African American community.<sup>33</sup> Hastings's assumption that separate facilities were a necessity forced African Americans to travel for hours in converted cattle trucks in search of entertainment.

Housing for blacks in Hastings also created considerable controversy among residents. Following the announcement that "Negro" civilians would work at the plant, a delegation of thirty homeowners from northwest Hastings approached the city council in an unsuccessful attempt to oppose the housing of blacks in the Pleasant Hills Trailer Camp, also in northwest Hastings. According to a spokesman for the group,

Negro people are proud of their color. . . . They, too, want their own communities, their own schools, their own recreation. . . . We're proud of them and their leaders in the contributions they are making in the war effort. . . . They too are faced with problems, being uprooted from their established homes. . . . It would be best if they could be given a community of their own.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps this was true; however, it is doubtful if anyone asked the black families. The delegation assumed that "Negroes" wanted segregation. The city council voted unanimously to oppose the housing of African Americans in the government trailer camp even though the city could take no binding action. The delegation then signed a petition

stating their opposition to "Negro housing" in the trailer camp.<sup>35</sup> Despite these objections both African Americans and Native Americans ultimately resided at the camp.

The federal government also provided housing for black civilian workers in the Spencer Park addition, located in southeastern Hastings. (See map) Although the project was not completed until 1944, just the announcement that blacks would reside in Spencer Park caused consternation among south Hastings residents. In November 1943 a "Southside Resident" wrote the "Vox Populi" column deriding "northsiders for their fuss over Negroes living in the trailer camp," and asking "are they afraid they will get a taste of what the southside is going to get?" The "Southside Resident" further asserted that "we southsiders don't care about housing Negroes either."<sup>36</sup> When Spencer Park was completed in 1944, black families lived in 260 buildings in the southeastern section farthest away from Hastings. A separate recreation building was also built, and the black families organized a separate governing council.<sup>37</sup> Hastings, a community with limited experience in race relations, now had segregated housing.

Not surprisingly, the segregated navy provided segregated on-base housing as well. About sixty "colored families" resided in Prairie Village, remodeled construction workers' barracks built because "wives and families of Negro en-

listed men on the Depot were having difficulty finding homes in town."<sup>38</sup> Like Spencer Park, Prairie Village included a separate recreation hall for the black families.<sup>39</sup> On-base and off, segregated housing and recreation for African Americans was the norm.

While blacks and Indians found themselves completely separated from the community, white civilian workers who lived in trailer camps also came to be viewed apprehensively and as a distinct group by local residents. In response to the housing emergency created by the depot, the federal government constructed a trailer camp. Pleasant Hills, built at the fairgrounds in northwest Hastings, contained 250 trailers originally, later expanding to about 800. (See map) An additional facility, built later along Eleventh Street, eventually accommodated 500 trailers. The Pleasant Hills camp included toilet, shower, and laundry facilities as well as a recreation center; however, overcrowding and poor sanitation, dust and mud from the unpaved roads, and "rowdy" behavior often caused difficulties. Some trailer dwellers resented the condition of the camps, and local residents frequently viewed the trailer dwellers and camps harshly.<sup>40</sup>

To escape the congested and unsanitary trailer camps some people began parking trailers on private yards rather than at the camps. Undoubtedly this was a more pleasant arrangement for these people, with the added advantage



The Pleasant Hills Trailer Camp in northwest Hastings had room for more than 700 trailers. *Hastings Daily Tribune/Adams County: The Story*

## Hastings and the NAD

of feeling more a part of the community. After complaints from local residents, however, the city council voted for strict enforcement of the trailer parking ordinances requiring homeowners to purchase a permit and to provide adequate toilet and shower facilities for both sexes within two hundred feet of the trailers.<sup>41</sup> This, in effect, forced the trailer dwellers back into the camps and kept them separated from the larger community.

A series of letters in the "Vox Populi" section of the *Daily Tribune* provides insight into community attitudes, clearly indicating the dissention between locals and trailer people. Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Henderson, trailer dwellers, wrote to advise "hostile citizens" that

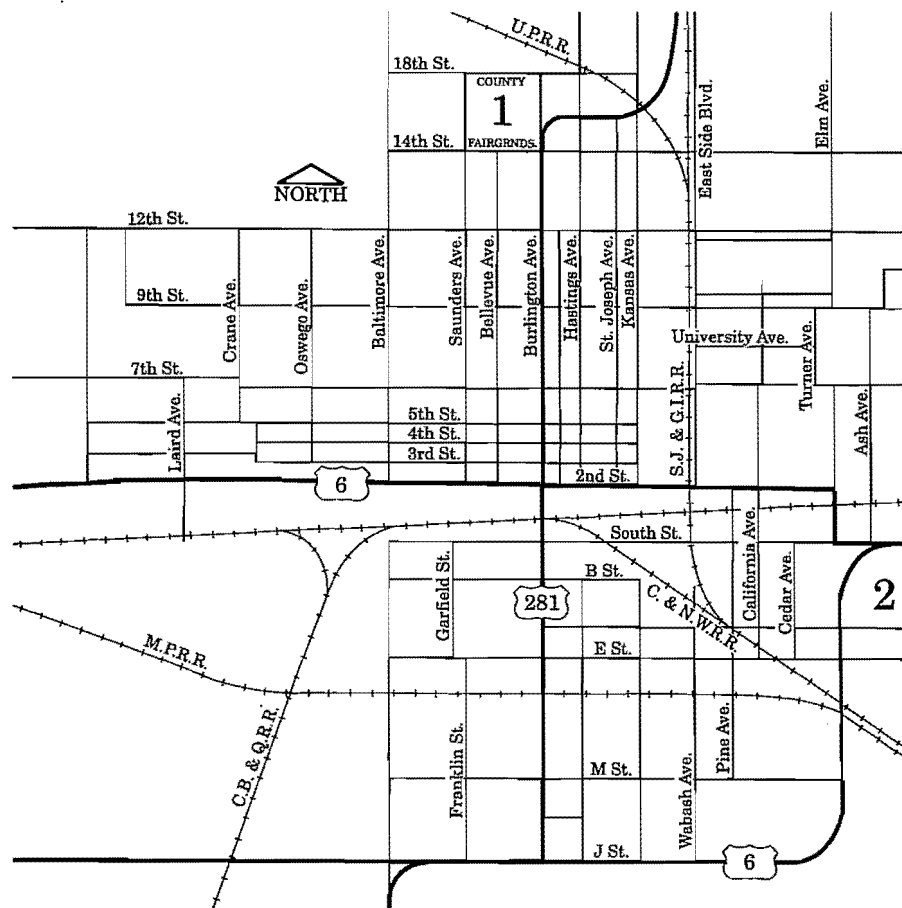
we don't choose to be herded into concentration camps where our morals, health and social welfare shall be dictated by small town morals squads. . . . We are good American citizens helping to win this war. . . . Some of us are mothers of boys in the war somewhere, fighting to make the world safe for this same group who are trying to herd these mothers into camp.<sup>42</sup>

Other letters from trailer dwellers expressed similar feelings.<sup>43</sup> "A Native of Adams County" responded angrily to the Henderson letter. This person wanted to know:

Why are they living in trailer camps, drifting from place to place, especially if they have been successful before the war? Did they ever have a home to leave? If they did, I'm sure it wasn't to do their bit toward the war that they left it, as they say. It was more to get big pay at the plant. We at Hastings didn't ask them to quit their jobs to come here to work on the defense plant.

The letter closed by stating, "Some of these campers are like Hitler and want us to move out for them."<sup>44</sup> Obviously, the "Native" resented the changes taking place in Hastings and blamed the newcomers, whom she did not view as individuals but as a faceless group. Plainly, the "Native" wished these outsiders would return from whence they came.

Finally, Hastings resident Helen



Hastings during World War II. Number 1 marks the location of the Pleasant Hills Trailer Camp; number 2 is the Spencer Park Addition.

Bazar defended the Hendersons and answered "that nincompoop who hasn't the nerve to sign her name." She pointed out that if the "Native" took the time to get to know these people, she would realize that her assumptions were wrong.<sup>45</sup>

What was it about white trailer dwellers that caused them to be viewed almost like a separate racial group by some Hastings residents? Perhaps guilt by association created this situation. These people lived in camps, especially Pleasant Hills, that also housed many African Americans and Native Americans. Furthermore, trailers represented temporary, transient dwellings and some people viewed trailer occupants as transients also. The "Native" certainly

saw them as "drifting from place to place."

Although many plant workers were from the local area, including displaced farmers, many others came from across the United States, with a sizeable group from Nebraska and the Midwest. Missouri, however, represented home to scores of new depot workers.<sup>46</sup> Because so many workers came from Missouri, some local residents may have stereotyped them as backward hillbillies and therefore, unwelcome. Helen Bazar appeared to have the key to acceptance of the newcomers. If locals took time to become acquainted with them, they discovered that the trailer dwellers were good people too. The "Adams County Native," seemingly unacquainted with



the trailer dwellers, made judgements based upon her preconceived ideas, prejudices, and apprehensions. Individuals like Helen Bazar, who knew the Hendersons or other trailer people, judged them on their own merits. Unfortunately, while some trailer people may have found individual acceptance, others felt excluded, a separate community.

Although the Naval Ammunition Depot provided an economic boost for the community, Hastings residents faced other alterations in their way of life. Congestion extended everywhere and waiting in line became commonplace. Overcrowded schools, heavy traffic, and crime were public concerns. Parking became an acute problem in downtown Hastings, and the Chamber of Commerce asked the police department to correct it. Residents reacted with apprehension and anxiety to these changes as well.

Overcrowding in the schools created a strain on teachers and resources. The 1942 school year began with 235 more students in the public schools than in 1941. By August 1943 the *Daily Tribune* reported a 1943-44 all-school enrollment of 4,359 students, 47 percent more than in 1941-42. Elementary teacher Reba Yeakle remembered teaching fifty-seven children, compared with twenty to twenty-five students normally. The large enrollments forced schools to extend the school day and to hire extra teachers, creating a financial burden on the schools. Eventually, a new elementary school was constructed in Spencer Park, the government housing project.<sup>47</sup>

Traffic was not the only law enforcement problem facing the community. After several reports of women and children being "accosted" and "molested," the city hired an extra policeman, purchased two-way radios for the patrol cars, and instituted a curfew for children under sixteen. Residents' concerns centered both on the safety of women and children as well as on a rising incidence of juvenile delinquency. Additionally, citizens formed a "vigilante" committee to work with the police de-

partment to improve law enforcement.<sup>48</sup> Reba Yeakle recalled, "Being a single woman, I wouldn't walk around late at night."<sup>49</sup>

During Jubilee Days in 1939 Hastings police had controlled crowds in excess of 20,000 people with almost no problems. In 1942 concern about crime led to the formation of a "vigilante" committee. Crime and congestion caused local residents to be apprehensive about the sudden changes taking place in their community. No longer did women feel safe walking alone at night. New people arrived, and rents skyrocketed. Local residents unfamiliar with people of differing races or lifestyles often reacted in their economic self-interest or with apprehension.

The Naval Ammunition Depot remained in operation until 1966. Except for a spurt during the Korean War, production and personnel never again approached World War II levels. The Pleasant Hills trailer camp closed, but Spencer Park remained open and evolved into the Good Samaritan Village retirement complex. The depot site became home to Central Community College, the Roman L. Hruska U. S. Meat Animal Research Center, and Hastings Industrial Park East, housing forty different firms. A more troubling legacy to the Hastings area was soil and ground water contamination from the depot. The clean-up process will continue into the future.

Historian Gerald Nash argues that World War II transformed the American West.<sup>50</sup> Had the war transformed Hastings? In the short term it is apparent that life changed significantly, and those changes caused reactions which divided the community. In the long term, however, change was not as dramatic. Peace brought a cutback of depot production and personnel. Indian workers returned to their reservations. Black sailors and civilians also left. The racial makeup of the community returned to prewar ratios. By 1950 the population stood at 20,221 a significant increase from the 15,145 of 1940 but down con-

siderably from the 22,252 reported in 1943 and proportionally in line with increases throughout the decades of the twentieth century.

While war industry helped Hastings recover from the ravages of the Great Depression and provided a basis for growth in the future, Hastings attracted no major postwar industrial development such as the defense and aircraft industries on the West Coast.<sup>51</sup> World War II dramatically impacted Hastings, Nebraska, but it did not transform the community. In many ways Hastings returned to what it had been before the war, a rural, racially homogeneous city, economically dependent on agriculture.

#### Notes

Works frequently cited have been identified by the following abbreviations: *HDT*-Hastings Daily Tribune; *PK*-The Powder Keg

<sup>1</sup> Catherine Renschler, "Jubilee Days," *Historical News* 22 (1989): 1. Jubilee is a combination of the two words jubilee and museum. Hastings celebrated Jubilee Days in 1938 under the sponsorship of the American Legion. In 1939 the new Hastings museum was to be dedicated, and it was decided to combine the two events into Jubilee Days.

<sup>2</sup> Dorothy Weyer Creigh, *Adams County: The Story* (Hastings, Nebr.: Adams County-Hastings Centennial Commission, 1972), 186-87; Renschler, "Jubilee Days," 1-4.

<sup>3</sup> "Vox Populi," *HDT*, Sept. 10, 1942, 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, *HDT*, Sept. 21, 1942, 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, *HDT*, Oct. 12, 1942, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Creigh, *Adams County*, 1035; U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. *Fourteenth-Seventeenth Census of the United States, 1920-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office) V. III (1922), 604; V. III (1932), 95; V. II (1943), 700. Hastings population figures from 1870 to 1940 were: 1870, 0; 1880, 2,817; 1890, 13,584; 1900, 7,188; 1910, 9,338; 1920, 11,647; 1930, 15,490; 1940, 15,145.

<sup>7</sup> "City Buzzing In Preparation For War Plant," *HDT*, June 11, 1942, 1; Creigh, *Adams County*, 198, 206; "Hastings Population Now 22,252, C. of C. Figures Show," *HDT*, Aug. 12, 1943, 1; Interview of Ruth Mullen by Wanda Caswell, Apr. 2, 1991, OR 16-5, transcript, Oral History Collection, Adams County Historical Society, Hastings, Nebr. (hereafter cited as ACHS); *Polk's Hastings City Directory, 1939* (Omaha: R. L. Polk, 1939), 11; *Polk's Hastings City Directory, 1944* (Omaha: R. L. Polk, 1944), 7; Interview of Reba Yeakle by Will

## Hastings and the NAD

DeRosear, December 1991, OR 16-2, transcript, ACHS.

<sup>8</sup> "Acquire Land For Navy," *HDT*, Sept. 22, 1942, 7; "Naval Ammunition Depot," 1; "Plant Building Starts," *HDT*, July 13, 1942, 1; "Start Land Appraisals," *HDT*, July 15, 1942, 1; "Your Souvenir Picture of NAD," *PK*, Dec. 7, 1945, 4.

<sup>9</sup> "Fifty-Five New Families Move To Hastings in Past Two Weeks," *HDT*, July 15, 1942, 5; "New Families in Hastings Exceed 300 During July," *HDT*, Aug. 18, 1942, 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Hastings City Directory, 1944*, 7; "Sharp Gains for City," *HDT*, Feb. 3, 1943, 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Hastings City Directory, 1939*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> "Allot Funds For School," *HDT*, July 17, 1943, 3; "City Granted Recreation Funds," *HDT*, Jan. 29, 1944, 1; "City Recreation Department Plans Full Schedule of Games, Social Activities for Children of Working Mothers," *PK*, May 26, 1944, 3; "Dance Given For Service Officers," *HDT*, May 24, 1943, 8; "Discuss Race Problem," *HDT*, Feb. 14, 1944, 7; "Events In Society: Hastings Women In Wartime Role," *HDT*, Oct. 20, 1943, 3; "Lanham Fund To Hastings," *HDT*, Aug. 31, 1943, 1; "N.A.D. Men Attend Dance At Hastings College," *PK*, May 11, 1945, 6; "Spencer Park Nursery Opens This Week," *PK*, May 12, 1944, 6; "Trailer Camp Library Has Successful Start as Project in Hastings," *HDT*, Aug. 14, 1943, 7.

<sup>13</sup> "City Lacks In Housing," *HDT*, July 29, 1942, 7; "Dedicate New Homes," *HDT*, Jan. 6, 1943, 1; "Fair Rents," *HDT*, Sept. 11, 1942, 6; "Need 895 More Homes," *HDT*, Apr. 19, 1943, 1; "Occupy First New Homes," *HDT*, May 5, 1943, 1; Carol Shepherd, "Spencer Park," *Historical News*, 15 (August 1982): 1; "Small Ones, Too," *HDT*, Sept. 14, 1942: 4; "Speed Work On Housing," *HDT*, June 30, 1942, 1; "War Workers Normal Folks," *HDT*, July 16, 1942, 7; "WPB Okays War Homes," *HDT*, Jan. 2, 1943, 1; Yeakle interview.

<sup>14</sup> "Fair Rents," *HDT*, Sept. 11, 1942, 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*; "Pledge Aid to Fair Rent Group," *HDT*, Sept. 12, 1942, 1; "Small Ones, Too," *HDT*, Sept. 14, 1942, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Yeakle interview.

<sup>17</sup> "The Home Front," *Nebraska History* 72 (Winter 1991): 191.

<sup>18</sup> Mullen interview.

<sup>19</sup> "Serious Housing Shortage Looms," *HDT*, July 20, 1942, 10; "Stein Furniture Ad," *HDT*, July 13, 1942, 4.

<sup>20</sup> "Banks, Stores Open Evenings For Workers," *PK*, Mar. 24, 1944, 1; Creigh, *Adams County*, 215; "Pass Trailer Ordinance," *HDT*, July 6, 1942, 1; "Personnel Urged to Shop on Mondays," *PK*, June 8, 1945, 1; "Stores to Be Open Late Monday Nights," *PK*, Apr. 7, 1944, 1; "Stores to Open Thursday Nights," *HDT*, Sept. 9, 1942, 1.

<sup>21</sup> "Depot Wants Men, Women," *HDT*, Mar. 18, 1944, 1; "54-Hour Week at Depot," *HDT*, Apr. 10, 1945, 1; "Hastings Highest In Labor Shortage," *HDT*, Mar. 3, 1944, 1; Interview of Elaine Hatten by Will DeRosear, January 1992, OR 16-3, transcript, ACHS; "Vox Populi," *HDT*, Mar. 9, 1944, 8. A Class One labor shortage area was one in which there was "an acute shortage of labor and in which any existing war contracts should not be renewed unless facilities in other areas cannot be found. Also no new facilities should be classed in a Class One area or any new contracts for hitherto unprotected material should be placed," *HDT*, Mar. 3, 1944.

<sup>22</sup> Shepherd, "Spencer Park," 2.

<sup>23</sup> Creigh, *Adams County*, 331; "Discuss Negro Center: Colored Troops May Be Sent to Navy Plant," *HDT*, Dec. 3, 1942, 1; "Sioux Indians on the War-path Against Japs, Nazis," *HDT*, Nov. 26, 1942, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Polenberg, "The Good War? A Reappraisal of How World War II Affected American Society," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 100 (July 1992): 321.

<sup>25</sup> Yeakle interview.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> "The Home Front," 202.

<sup>28</sup> Hatten interview.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*; "Sioux Indians," *HDT*, Nov. 26, 1942, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Yeakle interview.

<sup>31</sup> "Discuss Negro Center," *HDT*, Dec. 3, 1942, 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*; Creigh, *Adams County*, 214, 331; Todd L. Petersen, "Kearney, Nebraska, and the Kearney Army Air Field in World War II," *Nebraska History*, 72 (Fall 1991): 124; "Raid Negro Gambling Place," *HDT*, July 12, 1943, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Creigh, *Adams County*, 809; Hatten interview.

<sup>34</sup> "Housing Plan is Opposed," *HDT*, Oct. 26, 1942, 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Shepherd, "Spencer Park," 2; "Vox Populi," *HDT*, Nov. 1, 1943, 6.

<sup>37</sup> "News in Brief," *HDT*, Nov. 27, 1943, 9.

<sup>38</sup> "Prairie Village New Project," *PK*, Feb. 22, 1944, 3.

<sup>39</sup> "Colored Sailors and Wives Make Prairie Village Shipshape," *PK*, Oct. 22, 1943, 1; "Housewives Keep Village Spotless," *PK*, Nov. 19, 1943, 3; "Prairie Village New Project," *PK*, Feb. 22, 1942.

<sup>40</sup> Creigh, *Adams County*, 210, 809; "Plan Second Camp Unit," *HDT*, Sept. 9, 1942, 1; "Vox Populi," *HDT*, Sept. 10, 1942, 8; Yeakle interview.

<sup>41</sup> "Act on Trailer Parking," *HDT*, Nov. 24, 1942, 1, 9; Creigh, *Adams County*, 210; "Will Enforce Ordinance," *HDT*, Aug. 28, 1942, 1.

<sup>42</sup> "Vox Populi," *HDT*, Sept. 10, 1942, 8.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, *HDT*, Sept. 26, 1942, 4; Sept. 28, 1942, 6.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, *HDT*, Sept. 21, 1942, 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, *HDT*, Oct. 12, 1942, 6.

<sup>46</sup> "Efficiency of Two Depot Recruiters Commended by WMC Manager," *PK*, July 4, 1944, 3; "Fathers, Mothers, and Daughter Give 'All' To War Effort As They Work on Depot," *PK*, Nov. 17, 1944, 3; "From All Over the World, War II Vets Come to Depot to Continue War Effort," *PK*, Aug. 4, 1944, 3; "Mayme Delimont, White-Haired 'Mother' of the Depot, Comes Back To Old Pioneer Camping Ground to Brew Good 'Cawfee' for Workers," *PK*, Sept. 22, 1944, 2; "Spencer Park Residents Have Own Little City," *HDT*, June 24, 1944, 7; "W. C. Porter, First Man Employed Here After Army Discharge By Point System," *PK*, June 8, 1945, 3; "Youngsters of 60 & 70 Aid War Effort at Depot," *PK*, Dec. 3, 1943, 1.

<sup>47</sup> "Expected Increased School Enrollment For Coming Year," *HDT*, Aug. 24, 1942, 2; "Hastings Schools Open Today," *HDT*, Aug. 3, 1942, 1; "Nearly 5,000 Pupils Will March Off to School Monday," *HDT*, Aug. 30, 1943, 7; Shepherd, "Spencer Park," 3; Yeakle interview.

<sup>48</sup> "Approve Citizen Aid," *HDT*, Sept. 19, 1942, 1; Creigh, *Adams County*, 210; "Good Suggestion," *HDT*, Sept. 19, 1942, 8; "Man Accosts Young Women," *HDT*, Sept. 26, 1942, 3; "Mayor's Problem," *HDT*, Sept. 25, 1942, 6; "News in Brief," *HDT*, Mar. 10, 1943, 7.

<sup>49</sup> Yeakle interview.

<sup>50</sup> Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1985).

<sup>51</sup> "Ceremony Marks End of Navy's Reign at the NAD," *HDT*, June 30, 1966, 7; Creigh, *Adams County*, 810-14; Eldon K. Langevin, "Big Upheaval Isn't Over Yet," *Sunday World-Herald Magazine*, June 23, 1946, 22; Thad Livingston, "Hastings NAD the Last 50 Years: Depot Lives Today," *HDT*, Aug. 12, 1992, 1 & 6; "Naval Ammunition Depot," *Historical News*, 25 (1992): 4; "Pig farming now not so stinky," *Kearney Hub*, May 3, 1994, 9A; "Pleasant Hills Tenants to Move to Spencer Park," *PK*, Sept. 14, 1945, 1; Shepherd, 6; "Spencer Open to Veterans," *HDT*, Dec. 6, 1945, 1; "Trailer Camp Is Vacant," *HDT*, Oct. 15, 1945, 7; "Trailers Are Moving Fast," *HDT*, Dec. 7, 1945, 9.