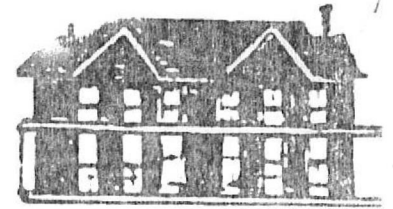




Nebraska
Committee for
the Humanities

Betty McKeone



Robert Henri Museum
Historical Walkway

Nebraska Committee for the Humanities Grant #84-04

"The Rebirth of the Cozad Revelation"

Subject: Robert Henri, and

The History of the Hendee Hotel in Cozad, Nebraska

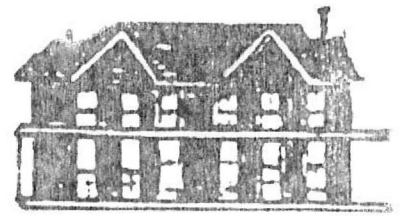
Date: May 2, 1985

Research and author: Betty Menke

Sources:

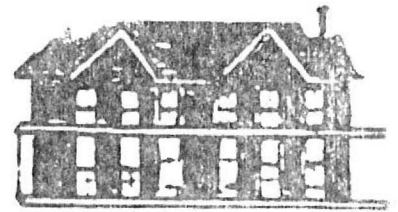
Personal interviews, The New Reporter Newspaper of 1891-93, Notes About the Hendee by Deline Lewis, The Son of the Gambler Man by Mari Sandoz, papers and diaries of H. B. Allen, the Cozad Local Newspaper, The History of Cozad by the Eighth Grade Class of 1927, Dawson County records, the Early History of Cozad and abstracts of the Hendee Hotel, and Dr. Phillip Holmgren of Kearney State College.

It was a beautiful summer Sunday in 1872, clear and fresh, the only movement on the endless prairie being the wind sweeping over the long grass. The Union Pacific westbound train has passed a short time ago, and John Cusack, the Union Pacific Section Boss at Darr, Nebraska, had watched it disappear down the tracks. It was another long prairie day for Cusack, and little did he know that it was to be one of the most memorable days of his life. He had to check some track so he got on the hand car and headed west. Soon he saw a speck on the horizon, a black speck coming toward him down the track. He hurried on to investigate, and he remembered always the strange sight



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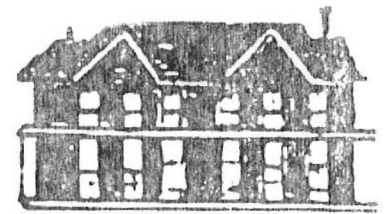
as he approached. It was a man, nattily dressed in a dark swallow-tail suit, the coat tails "flying in the wind", a high silk hat, gold-headed cane, and even a large diamond stick pin in his black cravat. The man was tall, dark, and stately, with beady black eyes that seemed to pierce through a person. The man stopped at the 100th Meridian sign and was looking north. That very spot was a beautiful one because it was in the middle of the fourteen mile valley between the north and south hills, a lovely valley. Mr. Cusack stopped to talk to the man whose name was John J. Cozad from Cincinnati, Ohio. Mr. Cozad had been on the train, had seen the 100th Meridian sign, and had gotten off the train at the next stop, Willow Island and had walked back east down the tracks to the sign. The men talked at length, and Mr. Cozad told Mr. Cusack about his desire to establish a new town right here at the 100th Meridian. He could foresee the future buildings that would stand there: grain elevators, stores, livery stables, cattle yards, churches and schools and fields of grain. He would build a "Meridian Avenue" right from the sign north, a wide tree-lined street and at the end of the avenue he would build a beautiful home for his wife Theresa and his sons Johnny and Robert. His town would be a clean town; there would be no drinking, no gambling, no carousing; it would be a peaceful town, full of energetic, hard-working people, whom he would bring out from Ohio and the eastern states. Convinced that his decision on this location was



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a wise choice, he got on the hand car with Mr. Cusack and returned to Willow Island where John J. Cozad waited for the train back to Ohio.

John J. Cozad did return to Ohio, bought 40 thousand acres of land from the Union Pacific Railroad and began to organize a campaign to urge Ohioans to move west to a new and wonderful country where the soil was fertile, the air pure and the opportunities endless. Mr. Cozad (a title used always in reference to him as no one ever called him John) was a handsome, colorful, vigorous man, always meticulously dressed. He was a man of a few well chosen words; he was aloof and cold. He had established a town called Cozaddale, near Cincinnati, and his business was land speculation although his avocation was gambling, especially the game of Faro. His mother died when he was young; he and his stepmother were not compatible so he left home at the age of twelve. After trying a number of ways to make a living, he decided to make his fortune gambling. He seemed to have a natural ability because of his keen mind and piercing eyes. Some said that he could see right through the cards; however, he watched his opponents carefully until he could detect some mannerism or eye movement that indicated what was in his opponent's hand. It was this astute psychological study of people that made him a winner. He was so good that eventually he was barred from many river boat, railroad and large gambling halls. Theresa once said that between trains in Omaha, he



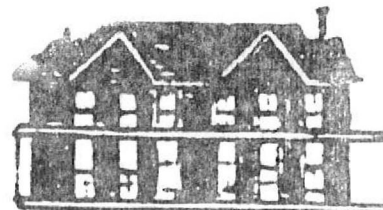
Robert Howe Museum
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made \$50,000.00 in the gambling room. Throughout his life, whenever he needed money, he left town and sought out a Faro game somewhere.

John J. Cozad as a young man had some abdominal trouble, which he feared was cancer, and one of the reasons he wanted to come to the Nebraska prairie was to live in the clear, dry air. He made plans in the spring of 1873 to bring his family, his beautiful Virginia-born southern wife, Theresa Gatewood Cozad and his two sons John and Robert. With them came Theresa's parents, Robert and Julia Gatewood, and her brother Traber. They got off the train at Willow Island and it was dry, hot and dusty as a prairie fire had passed through the area earlier. Mr. Costin and his family lived in the section house, but one part of the house was made ready for the Cozad family. Theresa Cozad did not seem to belong out here on this wild prairie. She was a beautiful lady, always decorously dressed and very sensitive to the fine arts.

In the fall of 1873, John J. Cozad filed a homestead claim on Cozad and began to sell land for \$2.00 to \$6.00 per acre. Some of the others who came out at the beginning were David Claypool, William Claypool, Izaac Pearson, the Cummings and about thirty colonists. Crude sod huts were constructed and served as housing until wood could be shipped out from Ohio. A railroad boxcar was the first official building. The name COZAD was placed on each end of the car and that was the beginning of the settlement.



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People continued to pour in on the trains in 1874. It was a bad year because of the grasshopper plague; they buzzed in from the west flying day and night and ate everything in sight. The days became dark with them and even the railroad tracks became greasy with them.

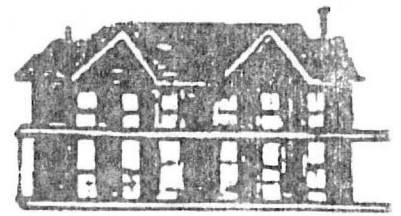
In December of 1873 one of the first buildings constructed with the new wood was a hotel to serve as a home for the Cozad family and to serve as a place for immigrant families to stay until their own homes could be built. Often there would be five or six families living in the little hotel. It was a two story building made of weatherboards and managed by Theresa's mother, Julia Gatewood. There were five other buildings in the new town on a street paralleling the railroad, but on April 29 in 1876 all the buildings and the hotel were destroyed by fire. People were discouraged, and many families left Cozad and returned to their eastern homes. At one time only five families remained in the town. John J. did everything he could to help his colonists. He spent thousands of dollars building a school, business buildings, and a sod bridge across the Platte River in order to give his people work, to get them through the hard times and to get his town started. When he ran out of money he went off on a gambling trip and returned well supplied with bills. Cozad never lost faith in his new town. He made many trips east to promote the town and gradually the colonists began to come again.



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John J. Cozad made plans to build a new hotel a few blocks north of the railroad tracks. It was finished in the spring of 1879, built of bricks one foot long made in Traber Gatewood's brickyard a few miles east of town. The new building had two stories and on the first floor there were three rooms on the south side of the building; the west room was the Office, the middle room the parlor and the east room a place for Robert to use for his printing press and his painting. Even at a young age, Robert aspired to become a great writer and a "picture painter". There was a section sixteen feet by forty feet on the north side of the building which was the kitchen and a large diningroom. It contained a long table four feet by twenty-five feet. At one end of the long table there were chairs for the Cozad family and they used their own fine white bone china and silver napkin rings. Around the rest of the table were benches and tin dinnerware. There were two stairways in the house, and upstairs a number of bedrooms. The three bedrooms on the south side of the upstairs were used by the Cozad family, the middle one being the master bedroom of John and Theresa. The other rooms were small and were used for travelers. Each of the small bedrooms contained an iron bed with a quilt spread, a dresser, a chair, pegs on the wall for clothes and often a braided rug. There was always a wide porch on the south and east of the building and captains chairs where the men of the town would gather to discuss the affairs of the day. There were no hitching posts in front



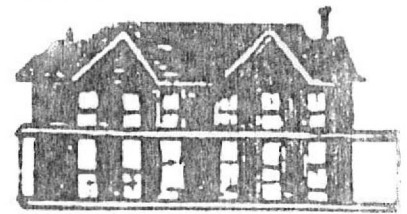
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of the hotel. On the east side of the hotel there were two hitching posts set in cement and they are still there.

When Mr. Cozad was building the hotel, he made an agreement with a man in Ohio named Joseph Riggs to come to Cozad to manage the hotel. Riggs apparently rented the hotel from Cozad, but the lodging and meals for the Cozad family were included as part of the rent. Joseph Riggs brought with him his wife Clara, four children and two servants. Clara Riggs and Theresa Cozad became lifelong friends, and that friendship continued secretly, even after the Cozad family left town.

Theresa loved music and played the piano and urged her sons to have an appreciation of music and fine arts. There were many singing evenings at the hotel. The summers were very hot and Theresa had a hammock put up down by the river where she could spend the afternoons and catch a bit of breeze. She also had a rocking chair down there where it was cooler.

Young Robert Cozad used to complain that when his father was out of town, the food at the hotel was not as good as it should be. He would often eat at his Grandmother Gatewood's boarding house, but his mother would remind him that he would have to pay for his own meals there. One day when his father returned from a trip, Robert complained vehemently to him about the poor food at the hotel, and eventually this led to Joseph Riggs leaving the Cozad Hotel. He went



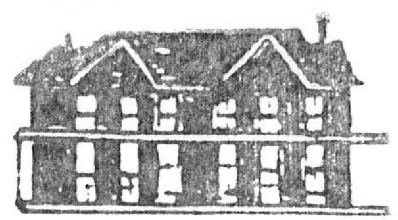
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across the street and started his own establishment and called it "The Riggs House".

Julia Gatewood ran a variety store, a grocery store, and a boarding house on Eighth and Meridian. She rented the upstairs rooms to new families while they waited for their new homes to be built. Her house was called The Beehive.

In Robert Cozad's early journals, which he copiously kept, he mentions writing a little paper which he published as The Runty Papers. He decided to use his initials RHC, connected together, as his signature for all his works. When the restoration workers were working on the Hendee Hotel and were removing old wallpaper, they found on the wall of the hall leading from the office to the diningroom the three initials RHC connected together in a child's handwriting. The workers scraped around it to save the signature so that it could be encased in glass and preserved as is Byron's signature preserved under glass in the Castle of Chillon on Lake Geneva in Switzerland where he wrote his famous poem, The Prisoner of Chillon.

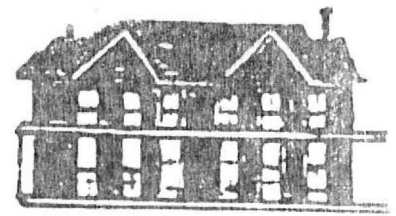
The town continued to grow. John J. Cozad was circulating posters which said: "HO! FOR THE GREAT PLATTE VALLEY! Excursions will leave Cincinnati, Ohio the third Tuesday in September at 7:00 o'clock and every Tuesday thereafter during the year 1879 for Cozad, Dawson County, Nebraska, on the 100th Meridian, 247 miles west of Omaha.



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Cost of a single ticket \$22.00, round trip \$35.00." Settlers came and established claims and struggled with the weather and with the cattlemen who insisted on driving their cattle through Cozad, little caring about people's homes, gardens or hayfields. Tension was high between the settlers and the cattlemen, especially at Oconto, Nebraska, where Print Olive lived.

John J. Cozad had a violent temper, a haughty pride, and very little tact so he constantly was making enemies. He thought the county seat should be at Cozad and not at Plum Creek and this did not win him friends. There were daily problems occurring at the sod bridge with disgruntled workers. One day when John J. returned to town from a business trip he was faced by a man named Alfred Pearson. They argued. Some say, over back wages on the bridge project, others say rent for hay ground; but whatever the reason, Pearson pushed Cozad down and in getting up Cozad thought he saw Pearson go for a knife, and Mr. Cozad shot him, injuring the man, but not killing him. Mr. Pearson died two months later. Because of the high feeling against John J. Cozad and the recent hanging of Mitchell and Ketchum at Oconto and the argument about the site of the county seat, Mr. Cozad decided to leave town immediately. He gathered a few things together, said a hurried goodbye to his family, borrowed a horse from his good friend David Claypool, and lit out across the prairie south where he caught

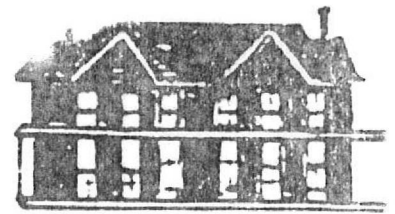


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an eastbound train. The next day someone found his brown hat stuffed in a coyote hole south of town.

Feeling ran high against the Cozads and as soon as Theresa could get the business in shape and sell the property and other assets, she sewed the money in her skirts and in Robert's coat pockets. She sold the hotel to Mr. Hendee and left Cozad forever. Johnny had already gone to Denver to care for the liquidation of the hay business there. The Cozad family just disappeared. A few times John J. Cozad sneaked back to town to meet secretly with the Gatewoods and Dave Claypool, usually in Dave Claypool's back kitchen. Then he left, never to return, even though Traber Gatewood had his name cleared of the shooting. The town of Cozad did not know what happened to the founder. In 1956 Mr. H. B. Allen, Cozad Historian, exposed the whole true story, and Mari Sandoz published her book Son of the Gambler's Man which told the whole story. Theresa and John J. became Mr. and Mrs. Richard Lee and went to Atlantic City, New Jersey, bought land on the famous Boardwalk, and established a gambling house known as Lee's Fort. Johnny became Dr. John Southern, a well known doctor and Robert became Robert Henri, the famous artist and teacher of art in New York.

After Robert Henri left Cozad forever behind him, he traveled to Pennsylvania where he studied art at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts under such teachers as Anshutz and Hovendon. He lived in Pennsylvania with John Sloan and William Glackens, both of whom became



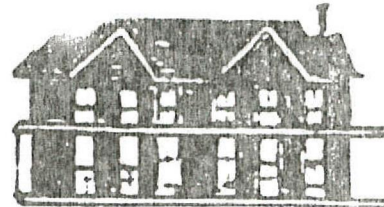
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his lifelong friends. In the summers he would go to Paris to study. There he was exposed to the French Impressionists, and he was especially impressed with Manet, Valasquez and Hals. Their free brush work, spontaneity, and dark tones gave their works vitality. He later employed this knowledge in his own art work. In Paris he painted many small, quick, "on the spot" sketches of city scenes.

He was married to one of his own students, Linda Craig, and they lived in New York City and in Paris in the summer. Linda was an artist also. Robert Henri painted many portraits as this was a good way to make money, but about 1903 he traveled to New England and Maine and began to paint pictures of the sea, the harbor and boats.

Henri was advocating a new kind of "freedom in art". He thought there could be beauty in anything real and urged his students to paint everyday live scenes. Linda died after a few years and Henri was distraught and went to Spain in 1906. He did much painting there, for the movement and color intrigued him. When he returned to New York, Henri gathered about him some associates, artists, many of whom were journalists, and they formed a school of art and art philosophy called "The Eight", a group devoted to developing greater freedom in art expression in America. This theory became known as "The Ash Can Theory of Painting". These men were Robert Henri, Sloan, Glackens, Davies, Luks, Prendergast, Shinn, and Lawson.

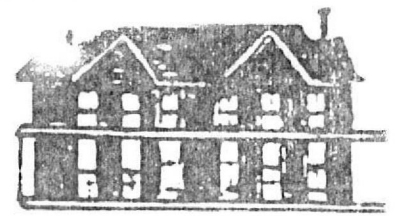


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In 1908 Henri married again, a beautiful redheaded art student, Marjorie Organ, who was a cartoonist for a New York newspaper. She helped him organize the Armory Show of 1913, an exhibition of the works of The Eight, revealing their new ideas about freedom of expression in art.

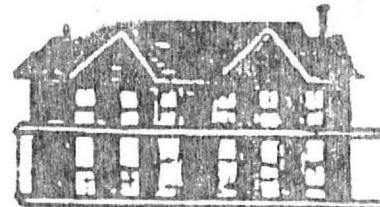
Henri and Marjorie traveled about the United States and to Europe and Henri painted voluminously. They spent many summers in Ireland because Henri loved to paint the Irish people, especially the children because of their purity and innocence. Robert Henry hated pretense of any kind. He loved the common man and often painted him, always with dignity. Henri never had children of his own and so he painted many pictures of children. Henri was a sweet man, even though a rebel against the traditionalism of his era; he was a kind man, the kind of man who attracts students. They all loved him and wanted to paint as he told them to paint.

Robert Henri died on July 12, 1929 at the age of 64 of cancer. He left behind not only a host of students but also a vast array of his own paintings; landscapes, portraits, seascapes, cityscapes, children and subjects from a broad spectrum of American life. Robert Henri, painter and teacher, possessed with new dramatic timeless qualities, was a great influence on the art of his time and all time thereafter.



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The land on which the hotel stood was first owned by Marcus Long via the Homestead Act of 1878. Then the land was transferred to John J. Cozad, then to Theresa Gatewood Cozad, and then to Stephen Hendee. The Hendees owned the hotel from 1885 until 1910. During that time there were several different managers. One was B. F. Lindsey. He advertised in the local newspaper called the News Reporter on November 28, 1891 that The Hendee House was a commercial hotel renting for \$2.00 per day and featuring fine food for dining. The hotel was one of the largest and strongest buildings in town, and it was the hub of activity. People went there to meet, to dine, and to stay overnight. In times of storms mothers took their children there for safety. Traveling salesmen set up their wares there for the local merchants to see. The room near the Office was used for this purpose. One such company was The Buster Brown Shoe Company. The trademark for the company was a midget and his bulldog. Old timers remember the day they were intrigued by the visit of the midget and the bulldog at the Hendee Hotel. They were children then and kept sneaking into the showroom to watch the midget and to tease the dog. Finally the midget chased them out of the room but they continued to watch through the windows. It is interesting to know that Buster Brown shoes are still sold in Cozad. The Phillip Morris midget also visited Cozad in the early days as did Hollywood's "Tallest Man in the World". Cozad was a



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bustling little town and the TransAmerican Highway, the old Lincoln Highway passed right in front of the Hendee Hotel.

The town newspaper called the News Reporter contained such ads as:

"Our table is furnished with best the market affords."

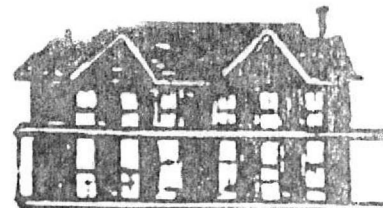
"Come have Christmas dinner at the Hendee House."

"Treat the family to a bountiful Thanksgiving dinner and attend the Thanksgiving Ball at the Hendee House."

"Cigars for sale at the Hendee House: 20¢, 10¢, 5¢, Montez, Peerless, Rosedale, all excellent."

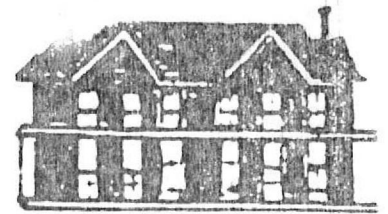
During those years of 1891 to 1893 Martha Trent Durland was the cook at the Hendee House. Miss Maggie Smith accepted a position with the hotel at that time. In 1883 Hannah Nichols was a waiters there. There were millinery shops in the hotel at various times and a photography shop and even seances were held there behind drawn shades. Traveling music teachers came weekly to give music lessons there. Once a man was injured in front of the hotel and he was taken inside to be treated, he stayed several weeks there to recuperate. The Hendee Hotel was never a drovers' hotel, always a commercial and settlers' hotel.

On June 1, 1910, the Hendee sold the hotel to John C. Simondson. Mary Edwards, who was a good friend of Julia Gatewood, wanted to buy and operate the hotel, but her family discouraged her, thinking that



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it was too much responsibility for her. She knew the Hendee family as they ate all their meals at her establishment. The Simondson family did not reside at the hotel. Mr. Simondson remodeled and repaired it. The severe weather, especially the wind, had caused the soft bricks to flake, so he had the entire Hendee Hotel stuccoed and it has remained so since that time. The hotel was a business venture for Mr. Simondson and he rented all of the bedrooms. There were twelve bedrooms upstairs at that time and several more downstairs. Mr. Simondson had paid \$2,000.00 for the property, and on February 23, 1920 sold it to William Foster for \$4,500.00. The Foster family resided in it until it was sold at public auction in 1980 to Wayman May. The Foster family did operate it as a hotel some of the time but in the later years it was the permanent residence of the Foster-Lewis families. It was a pleasant place to live, very cool in summer and warm in winter because of the solid brickwall construction inside and out. The bricks were laid lengthwise, each one twelve inches thick which made for extra strength and very good insulation. The big sink in the kitchen was in the original kitchen. The wainscoating throughout the building is original as are many of the decorative, tin ceilings. The building stood empty from 1980 to 1983 when it was sold to The Robert Henri Foundation, a group of interested citizens. It is being restored to make it as nearly original as possible, and it is being furnished with antiques of the late 1800 period. Hopefully the

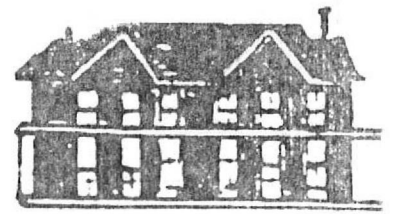


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hotel will be ready to be opened to the public in 1986. It was viewed for the first time in 1984 for the visit of Mrs. Janet LeClair of New York, the heir to the Robert Henri estate. She came to Cozad to visit Robert Henri's early home and to donate valuable papers from the Cozad and Henri Estates and other memorabilia. The hotel is shown frequently to special small groups: the Cozad City Elementary Students, The Dawson County Rural Students and Senior Citizens of the entire community.

The history of Cozad must include mention of the industrialization and how it affected the population of the town. Up until 1930 and even later perhaps the Cozad community was primarily agricultural, and the only stores and business which operated were there to serve the needs of the farmers. As the automobile came into use and became more economical there were more businesses in the town; people came to town to church; they brought their children in to high school; and older people retired to town. This change occurred between 1915 and 1920. The building of the school houses reflects the shifts in population. The population in 1930 was 1,813. The first school was built in 1874 and the next school in 1931.

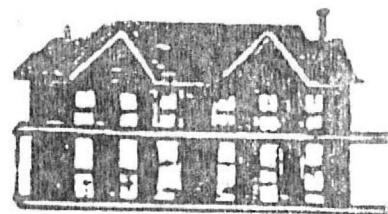
When World WarII ended the town changed dramatically because the alfalfa dehydrating plants came into the Platte Valley and into Cozad. There was a significant growth in population from 1945 to 1955. In 1940 the population was 2,156 and in 1950 2,910. A new school was



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built in 1953. Rural population was declining and more rural school students were coming to town. The next major growth period was in the 1960's. The population in 1960 was 3,184. Several large plants began in Cozad in the 1960's; O. A. Cooper Feed Mills, F & S Sausage Company, Evans Frozen Foods, Nebraska Plastics and the Monroe Automotive Equipment Company. These plants brought many new families to Cozad. From 1960 to 1970 the population jumped to 4,219. A new school was built in 1965. We had gone from a basically agricultural town to a manufacturing town and a change of life style began. More people worked now from 9:00 to 5:00 and this necessitated recreational facilities. Cozad began to build new parks, and baseball diamonds and swimming pools and bowling allies and skating rinks. The development of the Midway Lakes Recreational Area furnished boating and skiing opportunities for the community. Concerts series were instituted and a City Arts Council was formed. The Historical Society was active and eventually the Henri Museum Foundation was formed. As Cozad looks to the future one of its biggest industries will be tourism, as the town is proud of its heritage and culture and will want to share it with the world. The town has consistently grown since 1920 making a steady gain every ten years.

One of the greatest problems in the early days of Cozad was the battle between the cattle herder and the settler. The primary cattle man in the community was Print Olive who drove cattle from Texas to



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Oconto, Nebraska. The cowboys paid little attention to fences and let the cattle trample over the settlers' gardens and lush alfalfa fields. John J. Cozad sent his sons Johnny and Robert to guard his fences, protecting his alfalfa, when the cattle were going through. There were several clashes between John J. Cozad and Print Olive. There is the story of Mitchell and Ketchum, settlers who were killed and then hanged near Callaway, Nebraska. As a result of this, Print Olive was tried in April 1879 and sentenced to life in prison, but was released on December 17, 1880. He was shot and killed on August 18, 1886, in Colorado. After Print Olive left the valley there were no more confrontations between the cattleman and the settlor in the Cozad area.

Robert Henri Cozad loved the prairie and the color and the movement of the vastness of the land. It is reflected in all his art work and in his philosophy of freedom in art. It is sad that he never could reveal his early life or return to the place he had loved as a child. After Robert Henri died in 1929, his estate passed first to his sister-in-law Violet Organ, then to his nephew John LeClair and then to his wife, Janet LeClair. She has restored his studio, called The Loft in Gramercy Park in New York City. The Hendee Hotel will stand as a monumental museum to Robert Henri and to his great contribution to the art of America.