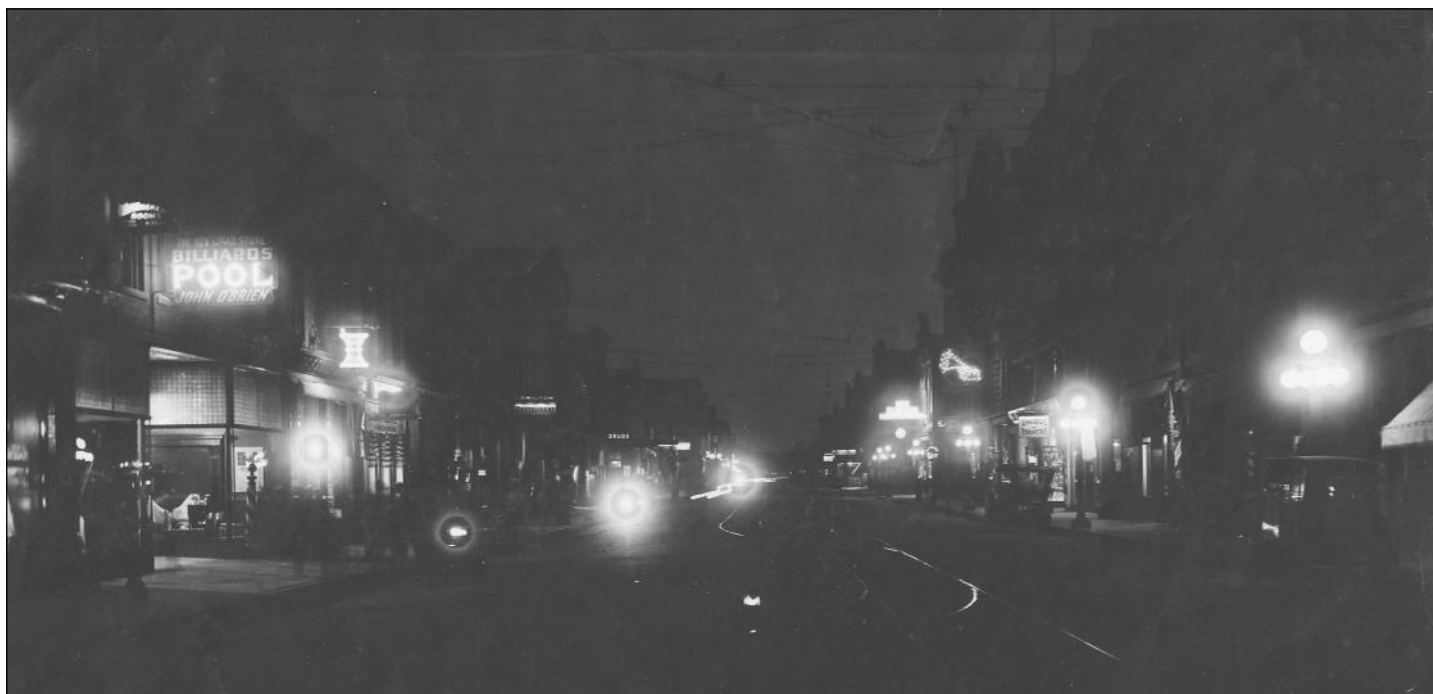


The Blue Earth County

HISTORIAN



Electricity Comes to Blue Earth County



In Mankato, gas lights lit city streets beginning in 1883. Electricity was first used in 1885, but just for some street lights and not used in many homes until 1890. In late 1914, the gas lights along Front Street were replaced with electricity (photo above). It took a lot longer for electricity to light up homes in rural Blue Earth County, see pages 6 and 9 to learn more.

Present History



Bend of the River Photo Club's new photo exhibition on display now, page 7.

Ghosts From the Past



Join us for the 29th Annual Ghosts From the Past featuring *Ghost Towns of Blue Earth County*, page 13.

In this issue:

- Director's Notes 3
- Gift Shop & Art Gallery 4
- Hubbard House 5
- Collections & Exhibits 6
- Every Object Has a Story 7
- Electricity Comes to Rural Blue Earth County 9
- Research Center 13
- Volunteer Opportunities 14
- Around Blue Earth County 18
- Calendar of Events 19

BECHS Mission: To lead in the collecting and promoting of Blue Earth County's history to ensure its preservation for the enrichment and benefit of present and future generations.

The Blue Earth County Historian



Board of Trustees

President, Randy Zellmer, North Mankato
Vice President, Shirley Piepho, Skyline
Secretary, Jessica Beyer, Mankato
Treasurer, Tom Solseth, Mankato
Patrick Baker, Mankato
Dale Benefield, Lake Crystal
Preston Doyle, Mankato
Joe Farnham, Mankato
Sandi Garlow, Mapleton
Jim Gullickson, North Mankato
Elizabeth Harstad, North Mankato
Julie Lux, Mapleton
William Steil, Mankato
Dana Truebenbach, Good Thunder
Marnie Werner, Mankato

Staff

Jessica Potter, Executive Director
Director@BlueEarthCountyHistory.com
Danelle Erickson, Development Manager
Museum@BlueEarthCountyHistory.com
Heather Harren, Communications Manager
Research@BlueEarthCountyHistory.com
Shelley Harrison, Archives & Collections Mgr.
Archivist@BlueEarthCountyHistory.com

History Center & Museum

424 Warren Street, Mankato, MN
507-345-5566
www.BlueEarthCountyHistory.com
Tuesday - Friday 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Saturday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

R.D. Hubbard House

606 South Broad Street, Mankato
507-345-4154
Closed for Season
Open Weekends in December
Christmas at Hubbard House
December 5, 3-7 p.m.; 6, 1-4 p.m.
Walk-in Tours
December 12-13, 19-20, 1-4 p.m.

The Blue Earth County Historian Fall 2015

The Blue Earth County Historian is published quarterly for the members of Blue Earth County Historical Society.

Copyright: *Historian* copyright 2015 by the Blue Earth County Historical Society. All rights reserved. Reproduction of any material from this issue is expressly forbidden without permission of the publisher.

Board of Trustees

Randy Zellmer
President, Board of Trustees

The Blue Earth County Historical Society is a strong organization thanks to our members, donors, dedicated staff and the financial support of Blue Earth County. Soon you will receive our annual campaign letter asking you to financially support the Historical Society as we close out 2015. As we look back over the past year it was through your generous support that we were able to improve the History Center and offer some great exhibits and programs.

The Research Center was relocated to a more spacious and user-friendly room. If you haven't accessed the Research Center recently, I encourage you to stop by and visit with Heather. Whether you are interested in locating information on an ancestor or maybe information on one of the county's historic bridges, Heather is there to help you. I encourage you to take advantage of the organization's resources.

BECHS has hosted several traveling exhibits since expanding to the lower level. I found the exhibit on Minnesota disasters to be both interesting and informative. Our staff supplemented the traveling exhibit with information on the numerous floods that struck our county over the years. The exhibit was followed by the release of the Free Press publication *Washed Away* which our staff helped research and provided many of the photos included in the publication.

Our recent temporary exhibit highlighted the 50th Anniversary of the Minnesota Vikings Training Camp in Mankato. Through the support of the Minnesota Vikings, Visit Mankato and the team's many fans who contributed their memorabilia, BECHS was able to create this exhibit.

Executive Director, Jessica Potter, has many ideas to grow our organization in 2016, which includes adding a staff member to develop programs and educational materials. In addition, we will need to make our final balloon payment towards the building acquisition. It is with your financial contributions that this growth can occur. I encourage you to consider a gift to the Blue Earth County Historical Society.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN SHAPING THE FUTURE OF BECHS?

Consider joining the Board of Trustees.

Applications will open soon;
three-year terms begin in March 2016.

For more information, please contact Jessica Potter or Randy Zellmer

Director's Notes

Jessica Potter, Executive Director

On November 7, 1901, the Blue Earth County Historical Society was founded as a community organization charged with the collection and preservation of the history of Blue Earth County. For 114 years, BECHS has not only served the community as the keeper of history, but also as a community partner, supporter and advocate.

We had many opportunities this year to celebrate and expand our community partnerships. One of the biggest and probably most seemingly unlikely partnerships was with the Minnesota Vikings. What does the Blue Earth County Historical Society have in common with Minnesota's NFL team? Well, a celebration of their history of training camp in Mankato, of course. We were honored to create an exhibit celebrating 50 years of Vikings Training Camp in Mankato through the eyes and collections of the fans. In exchange, the Vikings Public Relations Department promoted the exhibit, provided Vikings alumni for local events and donated the display cases that housed the exhibit.

The great thing about this project was that it also promoted our collaboration with many local businesses. This was a fun summer; we met people



Archives Manager Shelley Harrison with former Minnesota Viking Mick Tingelhoff, August 2015.

from all over the U.S. who travelled to Mankato for training camp. We met Vikings alumni who were humbled that people had collected memorabilia about them and their time with the team. It was an honor for us to meet former Viking Mick Tingelhoff as he explored the exhibit with his wife and daughter one week before being inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Thank you to all of the fans that lent items for the exhibit

and the fans that visited the History Center. Thank you to the following community partners that made this all possible: Buffalo Wild Wings, Jake's Stadium Pizza, Kato Moving and Storage, KEYC,

Mankato Free Press, Minnesota Vikings, MSU, M Library and University Archives, Pepsi-Cola of Mankato, PresenceMaker, Radio Mankato, SignPro, SPX Sports Pix/Quality 1 Hour Foto and Visit Mankato.

Another fun new partnership this fall was with Coughlan Companies. They hosted a charity employee/family 5K on September 12 and invited BECHS to be part of the day. It was a beautiful morning for a 5K with family-friendly games and activities provided by BECHS after the race. In total, the employees raised over \$2,000 for BECHS! Thank you!



Participants of the Coughlan Companies 5K in September

One of our long-standing community partnerships is with our local media. For many years, we have worked with our local media to provide historical content and, at times, context for local issues. Over the years, we have worked on anniversary specials with each of them, including KEYC's *Remembering the Flood of 1965* this past spring, three new books this year with the *Free Press*, and history spots for the Mankato Sesquicentennial in 2002 with KTOE. We also get to celebrate the present and all of the great things that are happening with BECHS and our growing community on a regular basis with monthly spots on both KEYC (first Tuesday at Noon) and KTOE (fourth Thursday at 1 p.m.), and occasional *Glimpses of the Past* articles in the *Free Press*. Each of these news outlets tells today's story, today's moment in history and it is our job to collect and preserve those moments. What a great partnership—preserving today for tomorrow.

And did you know we have a partnership with you? You have invested in BECHS through membership, donations, gift shop purchases and admission and we promise to continue to collect, preserve and present the rich history of Blue Earth County as we have done for the past 114 years!



Gift Shop & Art Gallery News

Danelle Erickson, Development Manager

The air is turning colder and it won't be long before everyone's mind turns to their holiday shopping. Be sure you stop by the History Center Gift Shop for a great selection of unique and local books and gift items. Don't know what to buy? We have BECHS gift certificates and gift memberships to available too.

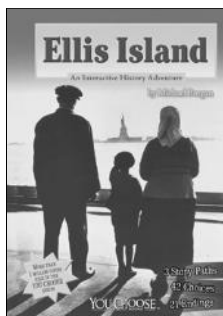
Local Authors

The Gift Shop carries a number of books written by Mankato's most famous author, Maud Hart Lovelace. The entire Betsy-Tacy Series is available as well as some of Maud's other stories including *One Stayed at Welcome*, *Early Candlelight* and collections of short stories by Maud and her husband Delos Lovelace.

Among other local authors in the Gift Shop, you will find a number of BECHS volunteers who have researched and written books for BECHS. Titles include *The Remarkable Men of Garden City*, *Meet the Hubbards*, *The Multifaceted Carp* and *Rapidan Dam: The Construction of a Landmark*.

Local Publishers

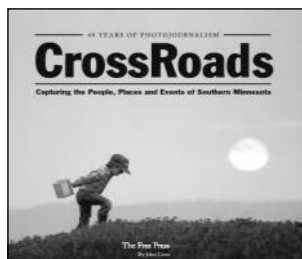
BECHS is excited to add some books from local publisher Capstone. Their popular "You Choose Books" let readers decide the path they will take in various historic settings. These books are a fun, interactive way for kids (and adults) to put themselves in the shoes of people in history.



Minnesota Heritage Publishing is another local publisher. Popular titles include *The History of Red Jacket Valley*, *A Country Doctor Goes to War* and a number of Lovelace related books.

Local Media

Not only has the *Mankato Free Press* been reporting on local news for over 150 years, but they also produce great books. *Washed Away: The 1965 Flood that Changed Mankato* and *Skol! Vikings 50: The History of Training Camp in Mankato* are now available in the Gift Shop. *CrossRoads: Capturing the People, Places and Events of Southern Minnesota* by John Cross, is a collection of Cross'



photos from 40 years of photojournalism and will be available in the Gift Shop on December 1.

Local Artists

Speaking of John Cross, along with his new book, the Gift Shop also has a number of his beautiful photographs. The 8x10 matted photographs are ready to be framed.

The Gift Shop also carries original art by local watercolor artist Gerry Tostenson, fabric artist Grace Keir as well as other handcrafted gift items by local craftspeople.

The History Center is also the one place to view and purchase fine art prints by Mankato artist, Marian Anderson. Topics include: wildlife, Native Americans, mountain men and nostalgic prints of Mankato and beyond. Marian's prints make excellent gifts and purchases support BECHS 100%.



Winter Spirit by Marian Anderson

Stop by the History Center for these and many other exciting books and gifts. Many items are also available at our online store www.BlueEarthCountyHistory.com/shop. Marian's art can also be viewed at www.MarianAnderson.com.

**Give the Gift of History
this Holiday Season!**

Memberships, Art, Gift Certificates

Browse the enclosed
Holiday Gift Catalog for ideas



Historic R.D. Hubbard House

Tiffany Jenson and Elizabeth Kramer, Hubbard House Assistants

With school tours, wedding parties and almost a thousand visitors, we had a busy summer here at the Hubbard House!

Our August Medicine Show was a hit. Guests were entertained by snake oil salesmen, fortunetellers, house tours and the spirited musical styling of "The Cherry Sisters."



Thank you to our incredible volunteers who brought the past to life through this annual event.



A huge thank you to the dedicated members of the Twilight Garden Club for their hard work in the Hubbard House

Gardens. The beautiful gardens were a part of the Blooming Pretty Garden Tour in June and have been the backdrop to many photographs this summer.

The summer has come to an end and the house is now closed for the season. It will open again on December 5 and 6 for the annual "Christmas at the Hubbard House." The house will be decorated for a Victorian family Christmas and feature costumed characters. Take time to visit with each actor to learn what part they play in the bustling Hubbard household. If you are interested in volunteering as a



"Christmas at the Hubbard House," 2014

character or tour guide at the Hubbard House, please contact Danelle.

"Christmas at the Hubbard House" takes place December 5 and 6. The house is open for walk-in tours the following two weekends.

Christmas at the Hubbard House

An Annual Holiday Tradition

A Hubbard Family Christmas

Saturday, December 5

3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Sunday, December 6

1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Costumed Characters · Holiday

Gift Shop · Refreshments

Adults \$7.50 / Children 5-17 \$5

BECHS Members & under 5 FREE



OPEN FOR TOURS

December 12-13 and 19-20, 1-4 p.m.

Adults \$5 / Children 5-17 \$2

BECHS Members & under 5 FREE

606 South Broad Street
Mankato, MN

BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Visit www.bechshistory.com for more details

CELEBRATE Family History MONTH

Explore family history resources available at the Blue Earth County History Center. Master Genealogist available all day for questions.



SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17
10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Free Research Center Admission



Collections & Exhibits

Electrifying Minnesota Coming Soon

Shelley Harrison, Archives & Collections Manager

We want to spark your curiosity! The Blue Earth County Historical Society is excited to be hosting our next Minnesota State Historical Society Traveling Exhibit, *Electrifying Minnesota*, opening November 6, 2015.

Imagine what it was like for the first time to have electricity available at the flick of a switch. *Electrifying Minnesota* will engage visitors to explore the role of electricity in our past. The exhibit was created by The Bakken Museum in partnership with the Minnesota History Center. It includes an interactive map showing how electrical service was extended throughout the state, as well as oral history videos of the men and women who built the electrical system. There are also interactive components that reveal the power of electricity and how it shapes our lives. Visitors will discover how electricity evolved from the first telegraph line to current energy issues through twelve shockingly interesting panels. They will be able to follow the path electricity has taken from the Mankato Gas and Electric Plant to today's sustainable energy.

In addition to the exhibit panels, we will display original materials from various collections in our archives, including photographs, documents and other objects. This will help us take an illuminating look at how electricity has transformed lives in Minnesota and Blue Earth County for well over 100 years. The exhibit also explores the story of how Blue Earth County met the challenge of bringing electrical power to the rural areas and the role the Rural Electrification Administration took in organizing the Blue Earth and Nicollet Electric Cooperative (BENCO).

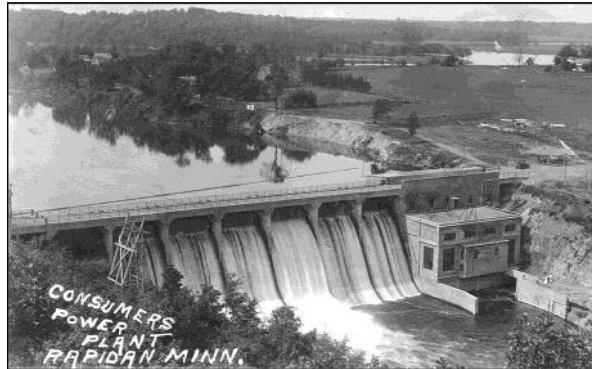
Mankato had electricity by 1885 and with the construction of the Rapidan Dam outlying communities had electricity by 1914; however many families in rural areas of Blue Earth County did not

have electricity until the mid-1930s. In fact, by 1935 only about 7% of Minnesota's residents in rural areas had electric service. This is just some of the power struggles between rural and municipal areas that have occurred while getting electricity to all corners of Minnesota. Today we take it for granted that electricity is all around us, but it took a huge effort to get electricity here.

Electrifying Minnesota opens at the Blue Earth County History Center on November 6 and runs through March 27,

2016. The Minnesota Historical Society Traveling Exhibits Program has been made possible by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the vote of Minnesotans on November 4, 2008, and is administered by the Minnesota Historical Society.

Next Traveling Exhibit: *The Invisible Hands that Feed Us* from the Carver County Historical Society opens in April 2016.



Consumers Power Plant at Rapidan, 1911

Electrifying Minnesota

A traveling exhibit from the Minnesota History Center and The Bakken Museum.

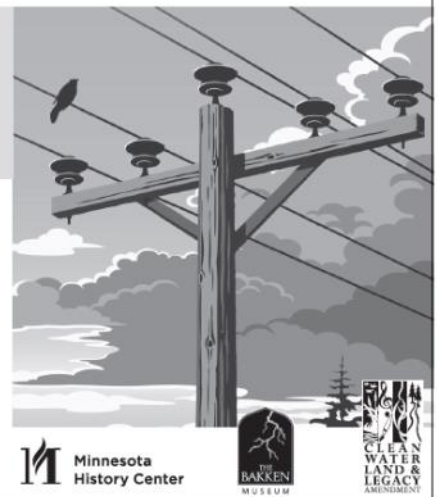
IMAGINE LIGHTING YOUR HOME at the flick of a switch—for the first time! Through film, photography and interactive activities, this exhibit illuminates the amazing ways electricity has shaped life in Minnesota.

Don't miss it—

Blue Earth County History Center

November 6, 2015 - March 27, 2016

FREE



Every object has a story...

By Grace Keir, Textile and Clothing Historian and BECHS Volunteer

One of the ongoing projects at BECHS is to review and update records for all of the textiles and clothing items in the collection. When reviewing these items, I often look for information about the wearer by finding obituaries and other relevant data. This is done to verify that the date of origin given when the donation was made matches the time the person would have worn the item of clothing. In doing this, I often find interesting details about the person who used the garment.

Recently, I was examining a lovely black coat from the 1910s worn by Mrs. L.G.M. Fletcher, nee Susan "Susie" Dyer, a pioneer resident of Blue Earth County. According to her obituary, dated May 28, 1941, Susie was born in 1845 in New Sharon, Maine. She graduated from the State Normal School in Farmington, Massachusetts and taught in Maine and Massachusetts. In 1868, Susie came to



Mankato at the request of George M. Gage who was the first president of Mankato Normal School and had known Susie in Farmington.

In 1871, Susie married L.G.M. Fletcher and became the second mother to his three children. Together, the couple had seven children. When reading about Susie in the Research Center obituary book, I noticed obituaries for two of her children. One was her son Gilbert Fletcher (1883-1933) who had an interesting art career and was a nationally known figure in the art world. You can learn more about Gilbert and his art by visiting the Fletcher display in the Museum.

The other obituary I read was for Susie's daughter, May Fletcher (1874-1959). May was a teacher in Mankato and Minneapolis and was the founder of the Mankato Council of Camp Fire Girls. Like her brother, May also became nationally known, at least in the Camp Fire Girls circles, for her book on Camp Fire ceremonials.

Finding more information about the person who wore a clothing item adds more to the provenance of the items in our collection. If you are considering donating an item from your family collection, please provide as much information about the person that used the item as possible. It helps us tell their story.

HISTORY CENTER ART GALLERY

Bend of the River Photo Club "Present History"

October 1 - December 31



Dodd Ford Bridge
by Randy and Rachel Wood

Bend of the River Photo Club members will showcase a collection of photographs taken in Blue Earth County at the new History Center Art Gallery. "We want to show the landscapes, structures, people, animals, and plants of the County, as well as the events that are happening in our present in order to record them for the future, our history. The club is a collaboration ranging from professional photographers to individuals out for a good shot." Join participating Club members at the Opening Reception on Tuesday, October 20, 6-8 p.m.

Photo featured on the front cover: *Butternut Store* by John Othoudt



Education & Outreach

Making Local History Accessible to All Ages

Monthly Educational Opportunities at the History Center

Our History Matters

Monthly educational series promoting and celebrating local history featuring local historians and authors. Held the fourth Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. Free for BECHS Members, \$5 Non-members.



Roger Stoufer shared from his book *Tale of a Teacher* during August's Our History Matters. His book is available in the Gift Shop.

Upcoming Programs

October 22-23 – SPECIAL EVENT
Ghosts from the Past: Blue Earth County Ghost Towns (see page 13)

November 19* – History of the Welsh Part II, with Bob Douglas

December 17* – John Cross, author and photographer of *CrossRoads*

January 28 - Living in a Log Cabin, with Larry Kortuem

**3rd Thursday due to holidays*

Remember When Coffee Club



Love history? Love to swap stories of the good old days? Looking for a place to connect with other history enthusiasts? **Come to the History Center the first Tuesday of each month at 10 a.m. for BECHS's**

Remember When Coffee Club. This is an informal opportunity to share memories and photos with fellow local history enthusiasts at the History Center. Attendance and rich conversation continues to grow. There is no formal program, just a conversation topic to get the group started. Coffee, tea and light refreshments are provided.

**Join us for these
Conversation Topics:**

November 3 - Veterans

December 1 - Holidays

January 5 - New Years Memories



World War II veterans, 1940s

Young Historians



Christina Shortall led September's Young Historians as they explored Native American heritage.

Young Historians is a monthly, free, hands-on history workshop for school-age children. It meets the 2nd Saturday of each month, September thru May from 10 a.m. to Noon. This year, Young Historians will explore the traditions and customs of the ethnic groups that called Blue Earth County home, from the Dakota to our modern day immigrant groups. Young Historians is made possible through the generous support of the Grace Jefferson Educational Fund.

Upcoming Workshops

November 14 - Norwegian

December 12 - Welsh

January 9 - German

Pre-registration for workshops is encouraged; contact Heather for more information and to register. If you are interested in sharing your ethnic history and traditions with our Young Historians, please contact Heather.

ELECTRICITY COMES TO RURAL BLUE EARTH COUNTY

By Hilda A. Parks

For many of us today, electricity is something we take for granted. We turn on lights, open the refrigerator and run hot water without thinking about what makes it possible. Less than a century ago, however, much of rural Blue Earth County was still in the dark.

It wasn't until 1938 that electricity began to reach rural Blue Earth County. Hundreds of poles were erected and miles of wire strung. Customers were enrolled and farm houses, barns and out buildings wired before a single farm could benefit. Rural electrification would "usher in" a new order, stated the *Mankato Free Press* on June 28, 1938, the day after the first poles were set.



REA Electric Show Comes To This Area Next Monday

Plans are complete for the REA farm equipment show to be held next Monday and Tuesday, August 5 and 6. The big tent will go up

tension service, the Rural Electrification administration, farm electric equipment manufacturers, and the South Central and Blue Earth.

Here's how the REA show's big tent will look when pitched south of Madelia next Monday.

Demonstrations showing how running water may be used to increase poultry production, its value in the dairy, in the pigyard, for fire protection, for the effortless

Will Demonstrate Advantages Of Power Lines to Farms

Monday evening's program includes a cooking contest, discussions of electrical costs, and a demonstration of the new electric

The women, in the meantime, may attend extensive programs in the big tent, where there will be groups

Blue Earth County Enterprise, August 1, 1940

The city of Mankato began to get electricity in the 1880s. A few stores and houses near Hubbard Milling, where the electricity was being manufactured, were wired and received electricity a few hours a day. By 1901 there was 24-hour service, although the plant was shut down during the day on Sunday to give the plant crew some time off. In 1910, with the completion of the Rapidan Dam, unlimited electricity could be brought into the city from the dam, rather than being produced locally in smaller quantities. This was the beginning of transmission lines to move electricity great distances.

The remainder of the county was not completely dark. Some villages, like Amboy, had installed gas lighting plants for street lights. However, the Rapidan Dam allowed more villages to receive electricity. Wires were strung to Kasota and Lake Crystal in 1912. By 1915, Good Thunder, Mapleton, Minnesota Lake, Garden City, Amboy and Vernon Center all had electricity available.

Not even every farm remained dark. Diesel engines and wind powered generators could be found in barns or basements of homes. Kerosene could be used to run some appliances. The Delco-Light Farm Electric Plant was considered a significant advancement in rural electrification. Sold by the Mankato Farm Light and Power Company, the plants ran on gasoline engines, could be hand-operated and were small enough that they could be carried from barn to house. "There is almost as much difference between electric lights and coal oil lights as there is between night and day," read Delco advertising. Another advertisement, found in the *Free Press*,

reads: "It not only provides light but it provides power – power to furnish running water to all parts of the home, at the water trough or wherever you may wish it – power to milk the cows, to clip the horses, to shear the sheep, to run the separator, the churn, the grindstone, the fanning mill, the washing machine, the electric iron, the sewing machine, and the vacuum cleaner." Other advertisements were intended to shame the farmer into buying the plant to make his wife's job easier.

The Delco Plant was not an easy sell. Insurance regulations did not allow more than one gallon of gasoline inside a house. Thus most used kerosene, causing knocking or reducing the power. The motto among salesmen was "Delco-Light Sells Best at Night."

It was estimated there were 98 Delco Plants operating in Blue Earth County in the 1930s. The electric plants worked well, were cheap to purchase and had no monthly bills. This meant many were reluctant to give up their plants in exchange for electricity coming through wires.

In 1934, President Franklin Roosevelt established The Rural Electrification Administration (REA) "to carry electricity to as many farms as possible in the shortest possible time and have it used in quantities sufficient to affect rural life." Although nearly 90% of people living in towns and cities had electricity, only 10% of rural people did. The private utility companies, who supplied electricity for most users, thought it would be too expensive to string all the wire that would be needed to reach every isolated rural farm. They also thought farmers were too poor to afford it. If electricity were to come to rural America, the government would need to be involved. Ultimately, because farmers used more energy than urban people, the extra cost of bringing the power lines to the farms was partially offset.

With the passage of The Rural Electrification Act of 1936, between 1936 to 1938 \$210 million dollars was spent on 100,000 miles of lines, bring electricity to 220,000 farms throughout the United States. Blue Earth County was not to be left behind. The Blue Earth-Nicollet Cooperative Electric Association was established in June 1937, with offices at 115 West Hickory in Mankato. It was one of the largest cooperative electric associations in the state. The first officers were: President L.P. Kruse

of Garden City, Vice President E.W. Johnson of St. Peter, Secretary Fred. D. Weaver of Mapleton and Treasurer Walton Pell of St. Peter. Initially financed by a \$150,000 government loan, at 2.88% interest, it planned to wire 1700 farms in the two counties. A writer for the *Free Press* wrote, on February 25, 1938, "the rural electrification project looks something as a showcase filled with candy appears to a child."

Farmers did need to be convinced. Land also needed to be obtained for right-of-way for the lines. REA field men went farm to farm to sell the rural families. There was a \$5.00 sign-up fee, and wiring the buildings on the farm was up to the owners, at their expense. It was discovered most newer houses were already wired, in the hope that the lines would soon come through. Whether or not a farmer was able to prepare his buildings for electricity, and would consider paying a monthly electric bill, often depended on the fields. When it had been a good year for crops, more people joined.

Project superintendent for the initial work was E.M. Nash and Ellerbe & Co. of St. Paul was designed the lines and served as project engineers. A call for bids was put out on February 18, 1938. The work was divided into two parts: construction of the approximately 122 miles of transmission line and erecting a substation. Cater Construction Co. of Kansas City won the contract for the construction of the lines. Langford Electric Co. of Minneapolis built the substation at Washburn's Corner, west of Rapidan (Hwy. 169 and Co. Road 9). The current would be ultimately provided by Northern States Power.

The work began in Nicollet County, at Traverse, west of St. Peter. Located on the railroad line, poles had been unloaded there and at Lake Crystal. Approximately 2,300 poles would be needed for the 122 miles of main line to be completed by August. Work had been delayed two months waiting for the delivery of the poles, which had been held up by a strike at the treating plant in the Twin Cities. The first poles were swung into place, starting at noon on June 27, 1938, and more than a dozen poles had already been erected by later afternoon, reported the *Free Press* the following day.

The main line, when completed, would have five sections and serve 175 customers. Feeder lines would be added in later years. The line ending at

Traverse would go through North Star, west along Highway 99, then south into Blue Earth County, crossing Highway 60 just west of the junction and following Highway 169 to the substation at Washburn's corner.



Installation of some of the first electric poles. *Mankato Free Press*, July 2, 1938

The southeast line would end east of the Willow Creek creamery and store, running almost to Lake Crystal and then to the substation. The west line ended one mile from the county line in Butternut Valley Township, running east until it intersected with the Traverse line near Highway 83. The east section of the line ended in Medo Township, with a section going into LeSueur County. On September 16, 1938, the Stacy Little farm in Judson Township was the first farm connected in Blue Earth County.

By September 1939, approximately 678 miles of line had been laid, serving 1,000 customers. An additional 188 miles of branch lines were installed in 1941, although the work was held up for lack of copper wire. The work would continue into the 1950s, reaching the remotest farms in the county. The entire project would cover 700 miles of Blue Earth, Nicollet and a small section of LeSueur counties.

The greatest benefit of electricity for farmers was running water. Electricity made it possible to pump water into pipes, thus bringing running water to barns and houses. No longer did quantities of water need to be carried for livestock. An added benefit was having water available when there were fires.

Electric light allowed farmers to set their own hours for milking rather than depending on daylight. Electricity also brought milkers, cream coolers and sterilizers for dairy farmers. Because electric separators ran smoother, more cream was separated from the milk. All these conveniences led to larger and larger herds. There was even discussion about air conditioning barns with homemade plants made possible by running water.

Electricity in the hen house increased egg production, especially in the winter when eggs were at the highest prices. With light, the hens thought it was day, and continued to lay. Electricity also allowed for electric brooders, a safer option.

The appreciation felt for the electricity on the farm was probably just as appreciated in the home. Not only was there running water, there was hot water. Indoor plumbing was not far behind. Both innovations brought ease of cleaning and bathing.

Electric lights were safer than kerosene lanterns, and there was no longer a need to clean lamp chimneys and change wicks regularly. The improved lighting also meant that even on the darkest winter days, there was time for sewing or reading. With the end of wood-burning cook stoves, so ended the need to remove ashes and chop and carry wood. Electric refrigerators ended the need for cutting and carrying ice for the ice box.

Smaller electric appliances made life easier in many ways. Vacuum cleaners meant there was no longer a need to haul carpets outside and beat them to remove dust and soot. Radios operated by battery sets became obsolete. An article in the *Blue Earth County Enterprise* for January 27, 1939 reported the electric flatiron was the most popular and common household tool, present in 90% of homes. Electric curling irons were even being advertised as early as 1938.

The REA and Rural Extension Agents sponsored shows into the 1940s, demonstrating the uses of electricity for the farm and home. A trailer would be set up with a fully-functioning electric kitchen. Demonstrations were presented on the ease of doing laundry, or the use of modern small appliances. Another trailer contained an operating bathroom with hot and cold running water such as could be built in a farm house. The benefits of electricity for dairy, hog, or poultry farms could be shown, and farmers living near the site might even bring a wagon-load of

New Electric Flatirons Ease Work and Cost of Laundering



Clothes last longer with a modern light-weight automatic electric iron.

Part of a newspaper article from the Rural Electrification Bureau, describing the benefits of electric flatirons, *Blue Earth County Enterprise*, January 26, 1940

corn to be ground for feed. Fire prevention was a key selling point.

Many people today who remember the coming of electricity to their home were children when it occurred.* One man recalled they had a light in the living room with four 25-watt bulbs, but they thought the room was almost too bright for their eyes. He also remembers how wonderful it was not to have to haul water for the animals and not to fear the brooder house would catch on fire. Another man remembers the change of being able to milk after dark.

A woman exclaimed the new electricity was “a miracle,” and thought the improvements it brought to the bathroom were the best - no one needed to empty the chamber pot every morning! An avid reader described electricity as “heavenly” when she didn’t need to read by kerosene lamps or put away her book when it got dark. Another woman’s first response when asked what she remembered about first getting electricity was “no more kerosene lamps!” She said the first thing her family bought was an electric stove. They had previously made one step toward modernization with a gasoline engine on the washing

machine. Indoor plumbing came later. Because her father seemed in no hurry to put in the pipes, her mother finally started digging the trenches.

The house was wired, the lines strung to the road, said another, and the Christmas tree was all decorated, including electric Christmas lights. The children in the family were so excited, hoping the electricity would arrive before Christmas Eve. It did!

Like often happens in a time of progress, there were some that weren’t happy about rural electrification. Some of the electric companies, who had previously declined to extend their lines into rural areas, began to see the REA as unfair competition, and they objected to rates being set for electricity. And in the middle of all of the convenient appliances, one little girl was sad she could no longer beg for ice chips to suck on from the ice man!

Sources

Blue Earth County Historical Society vertical files including the *Blue Earth County Enterprise* and *Mankato Free Press*

FROST-BENCO Electric 50th Anniversary booklet

*Author’s Note: Newspaper articles provided much information on the coming of electricity; however, I was also interested in the personal stories and asked friends and neighbors to share their memories.

CALL FOR ARTISTS

Now accepting proposals from local artists to be featured in the History Center Art Gallery. Exhibits run for three months.



All art mediums will be considered including photography, wall sculpture, fabric, mixed media, paintings and drawings including oil, acrylic, pastels, ink, graphite, etc. Work must be able to be hung on a wall and must be family friendly to be considered. For more information or for an application, please contact Shelley.



Around the Research Center

Heather Harren, Communications Manager

Fall is in the air and soon it will be time for the Holidays once again. Do you have someone who is hard to shop for? Or are you looking for a gift they will cherish for a lifetime? Why not give the gift of history through a family tree! The Research Center is a great place to start your search.

If you are new to the world of genealogy, we can assist you in locating your Blue Earth County ancestors. Start with what you know: when did your grandparents died, when did your parents got married, etc. With this information, we may be able to locate marriage announcements, obituaries or additional relatives. With names, we can also check our photograph collection to search for any family photographs that may have been donated over the years.

Another holiday gift idea we can help with is compiling information and images about the places in Blue Earth County where your family resided. Perhaps a little history of the time and place where your parents or grandparents grew up. This may help to spur memories of their time growing up which can then be shared at your holiday events.

These types of gifts can be passed down through generations as well. A gift of genealogy is a great way to share with the younger generations where your family came from, or if grandpa's family has owned that same farm for over 100 years. These stories may amuse young children or help adults understand their parents better.

Next time you are in the area, stop by the Research Center to see what you can find here. It may help with your holiday shopping!

Blue Earth County Trivia

1. What was the name of the last steamboat to visit Mankato?
2. Which township was said to have had the largest and best stone quarries in the country?
3. What town in Garden City Township was platted, had a grist mill established and was then abandoned?

Answers can be found on page 19. Like Blue Earth County trivia? More can be found on our website and Facebook page.

Blue Earth County Historical Society presents the 29th Annual

Ghosts From the Past

GHOST TOWNS OF BLUE EARTH COUNTY

PERFORMANCES TWO NIGHTS ONLY

Thursday, October 22, 6-8 p.m.

Friday, October 23, 6-8 p.m.

Blue Earth County History Center, 424 Warren Street, Mankato

TICKETS

\$7.50/Adults \$5.00/Children 5-17

Shows begin every 30 minutes; last show begins at 8 p.m.

Blue
Earth
County
Historical Society



Call 507-345-5566 to Reserve Tickets Today!

BECHS Volunteers Make History Happen

Thank you to all our volunteers who helped with our many summer activities including events and tours at the Hubbard House, helping with the Vikings Exhibit and at the Blue Earth County Fair, not to mention the daily volunteer activities at the History Center.

To celebrate another great year, all volunteers are invited to our annual Volunteer Holiday Potluck at noon on Monday, December 14 at the History Center. Please sign-up with Danelle.

Below you will find some volunteer opportunities. If you are interested in helping with any of these opportunities or would like more information about volunteering with BECHS, please contact Danelle or



Volunteers helping at our Annual Member Appreciation

visit www.BlueEarthCountyHistory.com/volunteer. New volunteers are always welcome!

Volunteer Opportunities

Kiwanis Holiday Lights

BECHS volunteers are needed to help with Kiwanis Holiday Lights setup at Sibley Park on Sunday, November 1 from 1-4 p.m. Volunteers are also needed on Sunday, November 29 from 5-9 p.m. as BECHS helps at the event. We are also seeking creative ideas and volunteers to help design our Kiwanis Holiday Lights Christmas tree.

As a participating nonprofit organization, a portion of the proceeds from the event will benefit BECHS. The Kiwanis Holiday Lights runs every evening November 27 through December 31 in Sibley Park.

Seeking Baked Goods

We are looking for bakers to contribute a dozen or two cookies or other treats to serve at upcoming BECHS events—Ghosts from the Past, Anniversary Open House and/or Christmas at the Hubbard House.

Receptionist/Gift Shop Assistant

Seeking individuals interested in greeting visitors, answering basic questions about BECHS and ringing up sales in the gift shop. Must be comfortable with computers. Training is provided.

Building Projects

There are countless projects at the History Center needing volunteer support, from painting to

handyman projects to moving furniture.

Research Center Assistant

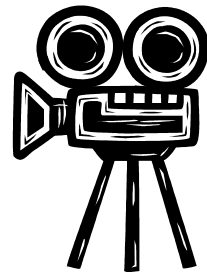
Do you enjoy researching family or local history? We are looking for people to help in the Research Center, assisting visitors and fulfilling research requests. Training is provided; however, previous research experience is preferred.

Photo Processing and Data Entry

Seeking detailed orientated individuals with good handwriting and good computer skills. Must be willing to commit to minimum of 2 hours per week.

Volunteer Stories

You may have seen some of our “Volunteer Story” videos on Facebook or YouTube. We are looking for more volunteers to share their stories of why or how they started volunteering at BECHS, what they enjoy the most or maybe specific memories about volunteering. The videos are informal and can be as long or short as you would like them to be. If you are interested in sharing your story, please let us know. Check out Volunteer Stories at www.bechshistory.com/video/volunteer-stories.





Blue Earth County Historical Society's 1860s BASE BALL CLUB

The Blue Earth County Historical Society's vintage base ball team, the Mankato Baltics, brings history alive on the field. Getting their start in June 2007, the Baltics are now members of the Vintage Base Ball Association, VBBA. The Baltics wear vintage uniforms, use vintage equipment and play by 1860s base ball rules. And yes, "base ball" was two words back then. A highlight for the Baltics this summer was a chance to visit and play on the Field of Dreams in Dyersville, Iowa. The team has one more game this year on December 5 in Arlington, MN.



Baltics at the Field of Dreams

For the Baltics full schedule, visit
www.BlueEarthCountyHistory.com/Baltics
or follow them on Facebook.

114 BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY YEARS OF HISTORY

A celebration of more than a century of our past.

Anniversary Open House

Join us at the History Center for refreshments, door prizes, **FREE Museum admission** and Holiday Gift Shop Specials including **double shopping discount** for BECHS Members.

Fri., November 6, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Sat., November 7, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

*Traveling Exhibit Opening
"Electrifying Minnesota"*

**History Center is located at
424 Warren Street, Mankato**

Give History for the Holidays

*Marian Anderson Art • Collectibles
Books • Vintage Holiday Décor
Memberships • Donations*

BECHS member 20% discount at History Center Gift Shop this weekend ONLY. Does NOT include consignment or sale items, online purchases, memberships or to be combined with any other offer.



BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Visit www.BlueEarthCountyHistory.com for more details.

WISH LIST

Here are a few items we could use. New or used; item or cash to purchase:

**Industrial Strength
Metal Shelving** for
collections storage

**Invite your friends
and family to
check out BECHS!**

**New 60w
Incandescent
Lightbulbs**

Keurig K-Cups
Any flavor.
For use with the
Keurig 2.0 in the public
coffee nook.

**Used Printer Ink
Cartridges**
to be recycled
for Office Depot credit

**MP3 Players
and/or
Docking
Stations**

**Please
support our
Annual
Campaign**

Cookies or Bars
for upcoming
programs and
events

***Wish List fulfilled: Electric Kettle
Thank you for your support!***

Membership Makes a Difference

Thank You for Being a Part of Our Team!

Thanks to all of the BECHS members who attended our annual Member Appreciation in August. Members shared their team spirit as they checked



the Vikings Training Camp exhibit, were treated to game time

brats and hotdogs and went on a special “field trip” tour of the History Center. We are glad you are part of BECHS’s “Team History.”



Member “team” benefits include:

- Free annual pass to the History Center and Museum, Research Center, R.D. Hubbard House and more
- 10% off most items in the Gift Shop and Marian Anderson Art Gallery
- *The Historian* in your mailbox or inbox four times a year
- The knowledge that you are supporting the one organization dedicated to Blue Earth County’s history



New or renewing members can pay member dues by mail using the form found on the back page of this issue or visit www.BlueEarthCountyHistory.com.

YOU make local history accessible through your annual membership dues. Your investment connects the present to the past. Thank you!

BECHS Membership

July - September 2015

New Members

Chandra Baker
Janet Boese
Bonnie Daly
Bob and Judy Douglas
Delbert & Judy Dunlap
Virginia Hanel
Philip and Charlene Harter
Jerry Killion
David Krengel
Rose Loeffler
Julie and Brady Lux
Billy Nievar
Brock Peterson
Nancy Runge
Daniel and Mona Schuh
Jeff and Julie Skluzacek

Tom Solseth
Pamela Tandberg
Dana and Todd Truebenbach

Renewing Giving Members

Booster levels and higher
Kathryn Hanson
Michael and Jennifer Johnson
Helen Wagner
Ken and Linda Wilmes

Renewing Business Members

Radio Mankato

*To All Our Members, THANK YOU
for your continued support.*

**SURROUNDED
BY HISTORY**
Educated in Blue Earth County
From School Slates to Cyberspace

SAVE THE DATE

5th Annual BECHS Fundraiser
Friday, April 29, 2016
Sponsor Opportunities Available Now

BECHS Donations

July - September 2015

Donations

Darwin Blume
Coughlan Companies
Joe & Malda Farnham
Susie Farnsworth
Char Hiniker
William Hinrichs
Don Howard
Barbara Jackowell
James & Deborah
Johnson
Ellis Jones
John Just Sr.
Catherine Klugherz
Jack Madsen
James & Ann McGuire
Mary Mortier
Beth Norman
Leslie & Glen Peterson
Carol Ries
Tom & Cindy Salsbery
Eunice Sassenberg
Joan Schmitz
Roger & Beverly Stoufer
Judy & Leo Voss
Chuck & Cindy Wright

Recurring Monthly Donors

Joel Botten
Dale Benefield

Carol English
Carlienne Frisch
Shirley Grundmeier
Christopher Larson
Jo-an & Dean
Lavitschke
Jack & Diann
McGowan
Judie Neitge
Tom Solseth
Donna Webb
Marnie Werner
Randy Zellmer
Beth Zimmer

Donor Matching Programs

The GE Foundation
Thrivent Financial's
Thrivent Choice

Honorarium

In Honor of
Lukas Lennartson
Jennifer Baxa

In-Kind

Nancy Craig
Donnette Wheelock



2015 Annual Campaign

“Discover Your Story” has been a sort of rallying cry for the Blue Earth County Historical Society this year. For some, that means finding something familiar like a family photo in the Research Center or a former hangout featured in the Museum. For others, discovering their story means finding a connection between themselves and the people of the past – sharing in their joy and triumphs, grief and hardships.

The Blue Earth County Historical Society has been collecting, preserving and presenting Blue Earth County’s story for generations. In doing so, we are ensuring that not only today’s visitors, but those for years to come, can discover their story and their place in history.

But we can’t do that alone. Your donation to our 2015 Annual Campaign will help to cover our remaining 2015 expenses and provide the funds needed to eliminate the \$200,000 balloon payment needed towards the History Center acquisition next year. Because of you, we are growing and making local history more accessible to more people.

Watch your mailbox for details or give today at www.BlueEarthCountyHistory.com. You may also consider our Monthly Giving Program as an easy way to provide steady support for the ongoing work of BECHS. Enroll online or at the History Center. Your credit or debit card will be charged automatically each month. You can also make your donation in person at the History Center or by visiting www.GiveMN.org and searching for “BECHS.”

GIVETODAY.
MAKEHISTORY.

give
TO THE MAX
DAY
NOV 12, 2015

Join BECHS for
**Minnesota’s
Day of Giving on
November 12 at
www.GiveMN.org!**
One more easy
way to make an
online donation to
support BECHS.

Around Blue Earth County



Fall is fast upon us, and the leaves are beginning to show their colors. I would again like to urge caution when driving in the country – this is also harvest time for farmers. You will be sharing the road with slow moving grain trucks and tractors pulling wagons loaded with corn or soybeans.

A little library has returned to Rapidan! RHS has erected a Little Free Library in Memorial Park. A Little Free Library is a “take a book, return a book” free book exchange. In its most basic form, it’s a wooden box of books where anyone may pick up a book or two, or bring a book to share. Check it out!

Yes, Rapidan did have a public library! In the early 1940s, a library was opened in the basement of the Rapidan State Bank as a chapter of the Blue Earth County Library. With a start of 100 books on loan from the central county library, Rapidan’s library grew and was well patronized. The library was also housed in the librarian’s home for several years. The library closed when Rapidan was made a stop on the bookmobile route.

The Rapidan Depot is now closed for the season. Upcoming special events at the Depot include: Ghosts and Goblins at the Depot on October 31 from 5:30–7:30 p.m. and Santa in the Depot on December 4 from 5–7 p.m. The Depot will reopen on Memorial Day, 2016.

Support BECHS on AmazonSmile

You can support BECHS while doing your holiday shopping on Amazon.com by logging into **AmazonSmile** first. On your first visit to AmazonSmile (smile.amazon.com), you need to select a charity (BECHS) to receive donations from eligible purchases before you begin shopping. Amazon will remember your selection, and then every eligible purchase you make at smile.amazon.com will result in a donation.



amazonsmile
You shop. Amazon gives.

Boy in Blue Civil War Memorial Dedicated

On May 30, 2015, a replica of the fountain in memory of Blue Earth County’s Civil War Union soldiers was dedicated. Hundreds of people packed Lincoln Park for the ceremony and to witness the unveiling. The ceremony, planned by the Boy in Blue Memorial Project committee members, closely followed the original dedication ceremony that occurred on May 30, 1893.



A paver walkway surrounds the fountain pool. Engraved pavers will continue to be sold until the walkway is filled. Over 650 Blue Earth County Civil War veterans names are being engraved in granite panels that will surround the pool base. These panels have not been installed yet and funds are being raised for the cost through an “Adopt a Veteran” fundraiser. For more information about the project, visit www.BoyinBlue.org or to see more photos go to www.facebook.com/BoyinBlueProject.

Moving? New Address? Please let us know!

It costs over \$2 for each returned newsletter that cannot be delivered. Please help the Society reserve funds and assure that you get your *Historian* by notifying us of your new or seasonal address.



THRIVENT
FINANCIAL®

BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
IS A
THRIVENT CHOICE DOLLARS®
ENROLLED ORGANIZATION

Calendar of Events October 2015 - January 2016

OCTOBER

- 17 Celebrate Family History Month with Free Research Center Admission**, History Center, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
- 20 Artist's Reception: Bend of the River Photo Club**, History Center, 6-8 p.m.
- 22 Tune in to KTOE 1420-AM** at 1 p.m. for BECHS Update on Talk of the Town
- 22 - 23 Ghosts from the Past: Blue Earth County's Ghost Towns**, 6-8 p.m., History Center, \$7.50 adults, \$5 kids

NOVEMBER

- 1 BECHS Annual Campaign Begins**
- 3 Remember When Coffee Club: Veterans**, 10 a.m., History Center
- 3 Watch KEYC News 12** at Noon for monthly BECHS Update
- 6-7 114th BECHS Anniversary Open House and NEW Electrifying Minnesota Traveling Exhibit Opens**, History Center, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
- 7 Author Nancy Koester explores the story of Harriet Beecher Stowe**, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, presented by the Betsy-Tacy Society, History Center, 2 p.m.
- 12 Minnesota Give to the Max Day**
- 14 Young Historians: Norwegian**, 10 a.m., History Center, Pre-registration encouraged
- 19 Tune in to KTOE 1420-AM** at 1 p.m. for BECHS Update on Talk of the Town
- 19 Our History Matters: Bob Douglas**, 6 p.m., History Center, \$5 adults, members free
- 28 Shop Small Saturday, History Center Gift Shop Open 10 a.m.-4 p.m.**
- 29 BECHS Night at Kiwanis Holiday Lights**, Sibley Park, 5-9 p.m.
Don't forget to vote for our tree! Top vote getter wins cash prize.



DECEMBER

- 1 Remember When Coffee Club: Holidays**, 10 a.m., History Center
- 1 Watch KEYC News 12** at Noon for monthly BECHS Update
- 5 Christmas at Hubbard House**, Historic R.D. Hubbard House, 3-7 p.m.
- 6 Christmas at Hubbard House**, Historic R.D. Hubbard House, 1-4 p.m.

- 12 Young Historians: Welsh**, 10 a.m., History Center, Pre-registration encouraged

- 12-13 Hubbard House open for walk-in tours**, 1-4 p.m.



- 14 BECHS Volunteer Holiday Potluck**, Noon, History Center, Please RSVP to Danelle
- 17 Tune in to KTOE 1420-AM** at 1 p.m. for BECHS Update on Talk of the Town
- 17 Our History Matters: John Cross**, 6 p.m., History Center, \$5 adults, members free
- 19-20 Hubbard House open for walk-in tours**, 1-4 p.m.
- 24-28 History Center Closed. Merry Christmas!**
- 31 History Center Closes at 3 p.m. Thank you for all of your support in 2015!**

JANUARY

- 1 Happy New Year! History Center Closed**
- 5 Remember When Coffee Club: New Years**, 10 a.m., History Center
- 5 Watch KEYC News 12** at Noon for monthly BECHS Update
- 9 Young Historians: German**, 10 a.m., History Center, Pre-registration encouraged
- 28 Tune in to KTOE 1420-AM** at 1 p.m. for BECHS Update on Talk of the Town
- 28 Our History Matters: Larry Kortuem**, 6 p.m., History Center, \$5 adults, members free

Three easy ways to stay up-to-date:

- Check out www.BlueEarthCountyHistory.com for full event details and updates!
- Sign-up for our free monthly e-news to receive updates between *Historian* issues
- Follow BECHS on Facebook and Twitter.

Electronic Version of *The Historian* Now Available

If you would like to receive *The Historian* via email rather than traditional mail, please contact Danelle at bechsms@hickorytech.net or 345-5566.

Answers to Blue Earth County Trivia on page 13:

1. *The Henrietta* 2. Lime Township 3. Lowell – See *Minnesota on the Map* exhibit to see the plat for this town site.

BECHS Annual Membership

The Blue Earth County Historical Society is a member supported non-profit organization. Membership dues make up a growing portion of the annual operating budget. Thank you for your support.

Name _____

Business Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Membership Levels

Individual Senior (62+) \$20

Individual \$25

Household \$35

Contributor \$50

Supporter* \$100

Booster* \$250

Advocate* \$500

Benefactor* \$1000

*Business memberships available

Please send this form and check to:

BECHS Membership

424 Warren Street

Mankato, MN 56001

OR

Complete your membership form online
at www.BlueEarthCountyHistory.com

Affiliate Membership levels available for Groups or Organizations, call for details.



Blue Earth County Historical Society

424 Warren Street

Mankato, MN 56001

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.

U.S. Postage

PAID

Mankato MN

56001

Permit No. 86

**Membership
Expiration Date**

Connecting the Present to the Past Since 1901