

The Blue Earth County

HISTORIAN

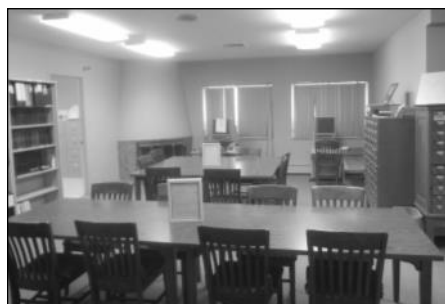


A Look Back at the 1965 Flood



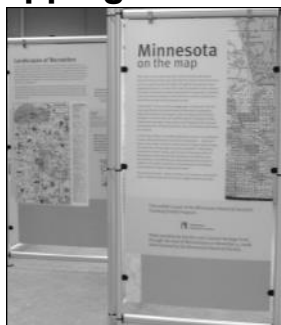
In April 1965, the swollen Minnesota River and its tributaries flooded many parts of the region. One of the hardest hit areas in Mankato was Madsen's grocery store (now Cub West) and Mankato (West) High School. Read more about the high water and dedicated volunteers of the 1965 flood on page 9. Photo courtesy of Judy Westermayer.

Expansion Update



New Research Center now open.
Building update on pages 2 and 13.

Mapping Minnesota



New Traveling Exhibit "Minnesota on the Map" opens June 2, see page 6.

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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



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History Center & Museum

424 Warren Street, Mankato, MN
(New Main Entrance)
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
Hours
May: Saturday and Sunday 1 - 4 p.m.
June-August:
Friday & Saturday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Sunday 1 - 4 p.m.

The Blue Earth County Historian Spring 2015

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

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Director's Notes

Jessica Potter, Executive Director

Spring flowers are emerging from their winter's slumber and birds are singing outside my window. It must be time to open the Hubbard House for another season. We are looking forward to a summer filled with great living history programs that engage people of all ages. The Historic R.D. Hubbard House will open for it's 19th season as a historic house museum on Saturday, May 2 with our 6th Annual Victorian Tea Party. It will be a great day of music and afternoon tea, sprinkled with a little Victorian history.

At the History Center, we continue to make improvements to the newly expanded facility. Our most recent project was moving the Research Center back to its original 1988 location with new modern additions and enhancements. One of those new additions is brand new digital microfilm readers made possible through a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society funded by the Legacy Amendment. The new machines will replace 25+ year-old equipment. The room also saw a make-over with new paint, carpet and entrance. Check out page 13 for more information and then come in and see it for yourself!

We continue to make improvements on the lower level with our meeting/program rooms. We now have three rooms available for not only BECHS meetings and programs, but also for community use. If you need a great space to hold a meeting or an event, let us know. The most recent addition to this space will be new padded meeting room chairs thanks to a donation drive at Surrounded By History and a grant from Land o' Lakes matched by Crystal Valley Co-op. They are currently on order and will hopefully be in place by early May.

Spring will give way to summer and our summer promises to be filled with more exciting changes and opportunities. As you will read later in this newsletter, this year marks the 50th anniversary of the 1965 Flood. This year also marks the 50th Minnesota Vikings Training Camp in Mankato. BECHS will help commemorate that anniversary with a memorabilia exhibit at the History Center in July and August. We are seeking Minnesota Vikings memorabilia from the community to help create this exhibit. The first opportunity to share your collection with us will be on Wednesday, May 13 at Jake's Stadium Pizza from 4-8 p.m. That night we will be on hand to meet with people and begin "collecting" for the exhibit. Check out page 7 for details. There are more community events planned leading up to the exhibit and many after it opens. Watch for details to be announced.

Hope to see you at the History Center soon!

Board of Trustees

Randy Zellmer
President, Board of Trustees

This year's Surrounded By History was a huge success. Attendance and funds raised were highest to date. Thank you to our many friends who joined us to celebrate "Built in Blue Earth County" in March.

At our Annual Meeting also held in March, BECHS showcased our new facilities. A summary was provided to attendees outlining the acquisition of the building. Blue Earth County Board was once again thanked for assisting with the down payment and additional annual funds to help offset expanded costs of the building. Those who attended were greeted with a new entrance, newly relocated and expanded gift shop which includes the Marian Anderson Art Gallery and large space to host traveling exhibits. If you have not visited BECHS recently, I encourage you to stop and enjoy our new facilities. An excellent program was provided by Tim Krohn of *The Free Press* on the history of flooding in our region. *The Free Press* with the assistance of BECHS staff compiled historical photos and stories of regional flooding for their newest publication "Washed Away."

I would like to thank Michael Lagerquist, Susan Hynes and Ky Battern for their many years of service and assistance to BECHS as Board members and volunteers. While their Board terms are complete, I anticipate their continuing support of BECHS on future endeavors.

I would like to welcome are new Board members: Joe Farnham, Elizabeth Harstad, Julie Lux, Tom Solseth, and Dana Truebenbach. You can read their introductions on the right. Each brings skills to the Board which will help the organization grow.

If you were unable to attend the Annual Meeting, please view the 2014 Annual Report online at www.bechshistory.com/who-we-are or pick up a copy at the History Center

Thank you for your ongoing support of BECHS. More than ever we need your support not only financially, but also by sharing our good news with others. I look forward to seeing you at future BECHS events and activities.

Welcome to Our New Board Members

At the Annual Meeting, the following individuals were selected to serve on the BECHS Board of Trustees for 2015-2018. Meet your new Board members in their own words:

Joe Farnham

A resident of Mankato since 1979, I have worked in both the public and private sector holding positions as Vice President for Advancement at MSU/M, President of the South Central Technical College Foundation, partner at Emerald Travel and administrator at Centenary United Methodist Church. I'm now retired and enjoy traveling.

Elizabeth Harstad

I grew up in Mankato, graduated from Mankato West, then attended Gustavus Adolphus College for a B.A. in History and minor in Political Science. I have my Master's degree in Social Work from MNSU, Mankato. I work at Greater Mankato Area United Way as the Community Impact Director. My husband, Chris, and I love to travel, cook, read and drink coffee together.

Julie Lux

I am a current resident of Mapleton with my husband Brady and two children. I work for MRCI in the Client Directed Services Department as a Licensing Coordinator and graduated from South Dakota State University with a degree in History.

Tom Solseth

I am a CPA with Abdo, Eick and Meyers, LLP in Mankato and my clients are mostly nonprofits. I also live in Mankato. I am excited to be on the board and look forward to helping BECHS.

Dana Truebenbach

My husband, Todd, and I are raising our two sons north of Beauford on his grandparent's homestead. I am the Finance & Administration Manager at Neutral Path Communications.

Thank you to Ky Battern, Susan Hynes and Mike Lagerquist for your past service on the BECHS Board.

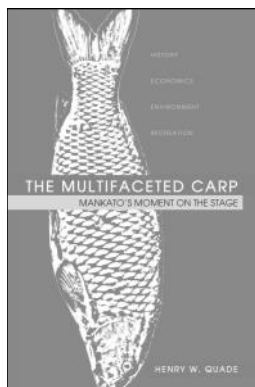


Gift Shop & Art Gallery News

Danelle Erickson, Museum Manager

In connection with the “Minnesota Homefront” exhibit on display through June 20, the History Center Gift Shop is highlighting some of our books that explore World War II, both at home and abroad.

The Multifaceted Carp is a perfect example of the spirit and resourcefulness found on the homefront. Mankato’s Armin Kleinschmidt saw how canned carp could provide food for troops and civilians during World War II. His vision became reality; and in 1945, the Lake Fish Canning Company was producing 600 cans of fish per hour. Regular price, \$12.95, on sale for \$9.95.



Blue Earth County native Frederick William Just is the subject of *The Story of a Special Man*. Written by his daughter, Elizabeth Vosbeck, Fred’s story includes accounts and photographs of his life including the time he served as captain aboard a Navy destroyer escort ship in the Pacific during the war. \$10.00

The Gift Shop carries additional stories about southern Minnesota men who served during WWII. Using journals, letters and photographs as her guide, author Tamara Thayer brings us along as she follows the career and service of her grandfather, Dr. Ellsworth “Mike” Thayer in *A Country Doctor Goes to War*. Likewise, author Janelle Kaye uses her father’s memoirs in her book *Reconciliation with War: A Family Journey* as she writes about his time in the war and his struggles with PTSD to follow. \$15.00 (Thayer) and \$25.00 (Kaye)

For younger readers, the Gift Shop carries books from the American Girl series. While her father is away with the military, Molly and her family are at home planting victory gardens, collecting scrap metal and learning to “make do and mend.”

Also in the Gift Shop:

BECHS Tote – This sturdy blue canvas bag is

perfect for a trip to the store, running errands around town, or for carrying all of your research papers when coming to the new Research Center. \$9.95
Blue Earth County Maps – Three beautiful and colorful maps show Blue Earth County and its ethnic breakdown in 1880, railroad land grants from 1864-1894 and the vegetation in 1854-1855. Great references at a great price. \$4.95 each

BECHS Pendant – Show your love for Blue Earth County with a pendant. There are a variety of images to choose from including county maps and scenes from the History Center or Hubbard House. \$7.95

Marian Anderson Art Gallery

Included in the Gallery’s selection of Marian Anderson prints are those that feature man’s best friend. An Irish setter, yellow lab and huskies are beautifully depicted in three of her canine prints. Minnesota native and polar explorer Will Steger and his team, made up of humans and canines, are featured in *Focus North* and *Focus South*. When Marian visited Steger’s



A Friend for All Seasons

home, she was introduced to his dogs. “I also became familiar with each of the dog’s individual personalities and their backgrounds....It is a real privilege not only to know Will Steger, but his team as well.”

BECHS Needs You!

Saturday volunteers needed for special events, programs, the Gift Shop and Research Center.

See page 14 for more information. Please contact Danelle at 507-345-5566 if interested.

HISTORY CENTER ART GALLERY

The Blue Earth County Historical Society is excited to debut our new art gallery space in our expanded History Center. The new art gallery is quite impressive and well worth the wait. The first exhibit in the new art gallery opens in July and will feature the Bend of the River Photo Club and their exhibit "Present History."

Started in 2008, Bend of the River Photo Club is a group of people passionate about photography. Whether photography is a hobby or a profession, Bend of the River Photo Club invites people of all skill levels to join them. The club meets the 4th Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at the Primrose Retirement Center.

The Blue Earth County Historical Society is actively looking for local artists to be featured in later exhibits. The art must be two-dimensional, ready to hang and be appropriate for all ages. Exhibits will change quarterly with an artist reception during the opening month. For more information or for an application please contact Shelley at 345-5566 or bechsam@hickorytech.net.

Marian Anderson
Fine Art Prints

SPECIAL MUSEUM EDITION

Marian Anderson's Historic Mankato Series is now available in a Limited Museum Edition. This sold out series is back with a limited quantity for a limited time only. All proceeds benefit BECHS's expansion. Get yours before they are gone!



Historic Mankato Series includes *Closing Time*, *Good Ol' Summertime* and *Partners in Progress*

Set of all three historic Mankato scenes \$500
or sold individually for \$200 each

Visit www.MarianAnderson.com

Historic R.D. Hubbard House

Where 1900s History Comes to Life

May 2, 1-4 p.m.

Opening Weekend & Victorian Tea Party

All ages event includes living history tours and Victorian Music at the Hubbard House with costumed characters

every hour. Afternoon tea and gift sale at the Emy Frenz Arts Guild. Tickets \$15 Adults, \$10 Members, \$5 Children. Reserve tickets today.



June 5 - August 28, 10:30 a.m.

Story Time at the Hubbard House

Join Katherine and Mary Esther Hubbard Friday mornings for a special story time on the Hubbard House lawn. Activities include stories, crafts and games. Story Time is free for all ages.

June 6, 1-4 p.m.

Victorian Lawn Party

Annual lawn party features lawn games, refreshments and dolly tea party. Free and open to the public; admission charged for house tours.



Historic R.D. Hubbard House

Hours of Operation

May and September

Saturday, Sunday 1-4 p.m.

June - August

Friday, Saturday

10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Sunday 1-4 p.m.



BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

www.bechshistory.com



Collections & Exhibits

“Minnesota on the Map”

Shelley Harrison, Archives & Collections Manager

With the internet, GPS and mobile apps detailed maps are just a finger-click away. It's easy to forget map making was once a serious talent that produced useful and beautiful works of art. Not only do maps help us with directions or distance to the nearest restaurant, they can also show property ownership, population shifts and topographical information. Maps can give us a tangible link to the past.

The Blue Earth County Historical Society is delighted to be hosting another traveling exhibit from the Minnesota Historical Society. “Minnesota on the Map” opens June 1 and celebrates maps and the desire to explore. Based on the book *Minnesota on the Map: A Historic Atlas* by David Lanegran, this exhibit features 23 reproduction maps and atlases, a video station with commentary by local historians and an oversized Minnesota map jigsaw puzzle. Featured maps range from Louis Hennepin's 1683 map of the upper Mississippi River Valley to a satellite map of Minnesota produced by NASA. The exhibit will also include many maps of Blue Earth County townships and municipalities, as well as surveying tools.

The colorful images used throughout “Minnesota on the Map,” will enable visitors to explore the history of maps and mapping and expand their knowledge of Minnesota and Blue Earth County. One interesting map is the 1853 map of the Minnesota Territory. The map was intended to solve any American Indian concerns and put new settlers at ease. Be sure to notice the size and shape of Blue Earth County on the 1853 map. Our county once covered a much larger area with the Missouri River as the western border and present day Iowa to the south. Geography enthusiasts and history buffs alike are sure to enjoy this exciting exhibit.



Minnesota and Dacotah in 1860

In association with the exhibit, “Our History Matters” on June 25, 2015 will feature a presentation on mapping and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) by Scott Kudelka, Minneopa Area Naturalist. Kudelka will also demonstrate the value of geodetic surveying and its impact on our daily lives.

“Minnesota on the Map” opens June 2 and runs through September 19, 2015. 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.

Minnesota Homefront

A traveling exhibit from the Minnesota History Center.

DURING WORLD WAR II, our nation's armed forces had a powerful ally — the citizens back home. Learn how ordinary Minnesotans worked and sacrificed to do their part for the war effort.

Don't miss it—

**On Display Now -
June 20, 2015**

**Blue Earth County
History Center &
Museum**

Free



The statewide tour of this exhibit is made possible with funds from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund of the Legacy Amendment, created through the vote of Minnesotans on Nov. 4, 2008.



MINNESOTA VIKINGS MEMORABILIA NIGHT

Wednesday, May 13, 4-8 p.m.

Jake's Stadium Pizza

330 Stadium Road, Mankato



Join the Blue Earth County Historical Society at Jake's Stadium Pizza for a special Minnesota Vikings Memorabilia Night. Evening includes throwback pizza deals, special display of Jake's Vikings treasures and the opportunity to have your memorabilia included in the upcoming "50 Years of Vikings Training Camp in Mankato" exhibit at the History Center. Staff from the History Center will be on hand all night to meet with people about their Vikings collections.*



If you are unable to attend, watch for future dates to bring your memorabilia to the History Center. For more information about Memorabilia Night or the upcoming Minnesota Vikings exhibit, visit www.BlueEarthCountyHistory.com.

* Items will not be collected on May 13, just photographed. Individuals may bring a photo of their memorabilia rather than the item. Items will be on loan with BECHS from June 1 to September 15, 2015. If items are to be used in exhibit, BECHS will contact the lender for arrangements. All displayed memorabilia will be stored in locked cases.

Every object has a story...

The Society's permanent collection includes paintings, textiles, objects, posters, photographs, books, letters and ephemera from the middle of the 19th century through the 21st century.

Blue Earth County Historical Society is pleased to announce the acquisition of memorabilia from the Mankato Brewing Company. This memorabilia includes an amazing collection of bottles, wall art, signs and even equipment from the brewery.

Mankato Brewing Company was originally the Bierbauer Brewery started by Jacob and William Bierbauer in 1857 and continued until 1920 and Prohibition. When prohibition ended, a group of local businessmen purchased the building and renamed it the Mankato Brewery Company. The brewery's doors closed for good in 1967. In 1970 the brewery was auctioned off by Blue Earth County due to back taxes of \$35,000 - \$40,000. It was purchased by Harlow Norberg for \$7,300 and demolished due to its deteriorating condition in 1971.

In the decades following its demolition, Norberg continued to collect memorabilia from the brewery; and it was his children who generously donated this collection to the Historical Society. We are excited to welcome these historical artifacts and their rich legacy. Some of this collection is now on display at the History Center.

If you are interested in donating memorabilia from a local business or a piece of Blue Earth County history, please contact Shelley Harrison, Archives Manager.



Enamel Sign "Kato Beer"



Wall Clock "It's Time For Kato Beer" 1930's



Education & Outreach

Making Local History Accessible to All Ages

Heather Harren, Education and Outreach Manager

It is time once again for school tours at the Historic R.D. Hubbard House. This year, tours have been updated to create a more interactive tour for the students. Our goal is to have students consider how the Hubbard family lived in the 1900s in comparison to how families live today. Throughout each tour, guides will be asking the students questions to engage them in the tour and have them think about life in the early 1900s. Some examples include:

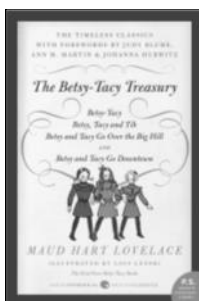
- In the parlor, the game table will be pointed out and students will learn what games may have been played in the 1900s.
- In the kitchen, students will learn about the butter churn, stove, bread safe and ice box.
- In Jay's bedroom, students will be asked about the need for spats and chamber pots.

With these and other questions, students will explore how life in 1900 was both different and the same as today.

Aside from the updated Hubbard House school tours, we are also excited to have all of the 6th graders in Mankato visit the History Center Museum this May. Typically these students would be visiting the State Capitol, but as it is under construction, the students were in need of a new field trip location, and we are happy to welcome them to the Museum. BECHS is excited about the visit and we are looking forward to sharing the history of where they live in. Hopefully this will be the first of many 6th grade tours at the History Center.

Maud Hart Lovelace Youth Book Club

The Maud Hart Lovelace Youth Book Club has been a great experience this winter for the participants.



The Club of 11 girls, read the *Betsy-Tacy Treasury*, which contains the first four books in the Betsy-Tacy series. They read a different book each month and participated in a monthly discussion and educational program. We look forward to repeating this type of program in the future; maybe even for adults.

Monthly Educational Programs

Our History Matters

Monthly educational series promoting and celebrating local history. Free for BECHS Members, \$5 Non-members.



Grace Keir shared about 1930s-40s fashions at March's Our History Matters.

Upcoming Programs

April 23 – 1940s Research by Beth Zimmer

May 28 – Vintage Base Ball by Hugh Belgard

June 25 – Mapping and GIS by Scott Kudelka, Minneopa Area Naturalist

July 23 – Bend of the River Photo Club Exhibit Opening

Young Historians

Monthly, free, hands-on history workshops for school-age children, 2nd Saturday of each month, September thru May, 10 a.m. to Noon. This year's schedule explored technology from the Progressive Era of the 1870s to the modern age including Ellis Island, World War I, Great Depression and World War II. For more information visit: www.bechshistory.com/programs/young-historians.



Young Historians toured the "Minnesota Homefront" exhibit in March.

Upcoming Workshops

May 9 - Tour of the History Center & Museum
September 12 - Watch for details

High Water and Hard Work: Remembering the Flood of 1965

By Hilda Parks

On April 10, 1965 the Minnesota River crested at 29.07 feet at the Main Street Bridge in Mankato, following hours of frenzied dike-building and anxious river watching by residents of LeHillier, Mankato and North Mankato. Other rivers and overland flooding throughout Blue Earth County had already caused havoc, covering bridges, washing out roads, stranding farm sites and livestock.

As the snow melted, the rivers rose and flowed near Mankato. Families left their homes, some to later find no home to which they could return. People volunteered for everything from filling sandbags to hosting evacuees to preparing food. Travel in and out of Mankato was limited due to flooding throughout the surrounding areas.



Main Street Bridge looking at Mankato, April 12, 1965

“This is history?” some may be asking. It seems like a fresh memory to many. Perhaps you were one of those sandbaggers. Or did you make sandwiches for workers? Were you checking flood levels regularly and reporting to local authorities or feeling lucky because your school was closed? Maybe you were even one of those who needed to leave your home. Perhaps you weren’t living in the area in 1965 or are too young to have experienced the flooding. Looking at the low water levels this spring, it is difficult to imagine the raging waters against the Main Street Bridge or breaking dikes at Sibley Park. But for many, after 50 years, those days may seem like yesterday.

Minnesota River flood levels for Mankato/North Mankato was predicted to be 23 feet in the spring of 1965. Both cities thought they were prepared. But from April 7 to April 10, Wednesday to Saturday, dikes were hurriedly raised higher and higher as crest predictions rapidly rose. Some dikes held, some did not. Only those who saw water rising in their own homes can tell the stories of fear and heartbreak. Only those who filled sandbags for hours, or patrolled the dikes looking for leaks, can relate how exhausted they were and how relieved as waters began to recede. Everyone living through those days has their own memories of where they were and what they did. The *Free Press* reported facts daily, mixing in a few human interest stories. Perhaps these memories will raise some of your own or lead you to seek out other stories.

Before the Flood

The winter of 1965 had been a snowy year, culminating with the St. Patrick’s Day blizzard which left a snow depth of 21 inches. The days turned warm quickly; and by the end of the month, some families in LeHillier began to leave for higher ground. Many remembered the 1951 flood, which had crested at 26.2 feet and inundated LeHillier and much of North Mankato. Dike building began.

The Minnesota River was still frozen and was measured at 2.37 feet on April 2. By Monday, April 5, it had risen to 11.27 feet. Flood crest predictions stood at 23 feet; dikes were ready at 26 feet. An ice jam at the Main Street Bridge that day caused concern, but it broke up by itself. The newspaper headlines read “Chance of Major Flooding in Area Seems Declining.” However, there was over an inch of rain the next day, and the flood crest prediction rose to 25 feet. Both Mankato and North Mankato scrambled to build their dikes higher.

The Maple, LeSueur and Watonwan Rivers, all which flow into the Blue Earth River, were rising more

quickly than the Minnesota River. On Monday, the eight houses on Hog Island in Garden City found themselves living on a true island. One family left. Other families remained, although they had lost all electricity with the washing out of power poles. One man crossed the water in his boat, bought a loaf of bread at the grocery store and returned home.



Large ice chunks like this caused ice dams on many local rivers. Photo courtesy Gene Braam.

By Tuesday, April 6, Indian Creek was becoming a problem. Flowing into the Pleasant Street slough, piped across the (West) High School parking lot, then under Park Lane (now Riverfront Drive) and Madsen's Super Valu (now Cub Foods West) and into the Minnesota River, the outlet into the river needed to be blocked as the water rose above it. Pumps were having trouble pumping over the dike, and the high school parking lot began to flood. This water was only temporary; more would come.

The Turning Point: Wednesday, April 7, 1965

Due to continued rain and rapidly melting snow, the flood crest prediction now rose to 26.5 feet with an expected crest on April 10. Dike work continued at a hurried pace as the area entered the most worrisome hours. Calls went out for more heavy construction equipment and flood lights with generators so work could continue at night. At one point even the empty sandbags ran out.

As the cities of Mankato and North Mankato, and the unincorporated village of LeHillier continued to raise their dikes, Honeymead (now CHS), located on the east bank of the Blue Earth River, called upon their employees to protect the plant. A spur railroad line close to the river was flooded by the morning. All motors were moved out of the area and boilers were cooled down. Empty storage tanks were filled with water as a means of protection if they became surrounded by the river. Soybean deliveries were accepted until that afternoon, even as the plant was being shut down. The efforts were successful, and Honeymead was not flooded, even as the Blue Earth River ravaged areas around it.

Many LeHillier residents left voluntarily after water broke through under a railroad trestle northeast of the town. Although it was mended within an hour, water had flowed unto North Sturgis Street. Perhaps rumors that the Rapidan Dam up river was in danger of going out helped speed the evacuation. The Lutheran Home (now Pathstone) near Sibley Park was also evacuated. Once the formal

order for evacuation was given, LeHillier and West Mankato were emptied overnight. The National Guard was called in to patrol evacuated areas and control traffic, particularly keeping sightseers out of the area. Some guardsmen were stationed as far away as Waseca to stop unnecessary traffic.

Thursday, April 8, 1965

The flood level was rising dramatically, over half a foot in five hours. The new flood crest prediction was raised to 30 feet; nearly four feet higher than 1951 and would break the record set on April 27, 1881 – 29.9 feet.

In spite of all the work, some dikes collapsed. LeHillier sustained damage from dikes undercut by the rapidly moving water. The primary dike at Sibley Park, holding back the Blue Earth River, broke at 2:00 p.m. Thursday afternoon. The park office and the zoo were abandoned. Cages were opened to allow some of the non-dangerous small animals to escape, and fences were broken down to allow larger animals to move to higher ground. Unfortunately most of the caged animals were lost. The two lions, who had only about an inch of water in their cage later died, apparently from exposure.

The fight to stabilize a secondary dike at West 5th Street continued. At the main entrance to



Sibley Park during the 1965 Flood.

Sibley Park water was four feet below the trestle. Only the roofs were showing of one-story houses on Hubbell and Owatonna Streets. The railroad kept the river from moving further into West Mankato; however, the water quickly found other escape routes. The parking lot at the high school was filled to within 25 feet of the front of the building. The water had come up in geysers through manhole covers. An observer reported seeing three water geysers in the parking lot, with five to six feet spouts, around 4:30 p.m. Two more geysers soon joined the flood, and a few hours later water was running over the road from the Madsen's parking lot. The basement of the high school and the vocational school was flooded with water only a couple of inches below the first floor slab. In the vocational school, water rose too quickly to allow time to move the larger machines. In retrospect, it was determined that little structural damage was done to the building because it is built on pilings.

Water rose so quickly in Madsen's Valu Center that shopping carts were abandoned in the aisles, and a plate of food was left on the counter in the restaurant. Water inside the store rose to the depth of 21 to 30 inches. Only the radio antenna of a car still in the parking lot behind the store was visible.

Employees worked quickly to remove

perishable foods as the water rose, however, none of the restaurant or bakery equipment could be saved. The store was dubbed "merchandising Venice" as boats were later used inside the building to remove goods from higher shelves. Businesses along the 500 block of South Front Street were also reporting water in their basements, the result of storm sewers backing up.

Friday, April 9, 1965

As the river continued to rise, the evacuation order for North Mankato came early that morning,

although many residents had left the day before. The fight continued along State Highway 169 as workers managed to keep the North Mankato sewer lift station in operation, although it was an island surrounded by sandbags. U.S. Coast Guard boats patrolled the area. Trying to keep a sense of humor in the midst of tense times, someone erected a sign, naming the sandbagged enclave "Gilligan's Island."

Diking around the Century Club, on the North Mankato side of the Main Street Bridge, was abandoned to put more effort into dikes built further back from the river. Owner James Nicholls stayed in the building, repairing leaks, so that ultimately only one inch of water got into the basement. Dikes were still being carefully monitored and a sign was erected at the Century Club, reading "You are now entering Dikesville, U.S.A."

Webster Avenue was a major concern for North Mankato workers. It was the failure of dikes at that point that had allowed water into the city in 1951. Even after a crest had been reported at the bridge, diking continued at Webster Avenue. Dikes were built to 34 feet, but officials were concerned that it would not be high enough. The North Mankato dike was 3,000 feet long and contained more than one million sandbags.

Saturday, April 10, 1965

The Minnesota River crested at the Main Street Bridge between 1 and 2 a.m. The river flowed at 92.07 feet, 29.07 feet above flood stage. It was estimated that the river at the bridge over the Blue Earth River and at Sibley Park was five feet higher. At one point during the highest water, the Blue Earth River was flowing into the Minnesota River as a small waterfall. LeHillier and West Mankato were flooded. North Mankato and downtown Mankato had been protected. Although everyone must have breathed a sigh of relief, there would be many more days of checking the dikes as the water slowly receded, and many weeks of repairing damaged homes, buildings and streets.

Days of High Water and Dikes

During that week in April, there were at times as many as 2,000 to 3,000 people working on the dikes. It took three shovelfuls of sand to fill a bag, and one young volunteer remembered a bag weighed almost as much as he. Students from Mankato State



Inside Madsen's during the Flood. Photo courtesy of Armin Schull.

College, Bethany and the high school worked beside other volunteers, filling sandbags and building dikes. Amateur radio operators from Mankato State College and surrounding areas provided means of communication between dike workers and their back-ups.

Mankato State College's Highland Arena was set up to house evacuees, with nurses and child care providers on hand. It was estimated that ultimately 7,500 people were forced out of their homes. However, most families had made arrangements to stay with family or friends, and only a handful needed emergency housing. First Presbyterian Church was the site for registration for evacuees. Centenary Methodist Church provided facilities for the Red Cross to feed volunteers and sleeping space for dike workers. The Salvation Army estimated that during the hectic days they had made 70,000 sandwiches, 3,000 gallons of coffee, 1,000 gallons of milk and hot chocolate, 800 gallons of soup and hot dishes and dozens of cookies and donuts.

Reading the *Free Press* from those hectic days, news and pictures of the flood fill many columns. For those so involved in protecting a city, it must have been difficult to believe that events continued as usual in the rest of the world. The national news covered Vietnam. There were bombings and boycotts in Alabama. Julie Andrews won an Oscar for *Sound of Music*. There was a groundbreaking for a new building for Mankato Savings and Loan at East Jackson and Broad Streets. Announcements of engagements, births and deaths filled inside columns of the paper. "Hints from Heloise" and the daily comics continued and advertisements for new Easter clothes took up much space. But toward the end of the week the cancelations began to appear: a Kiwanis's meeting, the Science Fair at Mankato State College, a Saturday wedding at Grace Lutheran Church.

There are many stories to be told of those days. Officials worked long, exhausting hours, sleeping on cots, existing on sandwiches and coffee. Bob Ringhofer, North Mankato city superintendent, who was finally relieved on Friday night, had a steak supper at Michael's, his first real meal for days. Ray Eckes, North Mankato mayor, remembered that he didn't have his boots off for three days. One man who would not quit work was put in jail for the night so that he would get some sleep. Men evacuated their

families and then returned to work on other dikes, knowing their homes were already flooded. Weatherman Warren Heiser and his wife, needed to leave their home in North Mankato, but he stayed in his car to be near his instruments.

During the week of the flooding, the area was visited by Minnesota Governor Karl Rolvaag and Vice President Hubert Humphrey. President Lyndon Johnson flew over the flooded area, and then toured flooding in the Twin Cities which came a few days later. Disaster funds were the topic of conversation. There was water damage to 225 homes in Mankato, 125 in LeHillier and 62 Mankato businesses. In total 39 counties in Minnesota were declared federal disaster areas due to flooding that spring.

Today hydrologists use supercomputers, radar systems and satellites to predict flooding. In 1965, they used slide rules, rain gauges and grave diggers who knew the depth of the frost in the ground. Today almost three miles of concrete flood walls and rip-rap line the river banks, a flood-control project completed in 1987. The Minnesota River running through Mankato-North Mankato may not be the prettiest stretches of river, but those flood walls look pretty good to anyone who lived through April 1965.

Sources

Blue Earth County Historical Society Photograph Collection and Vertical Files

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 NEW Remember When Coffee Club.**

This will be an informal opportunity to share memories and photos with fellow local history enthusiasts at the newly expanded History Center. There will be no formal program, just a conversation topic to get you started. Coffee, tea and light refreshments will be provided.

Conversation Topics:

May 5 - School Days

June 2 - Front Street

July 7 - Summer Jobs



Around the Research Center

Heather Harren, Education and Outreach Manager

If you haven't stopped by the Research Center lately, you will be surprised the next time you come. On April 2 we moved the Research Center to its new location, bringing it to a more central location within the building. Technically, the Research Center is in its old location, the same location it was from 1988-2005, but with some great improvements.

The first thing you will notice is a new entrance to the Research Center. The 7.5 foot opening with new glass doors makes a great first impression.

The room still has everything that the old Research Center had, but is just arranged differently. The biography and subject files are located just off the main room, along with the microfilm reels. Speaking of microfilm, we received a grant to upgrade our two existing microfilm readers. The readers have been ordered and will be installed by the end of the month. If you are interested in donating funds toward the cost of the readers' not covered by the grant, please see the wish list below.

In the new Research Center, we also have a different copier that allows us to make color copies for researchers. Black and white copies will remain at \$.25 and color copies are \$1.00. This is a great thing to offer to researchers as many people want the color image from the newspaper.

Next time you are in the area, stop by the Research Center to see all of our changes.

Blue Earth County Trivia

1. What year was the first telegram sent to Blue Earth County?
2. What was the first township surveyed in Blue Earth County?
3. What other names was LeRay Township known as?

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



BECHS Volunteers Make History Happen

April 12-18 was National Volunteer Appreciation Week. Every April, we take some extra time to recognize and celebrate our incredible volunteers. Like a lot of things at BECHS, volunteers have faced a number of changes over the past year, and like always, they have stepped up to the plate and faced the changes head-on. To all of our volunteers: Thank you for sticking with us, putting up with all of the changes and helping us as we move forward for bigger and better things at BECHS!

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, our volunteer coordinator, at bechsms@hickorytech.net or visit www.bechshistory.com/volunteer.



30 volunteers attended the Annual Volunteer Appreciation on April 13. Ten individuals were recognized for their donated hours ranging from 219 to 872 hours in 2014. Above are 8 out of our top 10, (l to r) Mary McComb, Grace Keir, Dale Benefield, Mary Ward, Shirley Schaub, Jo Schultz, Jo-an Lavitschke and Donna Webb.

Volunteer Opportunities

Urgent Need: History Center Gardeners

The History Center has a number of flower beds, all of which are cared for by our volunteers. Whether you have been gardening for years, wanting to learn or somewhere in between, new volunteers are always welcome and much needed. Schedule is flexible.

Tour Guides

Seeking individuals interested in leading tours of the Hubbard House and/or History Center. BECHS gives tours to a variety of groups including school groups, and tour groups of all ages. Training is provided.

Receptionist/Gift Shop Assistant

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

Vikings Training Camp

Volunteers are needed to assist with a variety of projects related to Vikings Training Camp. Here's how you can help:

- Planning committee to meet regularly May-July
- Assist with exhibit development
- Work at History Center during Training Camp (mid-July to mid-August)

Building Projects

There are countless projects at the History Center needing volunteer support. From painting to hanging blinds to moving equipment.

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 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.

Surrounded By History 2015

Surrounded by History, the Historical Society's 4th annual fundraiser was held on March 20 and attended by over 200 people. The evening included live music from the Ben Marti Trio, dinner, wine raffle and live and silent auctions.



Our emcee for the evening's festivities was our very own Jim "Gully" Gullickson,

General Manager of KSMU-FM at MSU,M. The focus for the evening was celebrating the innovation and ingenuity that built Blue Earth County.

Milestones were also a common theme; milestones not only for local businesses but also for BECHS. Over \$11,000 was raised that evening for the History Center Expansion, not including the funds raised through



sponsorships and ticket sales. Surrounded By History continues to grow each year and continues to raise significant funds for BECHS' operations.

Thank you to everyone that attended and made the evening memorable. Thank you to those that



donated items for the auctions and wine raffle. And thank you to our sponsors who made this event possible!

SURROUNDED BY HISTORY

Built in Blue Earth County

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

Presenting Sponsor - \$5,000
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Auction and Wine Donors
Attendees and Volunteers

SAVE THE DATE:
Surrounded By History—April 29, 2016

Membership Makes a Difference



“Our History Matters” is a popular monthly program at the Blue Earth County Historical Society, but it can also be a call to action. History does matter! Without history, we wouldn’t be able to

appreciate where we come from, where we are going or learn from mistakes and successes.

One of the easiest ways to show your history matters is by proudly claiming your BECHS membership. Spread the word to your family and friends. Share with them why history is important to you and encourage them to join.

Yes, the more members BECHS has, the greater the financial benefit for the organization, but it’s so much more than that. More members means more people are excited about history, and more people excited about history means more people will be looking for ways to preserve and share the history we see around us every day.

So THANK YOU to all of our new and renewing members. Now let’s spread the word! Let people know that the Blue Earth County Historical Society is here for everyone looking to learn about and experience local history.

Join or renew your BECHS membership today. See the back page of this issue of *The Historian* or visit www.blueearthcountyhistory.com/join to submit your membership dues online.

Member benefits include:

- A free unlimited annual pass to the History Center Museum, Research Center, and R.D. Hubbard House
- Free or reduced admission to some BECHS programs and events
- 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

BECHS Membership

January - March 2015

New Members

Ken and Jan Albrecht
Trulie Bolton
Margaret Fogelberg
Jerry and Shirleen Gulden
Robert Hale
Ralph Hall
John Hallman
Kathryn Hansen
Elizabeth and Chris Harstad
Jon and Lois Hedman
Lila Kahmann
Bruce Raps
Pat and Linda Smith
Mary Struffert
Paul Von Drasek
Ron and Cindy Welp
Ken Ziegler

Renewing Business Members

Crystal Valley Co-op
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***To ALL our new and renewing members,
THANK YOU for your continued support.***



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January - March 2015

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You can support BECHS by shopping through AmazonSmile when you do your Amazon shopping. Visit www.smile.amazon.com, login to your Amazon account and enter "Blue Earth County Historical Society" as your charity of choice to get started!

It's that simple and next time you shop on Amazon, you will be supporting BECHS while you shop.



Blue Earth County Historical Society Monthly Giving Program



The Monthly Giving Program is an easy way you can help 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.

www.bechshistory.com/monthly-donations.

Around Blue Earth County



The Rapidan Heritage Society is looking forward to our first event of 2015 - Memorial Day, May 25. Services in Rapidan's Memorial Park will begin at 9 a.m. with the North Mankato American Legion Post presenting the Colors. Following the service, coffee and donuts will be served with good neighborly conversations.

At 10 a.m. join us for a presentation about Walt Whitman, perhaps the greatest American poet of the 19th Century and best known for writing *Leaves of Grass*. Did you know that he also had a role in America's Civil War that made him not just a great poet but also a great American?

This presentation will be given by George Romano, past President of the Rochester Civil War Roundtable and member of the Wood Lake Battlefield Preservation Association Board. We are excited to welcome Romano as he shares about Whitman's life, poetry and his role in the Civil War.

A lunch will be served after the Whitman talk, around 11 a.m. Everyone is invited to attend. The lunch is a free-will offering with proceeds going towards the restoration of the caboose (yes, it is still pink!).

Memorial Day will also signal the opening of the depot for 2015. The Depot will be open for visitors on Sundays from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Each year, the Society sells a Red Wing Pottery piece. The 2015 piece is a bread bowl featuring the Rapidan Garage. Last year's piece, a plate featuring a Milwaukee steam engine, is also available.

Deep Valley Homecoming June 26 - 30, 2015



Visit www.betsy-tacysociety.org for a complete schedule of events and registration form.

Advance registration encouraged as limited space available for some programs.



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.

Watch the Baltics all summer long around Minnesota and Wisconsin.



For the Baltic's full schedule, visit www.BlueEarthCountyHistory.com/Baltics and follow them on Facebook.



2015 Minnesota Welsh Hymn Festival

Sunday, September 27 at 1:30 p.m.
First Presbyterian Church, 220 East Hickory, Mankato MN

VISITING CONDUCTOR

Betty Cullingworth
of Toronto, Ontario, Canada

PERFORMING CHOIR

Windom Area Chordhustlers
Windom, MN

4-part Congregational Singing of Welsh Hymns (in English)

For more information about this and other Welsh events, check the website:
<http://mnwelshassociation.weebly.com> and www.facebook.com/MinnesotaWelshAssociation

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.

Calendar of Events April - July 2015

APRIL

- 23 Tune in to KTOE 1420-AM** at 1 p.m. for BECHS Update on Talk of the Town
- 23 Our History Matters: 1940s Genealogy** by **Beth Zimmer**, 6 p.m., History Center, \$5 adults, BECHS members free

MAY

- 2 Hubbard House Opening Weekend**, open for tours 1-4 p.m.
- 2 6th Annual Victorian Tea Party**, 1-4 p.m., R.D. Hubbard House. Tickets on sale now.
- 5 Remember When Coffee Club: School Days**, 10 a.m., History Center, see page 12 for details.
- 5 Watch KEYC News 12** at Noon for monthly BECHS Update
- 9 Young Historians: History Center Tour**, 10 a.m., History Center, Pre-registration.
- 9 Maud Hart Lovelace Young Adults Book Club**, 1 p.m., History Center, Pre-registration.
- 13 Minnesota Vikings Memorabilia Night**, Jake's Stadium Pizza, 4-8 p.m., see page 7 for more information.
- 14 Mankato Heritage Preservation Commission Mankato's Captains of Industry Historic Bus Tour**, 4 p.m. or 5:30 p.m., to register call 311.
- 16 Mankato Baltics @ Columbia Heights**
- 23 History Center Closed, Hubbard House Open *Happy Memorial Day***
- 28 Tune in to KTOE 1420-AM** at 1 p.m. for BECHS Update on Talk of the Town
- 28 Our History Matters: Vintage Baseball** by **Hugh Belgard of the Mankato Baltics**, 6 p.m., History Center, \$5 adults, members free

JUNE

- 2 "Minnesota Maps" Traveling Exhibit Opens**
- 2 Remember When Coffee Club: Front Street**, 10 a.m., History Center
- 2 Watch KEYC News 12** at Noon for monthly BECHS Update
- 5 Story Time at Hubbard House**, 10:30 a.m. Every Friday Morning through August, Hubbard House
- 6 Victorian Lawn Party**, 1-4 p.m., R.D. Hubbard House
- 13 Mankato Baltics 1860s Base Ball Festival**, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Erlandson Park, Mankato
- 20 "Minnesota Homefront" Traveling Exhibit Closes**

- 21 Mankato Baltics @ The Landing in Shakopee**
- 23 Concert on the Courthouse Lawn, 7 p.m.**, Historic Blue Earth County Courthouse. Historic Walking Tours by BECHS 5-7 p.m.
- 25 Tune in to KTOE 1420-AM** at 1 p.m. for BECHS Update on Talk of the Town
- 25 Our History Matters: Mapping and GIS** by **Scott Kudelka**, 6 p.m., History Center, \$5 adults, members free
- 28 Mankato Baltics @ Lanesboro**

JULY

- "50 Years of Vikings Training Camp in Mankato" Exhibit Opens in July** - watch for date and special events to be announced
- 4 History Center Closed, Hubbard House Open *Happy Independence Day!***
- 4 Old-fashioned Independence Day Celebration**, 1-4 p.m., R.D. Hubbard House
- 7 Remember When Coffee Club: Summer Jobs**, 10 a.m., History Center
- 7 Watch KEYC News 12** at Noon for monthly BECHS Update
- 12 Baltics Scrimmage at North Mankato Fun Days**, 11 a.m.
- 23 Tune in to KTOE 1420-AM** at 1 p.m. for BECHS Update on Talk of the Town
- 23 Our History Matters: Bend of the River Photo Club**, 6 p.m., History Center, \$5 adults, members free
- 30- August 1 Blue Earth County Fair**

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. 1868 2. Danville 3. Lake and Tivoli

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 _____

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Individual Senior (62+) \$20

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Please send this form and check to:

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Mankato, MN 56001

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Complete your membership form online
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