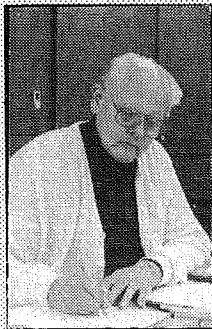


A SALUTE TO VOLUNTEERS!

As we step into the new year, BECHS would like to express a sincere thank you to all of its volunteers who have contributed so much over the last twelve months.

Their dedication is the life-blood of this organization. At BECHS, volunteers fall into three categories: Program volunteers, Collection volunteers, and Facilities volunteers.

Program volunteers assist with the many fundraising events we put on each year. They are the greeters, the servers, the cookie bakers, the Homestead Players, the tour guides, the craft makers, and the every-thing-



else-under-the-sun people. You see them at *For the Love of Betsy, Heritage Dinner, Mother's Day Plant Sale, Tour of Homes, County Fair, Silk Stocking Day Rummage Sale, Ghosts from the Past,*



and the *Holiday Open House*. Some volunteer for just one event, others can be found at every one.

Collection volunteers work primarily with the curatorial staff.

They index newspapers, clip obituaries, label artifacts, enter computer data, file information, research topics, conduct tours, and transcribe cemetery markers. Many of these people unselfishly devote 10 to 20 hours of their time each week at these tasks. Their ongoing efforts



have made our Historical Society one of the finest county research centers in the state.

Our **Facilities volunteers** include everyone from our on-call computer help to the Twilight Garden Club. Plans are also in the making to form a *Craft Club* as we



move into the new year. Craft items will be made to sell in both BECHS gift shops. We know there are a lot of creative people out there. Come join us, bring your ideas and make new friends! For more information, contact Jane Fossen afternoons at the Heritage Center.

The Historical Society encourages everyone to join in



with any aspect of this very important and much appreciated volunteer work. Enclosed in this newsletter is a **Volunteer Registration Card**. If you are at all interested in volunteering at BECHS, please fill the card out and mail it in. You will not be under any obli-

gation, we will simply use the information to compile a list of interested people to contact. For further information, call (507)345-5566.

Blue Earth County Historical Society
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Mankato, Minnesota 56001
(507)345-5566

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BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

January 1991 Calendar of Events

- Jan. 1 *Offices Closed in observance of New Year's Day*
- Jan. 15 *Educators' Open House -- an opportunity for area educators to become acquainted with our facilities*
- Jan. 19 *Young Historians -- Candle making; call for reservations*
- Jan. 21 *Offices Closed in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day*

BECHS Notes

Audrey Burmeister-Hicks

Happy New Year, BECHS Friends, and Happy Birthday BECHS! In 1991, the Blue Earth County Historical Society will be celebrating the 90th year of its organization, the 75th year of its incorporation, and the 120th year of the Hubbard House's existence. In this year of celebrating the *old*, we are also looking forward to initiating the *new*. By the time you read this newsletter, a new Executive Director will have joined BECHS, bringing to the staff the enthusiasm and fresh ideas a new employee brings. These BECHS Notes will be the last I write as Interim Director. The past 3 months have been very challenging and enlightening to me, but I am very happy to return to the work that I find most enjoyable, the management of the BECHS artifact and archives collections. No task at BECHS is carried on by one individual. The Society's greatest strength is the dedication and talent of the team which works together to achieve its goals. I thank the staff -- Mary, Jane K., Jane F., Craig, Kelly and Holly -- and the volunteers -- Jo, Alma, Orv, Ken, Win, Edith, Ora, Harold, Betty and Ryan -- who all worked hard to ensure that BECHS did not miss a beat during these weeks of below normal staffing.

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Edited by Audrey Burmeister-Hicks;
design and layout by Craig Roberts.

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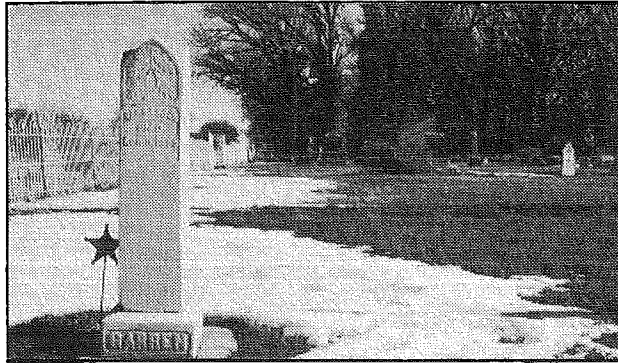
With Respect to Van Garren



Martin Luther King Jr. Day, observed this year on January 21st, can sometimes seem far removed from Blue Earth County. The Civil Rights struggle of the 1960's which it commemorates was experienced here essentially through the evening newscasts. But what the movement sought to rectify was present and had existed locally from the earliest days of our county. Yet, there was also a compassionate and understanding element here as well.

The BECHS vertical file on local citizens of African descent, primarily composed of turn-of-the-century newspaper clippings, is almost painful to read in this day and age. The derogatory terms and portrayals make no effort to mask the intolerance. In the midst of this file, however, is the obituary of a man, Van Garren, which with great objectivity tells us much about the individual, and much about the township of Sterling which did not let his skin color interfere with their ability to appreciate him. From the *Blue Earth County Enterprise*, Friday, April 7, 1905:

"Van Garren, our colored man, whom we have reported as being ill from time to time in these items, died last Monday morning, April 3rd, at the home of Mrs. Annis, where he had been taken to receive proper care and attention. He was removed from his little home by kind neighbors some time in December last, when it was first noticed that he was failing, and they continued to look after him until his death. He did not lack for friends all through his illness. Night after night a couple of them would sit up with him and did not consider it a hardship, knowing well that were the case reversed, as much would be done for them. Van Garren was born sixty-two years ago in Alabama, twenty-five miles due east of Huntsville. He had been leased for a time to act as a servant in a hotel at Corinth, Miss. After the battle of Shiloh his hotel duties became a secondary consideration. He was selected to prepare rations for



prisoners of war. It was he who gave them their first meal after entering Confederate lines, and the last before starting for Andersonville. After the evacuation of Corinth he fell in with a portion of the 5th Iowa Cavalry (afterward's known as Brackett's batallion) and remained with that organization through the war, (two seasons in the south and two against the Indians). In all of that time, more than four years, not a word of reproach was ever heard against him, being of a kindly nature he was liked by all. In the wanderings of the regiment in the south it passed and camped on the plantation where he was born, and where he last saw his mother and sister. Not getting any trace of them it was a disappointment that he never recovered from, and never, in a twenty minutes conversation with him, did he fail to mention that mother, and wonder what had become of her. He, like all ex-slaves, took the name of their master and Garren was the name of his, hence Van Garren.

The funeral was held from the church on Tuesday, the 4th, inst. Rev. Gibbs of Amboy, reading the service. The attendance was large, considering the bad condition of the roads. He was laid to rest in the Sterling cemetery. His friend, W. Wells, of Amboy, who very kindly furnished us with the above information in regard to him, was in attendance."

Van Garren lived alone on a 4 acre plot near the Maple River just northeast of where the Sterling church now stands. He arrived in the county soon after the Civil War, apparently as a friend of soldiers from the area. He operated a milk route for the Sterling creamery. At every Sterling church Memorial Day service, Van Garren's name is mentioned with the footnote that his was the largest funeral ever held in that church. A common man, he earned respect in disrespectful times.

Craig Roberts

BECHS is seeking photos of Van Garren to copy for its collection. Please call (507)345-5566, if you can help.

Program Update

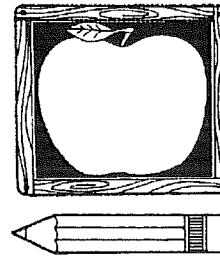
Jane Kolars

Holiday Open House

Our **Holiday Open House** was a wonderful success this year. Well over 500 people, including 3 out-of-town tour buses, spent a festive afternoon in the Hubbard House. We thank all of you who donated time, funds and talent to help make this day a special way to show our appreciation to the community, and to generate funds for our operating budget. Special thanks to Dick Chambers and Paul Schuster of *On Broadway Photography* for donating photographic services and film, to Saint Nicholas (a.k.a. Arnoldus Gruter), and to Shirley Grundmeier, the MSU Chamber Singers and the Lake Crystal Chorus for entertainment.

Educators' Open House

BECHS is hosting an **Educators' Open House** in our new museum, January 15, from 3:30 to 5:30pm. This is an opportunity for area educators to see the museum, talk with tour guides and meet costumed historic characters. We will be encouraging instructors to make use of BECHS facilities, and look forward to their comments on how we can become more accomodating and effective.



For the Love of Betsy!

A very special day to celebrate Maud Hart Lovelace and Betsy-Tacy is being planned for Saturday, February 16, at the Hubbard House. See Betsy-Tacy vignettes, a slide show about Maud Hart Lovelace, an exhibit of paper dolls, and much, much more! It's sure to be a fun afternoon for children and adults.



For those unfamiliar with the Betsy-Tacy series by Mankato author Maud Hart Lovelace, we encourage you to stop by our gift shops and pick up a copy of one of her books. They make truly wonderful reading for children ages 7 to 97.

BECHS's Archivist, Audrey Burmeister-Hicks is planning a paper doll exhibit to run concurrently with *For the Love of Betsy!* If anyone out there has paper dolls from any era (especially Betsy McCall or Nancy & Ronald Reagan) and is willing to loan them for a limited period of time, please call Audrey at the Heritage Center.

Young Historians

Young Historians is a monthly program designed for children grades 3 - 6. We try to make history come alive for these children by doing various activities such as making candles, touring a stone quarry, or creating stained glass. If you have a talent or an idea to share with our young historians, we encourage you to give Jane Kolars a call at 345-5566. We are always looking for new things to try and don't always know who to contact. Thank you.



Membership News

Mary Brown

New Members

Welcome to the following new members:
Mercedes Roos, Hawley, MN
Judy Voss, Mankato
Alan Schaefer, Mankato
Jason Chapman, St. James
Joyce Schoettler, Mankato

Donations

Thanks to the following for donations this past month:
Theonella Troumbly
Ogden W. & Elizabeth H. Confer
Joanne Bierbauer DeWitt
Carol Peterson, Wish Tree Donation
Lowell & Margaret Schreyer, Wish Tree Donation
Kay Lamb

We extend a special thank you to Shopko of Mankato for loaning the Heritage Center Gift Shop the use of a Christmas tree over the holidays.

Please Note: If we received your memorial, membership, or donation after the 15th of the month when our newsletter goes to press, your name will appear in next month's newsletter.