

BECHS NEWS

by Linda Henry, Executive Director

In looking back over 1992, the Society has worked very hard to get its financial house in order. We are pleased to have met the yearly repayment to all funds and have also paid an old legal bill of \$2100.00. We wish to express our sincere thanks to the membership and community for your support in accomplishing this task! Peterson & Company will once again be doing the audit for the Society.

1993 has experienced a wonderful beginning with a \$5000.00 donation from the Mary S. Gray Charitable Trust. It has been requested that this contribution be used to establish an endowment fund for the Blue Earth County Historical Society, the income from which is to be used for general operating purposes.

As you have probably already noticed, your newsletter has a new look. We now have a newsletter committee which will be writing many wonderful and interesting articles for future newsletters. We are also pleased to have Jeff Braun, an MSU intern, doing the editing and layout of the newsletter. Be sure to let us know how you like the new newsletter format.

The Society will also be changing from a monthly newsletter to a bimonthly newsletter. We felt this would be a more adequate solution to cutting costs than the alternative of raising membership dues.

Membership News

Thank you to the new and renewing members.

Hickory Tech Corporation

Judy Voss

Ernest Hansen

Mr & Mrs Sal Frederick

Forrest & George Rettmer

John Kanyusik Family

Berniel Weigt

John & Phyllis Votca

Mr & Mrs John Wittrock

Dr & Mrs Harry Smith

Ken & Arlene Brown

Charles Pennington

Ora Ohlenkamp

Marie Weimern

Pam Pietan

Nancy L Wicker

Mathew L Murray

Chris & Florence Moller

Linda Nussbaumer

Delores Wood

Carlienne Frisch

Tom Salsbery Family

Elmer Goodrich

Phyllis Abbott

Darell Aptiz Family

L.H. Ireland

Douglas W. & Patricia K.

Johnson

John L. Thro

Donald Cramer

Donna Butler

DONATIONS

Thank you for your donation

Mary S. Gray Charitable Trust

Ogden & Elizabeth Confer Trust

Madison Lake Historical Society

Emma Wiecking Estate

Viola Holbrook

Mary Dooley

Mr & Mrs W Mulrooney

Dist. 9 MN Home Econ. Assoc.

Sally O. Moltzen

Young Historians

February 6, 1993

The theme for February's Young Historians program will be "Log cabins and Lincoln," presented by Bryce Stenzel of Mankato. Stenzel is an MSU graduate student majoring in history.

The program will be held on Saturday, Feb 6 from 2 - 4 p.m. in the basement of the Hubbard House.

Stenzel, portraying Lincoln, will demonstrate the various building techniques used in constructing a log cabin, using the Holberg cabin, which was originally built in 1873, as a model.

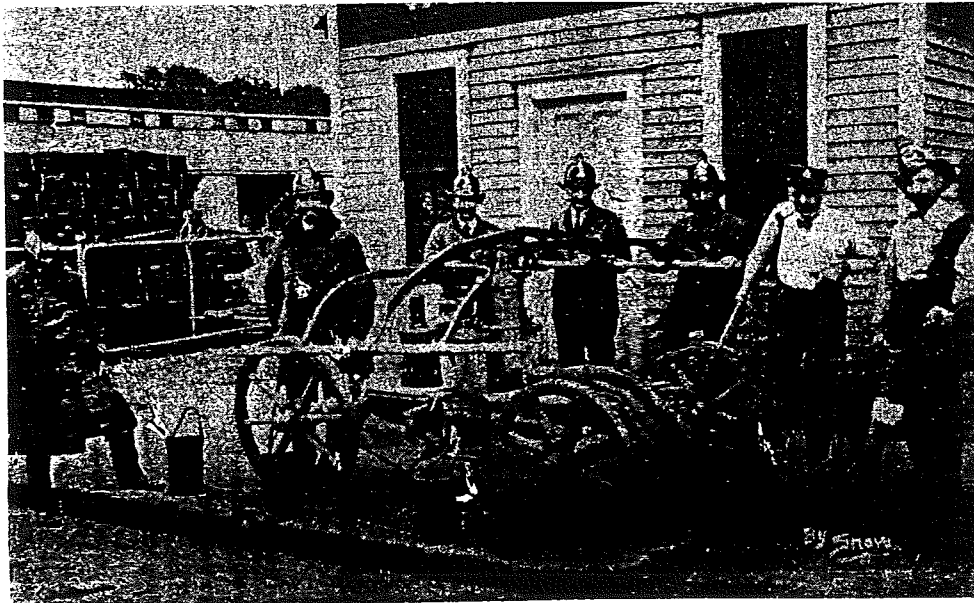
Children will learn about the various types of notching techniques, as well as the reasons for various other architectural features.

In addition, the children will learn what life was like for pioneers living in log cabins.

After the explanation has been completed, the children will be encouraged to try their own hand at log cabin building by putting together one made of "Lincoln Logs."

Space is limited so please be sure to make reservations by calling 345-5566.

Refreshments will follow.



The fire company shows off their hand powered pump truck and equipment used by the Mankato Fire Department--(BECHS Collection)

Mankato's "New" Fire Department

--Jon Craig

The year is 1860 and Mankato decides to organize its first firefighting unit. The leading men in the community band together in an effort to better protect their homes and property from the ravaging effects levied by rampaging fires. On April 6, the Mankato Hook and Ladder Company No. 1, a volunteer fire company, is formed. The department, in these early days, needed all the manpower it could recruit because every hand available could be used to pump the old hand pumps or join in the bucket brigade. The department consisted of 35 men who worked diligently together whenever a fire broke out. The volunteers learned as they worked, sometimes fighting fires for hours, sometimes for days. They were equipped with only a hand drawn truck containing ladders, hooks, buckets and other miscel-

laneous items.

A few years later, a second volunteer company was formed; the Mankato Engine Company No. 1. They were a volunteer group that consisted of approximately 15 men who were provided with a hand drawn and hand operated pumping engine. This was state-of-the-art equipment for the time and the envy of most fire departments in the state. The pump was operated by means of levers and large handles, which folded up when not in use. A dozen or so men were needed to pump the handles to achieve effective results. This was before the days of the water works so water was drawn from cisterns that were placed strategically at certain intervals throughout the town.

The hand drawn trucks and other equipment for both companies were stored in a small building near the old City Hall at South Front and Walnut Streets. A tower capped the building in which a fire bell was placed. Anyone discovering a blaze would run to the tower

and ring the bell. Volunteer firefighters would rush to the station, learn the location of the fire and when enough members had assembled, would man the ropes and pull the truck by hand to the blaze.

The first major stride involving the improvement of firefighting, occurred in 1879 when the water works system was installed. Mains and fire hydrants were placed at principal locations throughout the city. Pressure for the hydrants was produced by a pump located in the engine room of the Hubbard Mill. By this time the old hand truck was obsolete and sold to another city. The last time it was used was in 1880 where a fire ran rampant through the State Hospital in St. Peter. Dozens of lives were lost in the inferno.

On June 12, 1879, another hose company formed. Excelsior Hose Company No. 1 absorbed Mankato Engine Company No. 1. A few days later, a second hose company evolved known as Superior Hose Company No. 2.

The two Hose Companies soon became bitter rivals. Each company expended great measures to beat each other to a fire and be the first company to throw water on it. The rivalry created some hostile feelings between the two companies and fighting among the different members was not uncommon. Some of the hostility was vented through contests and tournaments. They would enter tournaments with each other and with other towns to compete for prizes and purses, not to mention pride.

Town and city events were not complete unless attended by the volunteer firefighters. With

their bright red flannel shirts and patent leather caps and helmets, they made any occasion a genuine party. The Fireman's Ball, an annual affair, was the social event of the season.

In following years the department added companies and new stations throughout the city as it grew. During this time the only means of notifying the firemen of a fire was by means of the bell, located at City Hall.

In 1894 the city installed an automatic alarm system. Telegraph boxes were distributed throughout the city and an electronic device was installed to automatically sound the bell at City Hall. The telegraph box would tap out a code to notify the firefighters where the fire was.

The next year the city purchased a horse drawn hook and ladder for Hook and Ladder Company No. 1. The other companies quickly followed suit by purchasing their own hose wagons and horse drawn engines at about

\$1,200 each.

The next notable advance in fire fighting equipment was made in 1914 when the department received its first motorized vehicle. It was a triple combination machine known as Engine No. 2. In 1916 the department purchased another vehicle equipped for carrying chemicals. And in 1920, an aerial ladder truck was placed into service. Uncontrollable fires were beginning to capitulate to twentieth century technology.

The first chiefs of the department worked without pay. Later, they were paid nominal sums annually, until finally, in 1919, the chief was placed on a full time salaried position.

You send your son running to City Hall to ring the fire bell that will notify the firefighters. You sit back in your back yard and watch the flames swallow your home. After all, you know it's going to be a while before anybody shows.

SOURCE: *A History of Mankato Fire Department:* Ben Bangert, date unknown

SOURCE: *Mankato Free Press*, April 5, 1960



Central Fire Station, 121 S. Second St., Mankato -- (BECHS Collection)

February 1993 Calendar of Events

Feb 6 *Young Historians*
2-4 p.m.,
at Hubbard House

Feb 12 *Lincoln's Birthday*

Feb 13 *Betsy - Tacy*
Birthday Party
1 - 4 p.m.
at Hubbard House

Feb 14 *Valentines's Day*

Feb 22 *President's Day*
Offices Closed

Heritage Center
415 Cherry St., Mankato
Hours:

Exhibit Gallery 1-4 p.m.
Tuesday - Sunday

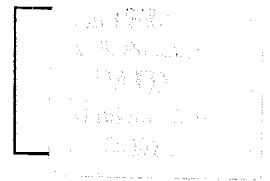
Research Center 1-4 p.m.
Tuesday - Friday

Hubbard House
606 S Broad St., Mankato
Hours:
1-4 p.m.
Saturday & Sunday only

Send Us Your Stories

The newsletter committee is looking for photos, stories, or anecdotes members may have about the Nov. 11, 1940 blizzard to publish in a future article. Please send in anything you wish to share.

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



ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



Superior Hose Company No. 2 hook and ladder truck outside their firestation.--(BECHS Collection)