COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Blue Earth County Historian

# From Daredevil to Businessman

## Glenn Allyn, Turn of the Century Mankato Car Dealer

Jeffrey Braun



Helen, Glenn and daughter Bonnie pose in an automobile display at a fair (probably the Blue Earth County Fair) circa 1913. Glenn Allyn opened the first Mankato Ford dealership in 1909. It was located on Second Street. He added a Stoddard-Dayton dealership in 1911. Helen, Glenn's wife, helped with the business and taught women to drive. (Blue Earth County Historical Society Collection)

In less than 100 years, automobiles have gone from frail, unreliable and whimsical pieces of machinery to an indispensable means of transportation for most people in the United States.

Various residents of Mankato made their own contributions to automobile technology during the pioneering days of the automobile industry in America.

Cars built in Mankato such as the Mayer Special--with it's V-8 engine and independent coil spring suspension--as well as the four-wheel-drive Kato cars and trucks were some of the first vehicles in the United States with such features.

The automobile industry needs a complicated infrastructure in order to support itself. Fuel and service stations, manufacturer's dealerships and parts distributors immediately come to mind.

Glenn Allyn was one of the more colorful Mankato car dealers in the early part of this century.

Allyn first began coming to Mankato around 1894 or 95 as a young boy, tagging along with his father on business trips to the

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Blue Earth County Historian

The Blue Earth County Historian is published bimonthly by the Blue Earth County Historical Society.

The Blue Earth County Historical Society is a non-profit organization and has been collecting and preserving artifacts of historical value to the people of south central Minnesota since 1901.

BECHS is the only organization or institution entirely dedicated to the collection, preservation and exhibition of Blue Earth County History.

## Blue Earth County Historian Staff

Jeffrey Braun Editor (Mankato State University Intern)

Newsletter Committee:

Lucille Fitzsimmons Dr. Bert & Inella Burns Lona Falenczykowski Marge Oelerich Gail Palmer Linda Henry

Please direct any inquiries or submissions to the Newsletter Committee:

Blue Earth County Historical Society Heritage Center 415 Cherry St. Mankato, MN 56001

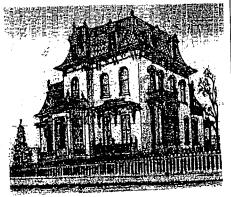
BECHS also operates the historic R. D. Hubbard House. Built in 1871 by Rensselaer D. Hubbard, founder of Hubbard Milling Company, the elegant mansion and nearby brick carriage house contain many displays and artifacts which are open to the public.

The Hubbard House is owned by the city of Mankato and has been operated by BECHS since 1938.

The Hubbard House is being readied for restoration and is listed on the State Historical Record, as well as the National Register of Historic Places.

**Hubbard House** 606 S. Broad St. Mankato, MN

Saturday and Sunday



R. D. Hubbard House

Second floor restoration of the Hubbard house is underway. Watch future issues of Blue Earth County Historian for updates on its progress.

## Membership News

Thank you to the new and renewing members.

Cralg Roberts Tire Associates Eldon & Helen Jones Mr. & Mrs. Sylvan Thiesse EdithHooman Fyme Haugen Grandma's Store

Paul & Mary Jo Hustoles Miller Auctions Malecki Gislason, Dosland Hunter

Dr. & Mrs. David Clause Mr. & Mrs. Charles Barnard

Betty O'Sullivan Marilyn Birbeck Richard Cogley Inelia Burns Glenn & Helen Erickson

Joseph & Malda Farnham Dr & Mrs Ben Geurs Evelyn Hill

Robert & Gail Ihrig

Wayne & Anne Knewtson Laura Linde Mary Mortier Arly Paulson

Renee Mathiason Norwest Bank Patricia Pond

Judy & Jerry Reich Save Mor Antiques & Jewelry Survey Services Inc.

Vee Williams Thomas Bohan

Judith Vosbeek

## **Calendar of Events** November/December 1993

## October

Oct. 30 Young Historians Halloween Party, 2-4 p.m., Heritage Center

## November

Bake and Craft sale Nov. 6 9 a.m. - 4 p.m., Heritage Center

Nov. 15 Deadline for Hubbard House contractor bids

Nov. 20 Young Historians Christmas decorations, 2-4 p.m., Heritage Center

#### December

Christmas Open Dec. 5 House 1-5 p.m., Hubbard House

#### Blue Earth County Historical Society

#### Board of Trustees

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Linda Henry Carol Oney Bryce Stenzel Betty Henry

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## Heritage Center

415 Cherry St., Mankato Winter Hours:

1-4 p.m. Exhibit Gallery

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

Tuesday - Friday

## Hubbard House

606 S Broad St., Mankato Winter Hours:

1-4 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday only

1-4 p.m.

## From the Desk of BECHS Director

Linda Henry

Hello Everyone,

It's hard to believe this is the last *Blue Earth County Historian* for 1993. How time flies! It was a great year for the society even though attendance was down this year. I'm sure one reason for low attendance was the severe flooding in the early part of the tourist season.

Many programs were successful this year including the annual Heritage Dinner and Ghosts From the Past. The 1993 Heritage Dinner in April (honoring the Palmer Family of St. Clair, Minn.) was our largest ever with 223 guests attending, and more than 400 people made the trek to Williams Nature Center for Ghosts From the Past.

I would like to thank the following Ghosts From the Past volunteers for their superb acting: Eleanor and John Wittrock, Betty Cords, John Christenson, Mike Lagerquist, Bob and Heidi Ihrig, Mara Kalvig and Sara Tacheny!

A small number of bus trips, including one to tour the Minnesota Historical Society, were also popular.

The society has received three major grants since the beginning of the year. The William and Mary Schultz Foundation donated \$5,000. A \$7,000 advertising grant from the Lowell Andreas Foundation has helped pay for advertising the society's events throughout the year and finally, a \$2,000 donation from the Archer Daniels Midland Corporation was received.

I am gratefull for the generosity of these coroporations. Money from these donations has been used for many things at the society including: activities, operating expenses and a new copy machine.

Membership has continued to be strong in 1993 and I hope to make 1994 even better.

One of the significant changes in 1993 was the new newsletter. Unfortunately, **Jeff Braun**, our editor, will be leaving us soon. Jeff has done a superb job and will surely be missed.

Our thanks to the many members and volunteers who have helped make 1993 a successful year for the society.

Happy Holidays!

## A Few Words From the Editor

I'm sitting in the office of the historical society, looking out the window and wondering just what to write. This is probably my last newsletter and I feel as though I should write something about my time here.

Outside the sky is clear and it's a nice fall day. Some college students are playing with a dog behind their house. Only a few months ago, I was a student like them, trying to find ways to avoid homework.

It's a warm September afternoon, but I know it won't be long until everything is buried with snow.

When I started here in January, I never really told you much about myself so I'll just tell you a little bit before I go.

I'm 28 and grew up in Richfield, Minn. After starting out at the University of Minnesota in civil engineering, I decided to take some time off from school to work.

I got a job as a customer service agent at Mesaba Airlines (Northwest Airlink) in the Twin Cities. I still work there.

In 1990, I decided to transfer my credits

to Mankato State and after three years, graduated in June, with a B.S. in Mass Communication. I also minored in history and business administration.

I played tuba and baritone in the MSU Wind Ensemble and also played tuba in the UofM Marching Band while I was in school

I enjoy history and worked for more than 13 years with my father, volunteering at a Twin Cities railroad musem. Many of the things I did there included restoring vintage railway equipment and working on train operating crews. I had the experience of hand firing a steam locomotive on mainline passenger train excursions for more than five years.

(You probably figured I had at least a slight interest in railroads from my short stories.)

I hope to write a book sometime on Mankato railways but you know how those projects go (or don't go).

My year here at the historical society has

been a great experience and has gone by way too fast. It seems like yesterday that I started my internship, but January is long gone and another one is just around the corner.

I enjoy working with all the people I've met here. I'm really glad Linda asked me to stay on after my internship was over in March. Everyone here is super and I'd love to stay but I can't. I've been driving down from the Twin Cities a couple days a week since school ended, but after November my work schedule won't allow me to do that. I'll miss working here and am glad for the short time I spent here.

I know people are averse to change. I hope you've enjoyed the ways I've tried to change the *Blue Earth County Historian* and that they weren't too drastic.

Thank you for the great opportunity to work here, its been enjoyable and educational. I don't like good-bye because it sounds too final, so take care everyone, its been great!

Jeffrey Braun - Editor

## From Daredevil to Businessman

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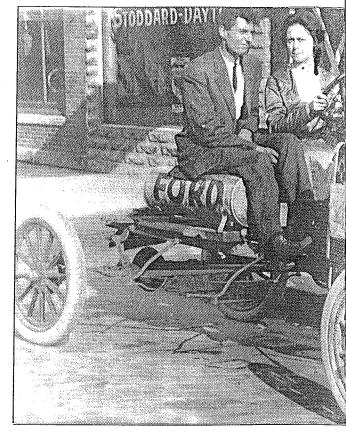
"Hub of Southern Minnesota," as Allyn called it.

Allyn moved to Mankato in 1903 to attend Mankato Commercial College and roomed at the YMCA. Allyn and several other school friends loved to wreak havoc on the town of Mankato, including firing off the old Civil War canon in Lincoln Park one Fourth of July. The concussion broke most of the windows in town, according to Allyn.

Allyn's wild driving stunts moved the mayor to appoint a city traffic officer.

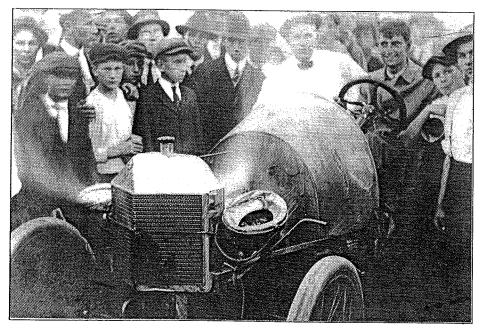
Regardless of Watters lack of a motor vehicle, Allyn and his friends were frequently arrested for speeding. By Allyn's own account he was "considered a menace to the life and limb of everyone." The Minneapolis Tribune ran an article about Allyn which said he had been arrested 36 times for speeding. "I had lost count," Allyn said.

Allyn was notorious enough for Free Press editor Joe Reynolds to call for sending Allyn "up on the hill" for 30 days while Henry Hance of the streetcar company complained that Allyn was "giving his streetcar motormen nervous



Glenn and Helen on a Ford Model T chassis outside Allyn's delab is peeking its nose over the dash board. It's hard to tell if the uncomfortable. Ford offered plain chassis for commercial use for, possibly promotion of Ally

The "reign of terror" brought on by Allyn and his friends increased with their discovery of automobiles. It got to the point that Mayor A. Mayer appointed Watters as a traffic officer to try and control the young men, but he could hardly be effective in enforcing the city's speed limit of 15 miles-per-hour while on foot.

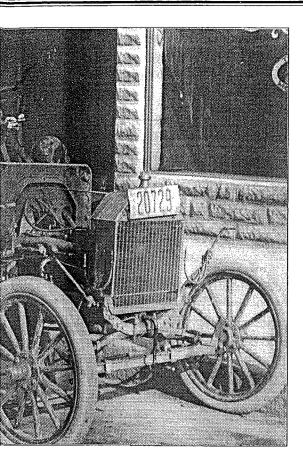


Glenn Allyn built several race cars and often drove them himself. At this time, crashes in racing were frequent and often fatal. Allyn has just crashed one of his cars during a race at a fair near Mankato, circa 1913. Judging from his expression, the car got the worst end of the deal, suffering bent headlights and a blown engine. (BECHS Collection)

prostration."

By 1909, Allyn was ready to settle down a bit but not ready to give up his interest in cars and speed. He obtained a Ford dealership on Second Street for Mankato and the surrounding area and joined the growing number of car





lership on Second Street. The everpresent family black ere's a bench over that gas tank but Glenn looks rather out it's hard to tell what this well worn example was used 's dealership.

(BECHS Collection)

dealers in town.

Clarence Saulpaugh already had a Buick dealership in the lobby of his hotel. Alba Lewis sold REOs in the J. A. Lewis and Son hardware store. Gomer Jones and Guy Hopkins sold a few token Maxwells and Ramblers. Besides these early Mankato car dealers, Ernest Rosenberger was busy building four-wheel-drive Kato trucks.

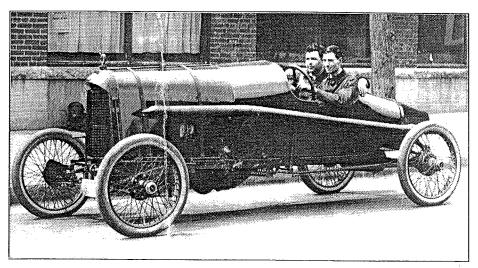
Henry Ford thought the four-door design would just be a fad. In 1910, several manufacturers announced four-door models for the 1911 model year. Ford thought four-door models would prove to be a fad and chose not to offer one in his 1911 line up.

Allyn acquired a Stoddard-Dayton dealership in the spring of 1911. When the new four-door model arrived, he had carriage builders Williams and Beach, and painter Harry Nichols come and have a look at the new

of the model's popularity.

Ford had underestimated the popularity of a four-door model and dealers pressed Ford to introduce one. Apparently sometime in 1911 or early 1912, Dan Murphy of Blue Earth went to Detroit. Allyn recalled hearing that Murphy "literally raised the roof at the Ford plant." Ford announced a four-door model soon thereafter.

Still feeling a need for speed,



Another one of Allyn's home-built race cars circa 1917. He was obviously a serious racer judging by the car's design. It's hard to tell the make of the chassis but Allyn's body design isn't much different than cars that were being raced at Indianapolis and other larger race tracks around the country. His cars often raced at the Twin City Speedway. (Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport site?) (BECHS Collection)

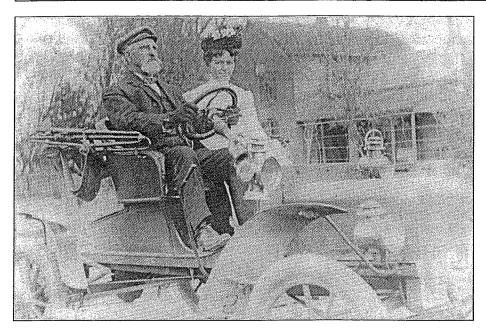
car. Allyn's intention was for the three to make after-market doors to retro-fit his two-door Fords.

Allyn considered the three men master craftsmen. They did such a good job of fitting the doors and matching the paint he kept them busy most of the year converting two-door Fords to four-door models.

Although Allyn said Mankato was the only place in the world one could get a four-door Ford at that time, it's likely other dealers made similar conversions in light Allyn began trying to promote speed contests. The Clements brothers (Warner, Wilbur, Braden and Cyril) were the only ones besides Allyn who were, as he said, "afflicted with 'lead' feet."

The brothers obtained a Model 17 Buick and had it "worked over" by Pin Jones, Irve Hammett and Kenneth Hoerr. Allyn said he remembered it to be similar to the "Marquette Buick," a racing car made famous by Louis Chevrolet, "Wild" Bob Burnham and Louis Strang.





Lawrence and Christine Cummins driving their new car in Mankato, sometime after the turn of the century. I wonder how long her white dress will stay clean on those dirt roads? It doesn't say what type of car it is but I would guess a Ford circa 1903-1905. Maybe a reader knows its type. (BECHS Collection)

# Wilbur not only lost control of the Buick, he lost an eye.

The Clements' car was really too fast for the half-mile dirt track at the Mankato fairgrounds but Wilbur was sure he could keep it on the track. He lost control and crashed through a fence and down an embankment. He climbed out of the car, scratched and bruised, covering one eye crying, "I lost my eye!"

A crowd of people gathered to see if Clements was alright or if they could help. All he could say was, "I wish some of you would look for my eye; it cost me \$125!" It turned out he lost his glass eye in the accident, it was later found.

Glenn Allyn fielded several race cars, including some that were

raced at the Twin City Speedway, but he didn't have a corner on the Mankato racing market. Besides himself and the Clements brothers, Helen Allyn (Glenn's wife) expressed an interest in car racing.

Helen suggested a "ladies race" but seemed to be the only woman in town at the time, interested in competing. It's likely there were other women in town that would have liked to race against her, but chose not to because it wouldn't have been considered proper at the time. (Today there are several top notch women race car drivers.)

Glenn decided to go ahead with the race anyway and hoped one of his friends would volunteer to dress as a woman for the event. Eventually, George Schaus, one of his four mechanics, volunteered to drive against Helen.

Schaus dressed in a long white

dress and a big white auto bonnet. He showed up at the fairgrounds behind the wheel of a well worn race car spewing smoke and fire.

# It might have worked if Schaus' dress would have been secure.

During the race at the fairgrounds, Schaus lost control of the dress and as the wind took charge, their little hoax was revealed.

Helen also worked with Glenn at his dealership and taught other women how to drive. She took her students to the Blue Earth County Fairgrounds where they could use the circular race track to practice.

Allyn was still quite the daredevil after going into the automobile business. According to some reports, he once drove a car up the steps of the opera house in downtown Mankato! The reports didn't say why, but the sight had to be unusual at the very least. One wonders if it helped sell many cars.

The Allyns and their friends were definitely colorful people and pioneers in Mankato's budding automotive industry.

Information for From Daredevil to Businessman was taken from an "I Remember Mankato" article written by Glenn H. Allyn for the May 22, 1952 Mankato Free Press.

# **BECHS News Briefs**

## · FALL FESTIVAL

The Fall Festival held Sunday, Sept. 12 was a success. A large crowd of people turned out for the event at the Hubbard House.

Everyone enjoyed the doll and toy tractor displays as well as Erwin Suess' accordian music and the other activities of the festival.

The guests agreed they were interested in making the Fall Festival an annual event at the Hubbard House.

## · GHOSTS FROM THE PAST

More than 400 brave souls ventured out to Williams Nature Center Oct. 2 and 3, apparently drawn there by stories of mysterious figures lurking in the shadows at dusk.

Ghosts From the Past is always a big event for Blue Earth County Historical Society. 1993's ghost weekend was no exception.

The two day event generated more than \$2,300 in ticket sales. BECHS' expenses for the weekend totaled \$100.

#### BAKE AND CRAFT SALE

It's not too early to start thinking about the holiday season ahead.

BECHS is getting in the holiday spirit with its Bake and Craft sale Saturday, Nov. 6.

Between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. the Heritage Center will be host to a variety of homemade crafts and baked goods that are bound to put you in the holiday spirit too!

And don't forget to stop in for lunch. Barbeque sandwiches, chips and dessert will be on sale.

Call Linda Henry at 345-5566 if you're interested in selling some of your craft goods or just want to volunteer to help out.

Admission is free. Cost for exhibitors is \$15 per table.

## · YOUNG HISTORIANS

Young Historians will meet between 2 and 4 p.m Nov. 20 at the Heritage Center.

Children will have a chance to make their own Christmas decorations that will be displayed at the Hubbard House Christmas Open House Dec. 5.

## · CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE

Although Hubbard House will be closed most of the winter for restoration, it will be open one special day in December.

Good food and Christmas carolers will mark BECHS' Christmas Open House Sunday, Dec. 5.

Between 1 and 5 p.m., the Hubbard House will be open to guests. There will be pictures

with Santa as well as strudel and decorations for sale. It will also be a chance to see the restoration progress. Don't miss it!

## · HUBBARD HOUSE RESTORATION

Restoration of the Hubbard House has finally begun after years of planning and fundraising for the project.

Volunteers began the slow task of removing artifacts and wall paper from the building's second floor in September.

Contractor bids for restoration work are being accepted until the Nov. 15 deadline.

Work will begin soon after selection of the winning bid.

The second floor will be restored to its 1905 configuration. Several walls that have been removed since 1905 will be replaced using original blueprints.

A major part of the restoration will be structural repair to nearly all the ceiling and wall sections of the second floor.

Changes have been made since 1905, and it will be interesting to see the building's transformation back to that time period.

This is the second phase of Hubbard House restoration. The first phase began last year with extensive work on the exterior as well as landscaping. **Blue Earth County Historical Society** 415 Cherry Street Mankato, Minnesota 56001 (507) 345-5566

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## Start your Holiday shopping now!

The Blue Earth County Historical Society has something for everyone on your shopping list.

Stop by the gift shop at the Heritage Center or Hubbard House and see the selection for yourself.

Members receive a 10 percent discount.

Gift Shop hours are:

Hubbard House - 1-4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

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

Give a gift that also supports the Blue Earth County Historical Society!



