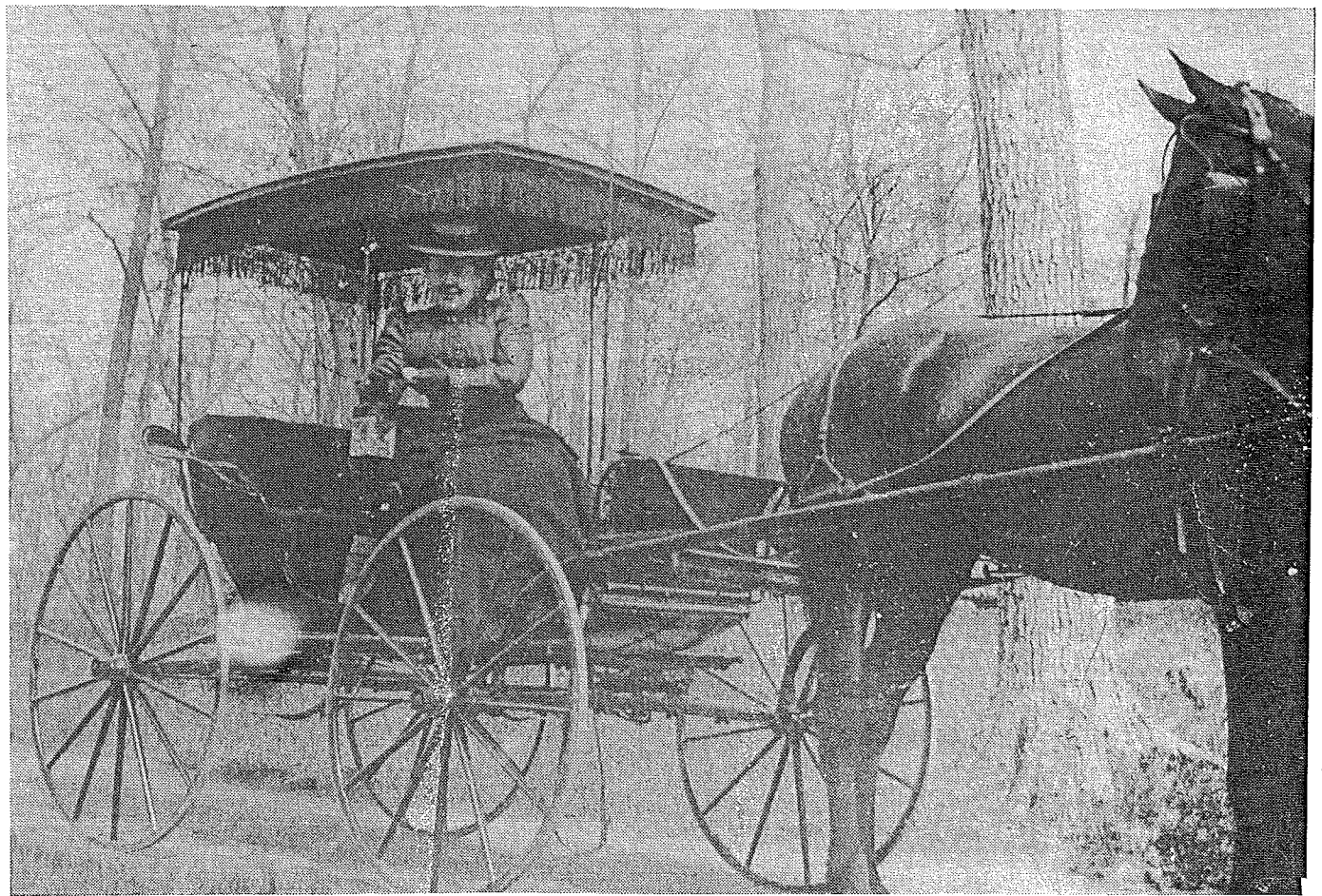


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Blue Earth County Historian

The Horse And Buggy Days

By
Anna M. Wiecking

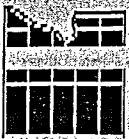


Mrs R. D. Hubbard with her horse and buggy

I'm going to tell you about some of the things I used to hear and see when I was a little girl, over 75 years ago. People have called those days

the horse and buggy days because most of the work that motors and machines, cars and trucks do today, was done by horses then. Early in the

morning, we children were still in bed while our parents were up, for people got up early in those days. The early morning sounds were



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.

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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.

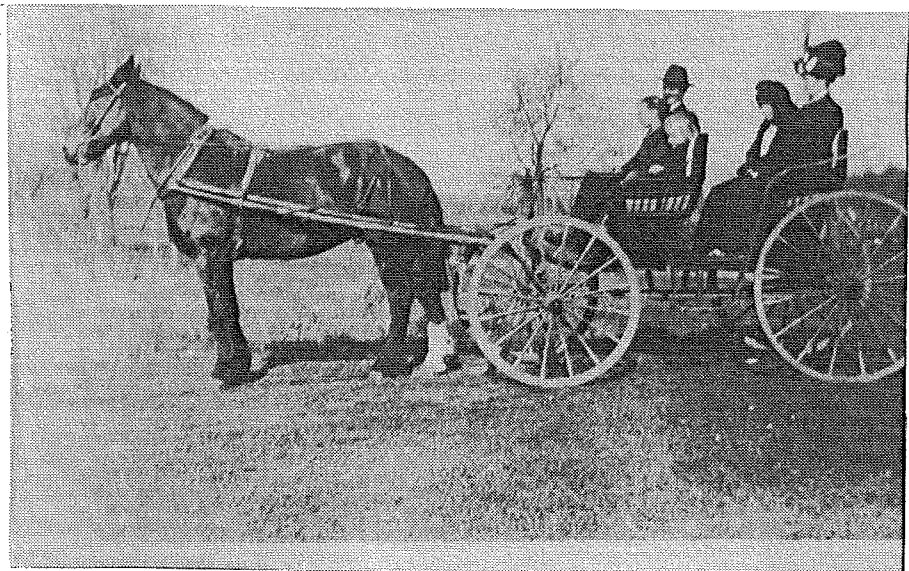
The Hubbard House is owned by the city of Mankato and has been operated by BECHS since 1938.

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

different than they are today. We could hear roosters crowing and hens cackling, pumps squeaking and clocks striking. Our cow was mooing in her stall, waiting to be fed and milked. Then the sound of a little tinkling bell! A man was gathering the cows to take them to

of the morning sounds had to do with horses going by the house. Of course many people walked to work then and since our sidewalks were wooden, we could hear them very well. And others used bicycles, so we heard bicycle bells, too. But a lot of people went past our house in



A pioneer family and their horse and buggy.

pasture out on the edge of town. The bell was on the lead cow. Lucy went along too with the herd of cows and the man brought her back in the afternoon.

We could hear our black horse Prince whinnying for his breakfast and the sound of our backyard pump when father pumped water for the animals. If Prince got too hungry he would paw with his feet on the barn floor. Many

wagons or carriages to work downtown.

The big heavy wagons had wheels with wood spokes and heavy iron rims. They rumbled loudly over the stony hard roads. There were no paved roads at all then. The wagons carried heavy loads and we could hear the loud clop-clop of the heavy feet of the big horses. Sometimes their harness would shake and make noise, and the

drivers would call to their horses or to the people passing by. There were many lighter carriages that had light-weight slender horses to pull them. They made nice trotting sounds and the wheels a softer spinning sound.

Did you ever hear of a horse car? When I was little there was a horse car line in Mankato. There were two heavy iron rails laid down on Front Street, something like a railroad track. The car was like a small bus, rather close to the ground, with four wheels. The rims of the wheels were curved to fit down over the rails so the cars couldn't get off the track. Mankato horse cars had just one horse hitched in front but in St. Paul they used a pair of mules in the early days. Our horse car line didn't last very long. You could only go where the rails went, mostly on Front Street. Perhaps it didn't pay well. But there were no street cars until 1907, many years after the horse cars left.

Now there were different kind of horses for different kinds of work. The heavy draft horses were sometimes as heavy as 1400 pounds, and they could pull heavy loads -- wagons piled high with stone, wooden

boxes or logs. Often they were matched teams, for a pair would be chosen because they looked alike -- two big brown bays, two black, two dappled grays, or even whites. They were beautiful to see.

Our fire engines and wagons used to be drawn by horses. They were well trained to do their jobs, and we loved to watch them at practice early in the evening in the fire station. The bell would give the alarm, the fireman would come sliding down their poles, open the stalls, and out would come the horses, their ears pricked up, all alert and ready. They went to their places in front of the wagon, the firemen let down the harness dropped down on the horses' backs, the firemen fastened the straps and buckles. The men jumped on the wagons, the big bell clanged, and away they went at a gallop to the fire. There they stood perfectly still while the firemen worked. They were wonderfully trained.

Then there were carriage and riding horses, much lighter in weight and trained to go fast. There were many kinds of carriages. In our family we had a surrey with two seats. To keep

the sun off there was a cover or canopy over it, with a fringe all around. All our family could get into it by putting the smallest ones on a box on the floor. My father had a single buggy too, for business trips. And he had a sleigh, or cutter, with bells on the shafts. There were two shafts for Prince to stand between. Many had two horses to hitch to their carriages, one on each side of just one shaft. Some children had small gentle Shetland ponies with a small carriage, or they rode on the pony as they still do today. In those days Sibley Park was really a big race track, and we used to see horse and buggy races there. There was a grandstand where people could sit to watch the races.

In those days most men came home for the noon meal, often walking both ways. Children came home from school for noon day meal too. Mothers seldom worked away from the home so the whole family was together. But the people who drove horses to town had to take care of them. If you were down for just a few hours you would tie your horse to a hitching rail or post. These rails were all along the street in front of the stores. Most people had

stone or iron hitching posts in front of their homes to tie the horses to. Some drivers just dropped a heavy iron or strap that they could hook up to the horse's head, then leave it on the ground so the horse wouldn't get away. If you stayed away when the horse needed to eat a meal, the driver would take a canvas feed bag out of his buggy and hang it under the horse's mouth so he could eat some oats while he was standing. Some people came to town to stay a long time, overnight. Then the horses were taken to a livery stable, like a big barn, a sort of hotel for horses. There they were cared for until the driver wanted them again. Horses had to be watered too. At some street intersections there were large round drinking fountains for horses. Our horse might be going along slowly, but if he saw a drinking fountain he hurried fast. He loved to put his nose way down, blow bubbles, and often he took such a long drink father would say, "Now Prince, you've had enough."

In those days all our deliveries were made by horse and wagon. Our milk, groceries, coal, ice, rural mail all were horse drawn. Our street

sprinklers were big barrels on wheels with horses to pull them. If we needed a way to get to the train station or some other place we called a hack, with four wheels, a box-like coach with windows, with the driver sitting high up in front.

Of all the delivery people who used to bring things to us, the ice-man was our favorite. We didn't have an electric refrigerator of course, because we didn't have electricity as yet. But we had an ice-box that stood on our back porch. We used it in warm weather, for in cold weather we didn't need it. We used our cool cellars and pantry.

Our ice came from our rivers. When a thick enough crust of ice had formed on the river, men would saw big chunks of it and store it in large barn-like ice houses, where they packed the ice in saw-dust. There it stayed until warm weather came. Then the ice dealers got out their big horse-drawn ice wagons. They were wooden, with high rounded canvas tops that looked a little like prairie schooners. The wagons were painted blue and white.

When we needed ice we put a card in our

window. We bought it by weight. The ice wagon stopped and a man lifted a big chunk of ice from the back of his wagon to the flat place made when the tailpiece of the wagon came down. Then the man took an ice-pick and chipped off the edges and dirty parts until the cake would fit our ice-box. Then he put a heavy leather pad on his shoulder, lifted the cake with a pair of tongs and carried it on his shoulder into the porch. He lifted the cover to the ice-compartment on top of the box, dropped in the ice and put down the cover.

Many people had pans under the box to catch the drippings from the melting ice. We had a pipe that went down under the porch. We loved to have the ice man come, for we children would go barefooted to follow the wagon, pick up ice pieces to suck, puddle in the water in the street. In the house, mother had to clean up the porch after the ice-man.

It was the farmers who used horses more than anyone else. They could not have managed without them. The pioneers had used oxen, but they were too slow for big fields. The farmers did their plowing, sowing, cultivating, hauling,

threshing, everything with horses.

There were many things horses and drivers needed, so many people earned their living by selling, making, mending and doing other things for horses or their owners. There had to be harness shops, carriage shops, feed and hay stores, besides livery stables. There were horse farms where they raised horse to sell.

Horses got sick so there had to be medicines and veterinarians to care for them. People needed warm robes of fur or wool for winter driving, and light-robes to keep off dust and dirt that the horse could kick up into their laps in summer. One had to have curry combs and brushes to keep a horse's coat clean and glossy. Horse had to be well cared for if they were to do this hard work.

Horses wore shoes. We used to love to watch a blacksmith at work. A man would bring in a horse to be shod, that is,

the horse's hoof had grown, sometimes a nail was loose or the shoes needed to be sharper for icy streets. The smith

knew what to do. Now he would put the shoe into his fire in the forge and and make the bellows blow to drive air under the fire until it was red hot. He would hold the shoe with a pair of



People and their horses gather at the Mankato Fair Grounds, Mankato, 1910.

to have his shoes looked after. The horses seemed to know what was going on and stood well. In summer someone might use a branch or fly whisk to keep the flies off. The blacksmith wore a heavy leather apron. He would pick up a horse's foot and hold it between his knees and look at the bottom of it. Then he would take off the shoe. Sometimes the shoe didn't fit because

white hot. Now he would take it out of the fire and lay it on his anvil, a heavy iron stand. He hammered at the shoe and shaped it. Then when it was right he dropped the hot shoe in some cold water, making a loud hissing sound, then nailed it on the horse's foot. The hoof of the horse had a layer of hard bony stuff all around it, not very thick. The smith knew just how to put the

thin flat horseshoe nails through the holes in the shoe into the hard bony layer of the hoof and then turn the end of the nails back. The flesh inside the layer was tender and would hurt if the smith didn't know just how to do it. A horse has four feet so the smith now had to look at the other feet. When all were ready, he would do a little filing and trimming around the edges as the horse stood on his feet.

People usually loved their horse and made pets of them. They had to understand how to handle them and take good care of them if they wanted horses to trust them and work for them. Horses could think and feel. There were some people who were cruel to their horses, but the police got them. Doctors were often called out in the night. A doctor would go with his horse and buggy, way out in the country after a long day in the office. When he had taken care of the patient the doctor would come out, take the blanket off his sleeping horse, tie the reins around a part of the buggy, sit back in the seat and go fast asleep. The good horse would take him safely home while the doctor slept.

Sometimes horses

got funny ideas. I knew of one horse who didn't like pigs. When the horse was hitched to a wagon with pigs in it, he wouldn't go at all. My uncle had a horse who would look around to see who was driving the carriage. If it was my aunt, he took his time, but if it was my uncle, he trotted right along.

I shall tell you a story to show how important it is to understand a horse and handle him in the best way. Once my parents and my two sisters and I were out for a ride up behind Highland Park. The roads were very poor. Part of the road was made of logs put across a marshy place. One of these logs must have rotted and there was a hole that nobody saw. Prince got one hind leg into this hole and his leg sank down, and was stuck there. He got very nervous and we were afraid he would break his leg. My mother told me to take my sisters and sit on a log and be very quiet. My father tied one rein to the other and made a long leading line. My mother went to Prince, patted him and talked to him, then patted him some more until he was quiet. Then she gave the stuck leg a pat to see if he could raise it up. Prince tried

but couldn't do it, so mother began talking and patting again until she thought he was ready to try. This time when she patted his leg it raised very carefully and out it came. How happy we all were!

Horses sometimes lived until they were 25 years old but they couldn't work that long. When our horses became too old to work, we sold him to a farmer who put him out to pasture and did a little light work now and then.

When the first automobiles came to town, horse owners were scared because horses were afraid of cars. Sometimes the horse owners would call up the car people and if they were going out that day the horse people would stay home. One day we were crossing the Pleasant Street slough when we heard a car. Prince heard it before we did and was already very nervous. Mother asked us to be very quiet. She stood up in the carriage, wrapped the reins tightly around her hands and arms, and held on very tight. The reins are fastened to the iron bit in the horse's mouth and his mouth is very sensitive. He knows what the driver

"Horses" continued on page 8

Calendar of Events

Sept. 20 -- BECHS Annual Meeting 7:00 p.m. at the Heritage Center

Oct. 1&2 -- "Spirits From The Past" 5:30 - 8:30 p.m. Tickets sold in advance only.

Oct. 22 -- Grandma's Attic and Bake Sale 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. at the Mankato Place (formerly Mankato Mall)

Nov. 5 -- Cookie Walk at the Heritage Center 10:00 a.m to whenever cookies are sold.

Hope To See You There!!

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wants. When the car was safely by, we children turned around and made faces at it. We didn't know of course that in a few years there would be more cars than horses. Many of us were sorry to say goodbye to the horse and buggy days.

Reprinted from *As We Once Were* by Anna M. Wiecking, 1971.