



BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

July/August 1995

## *Blue Earth County Historian*

### *Blue Earth County Fair Minnesota's Oldest County Fair - August 10-13*

*by: Julie Schrader*

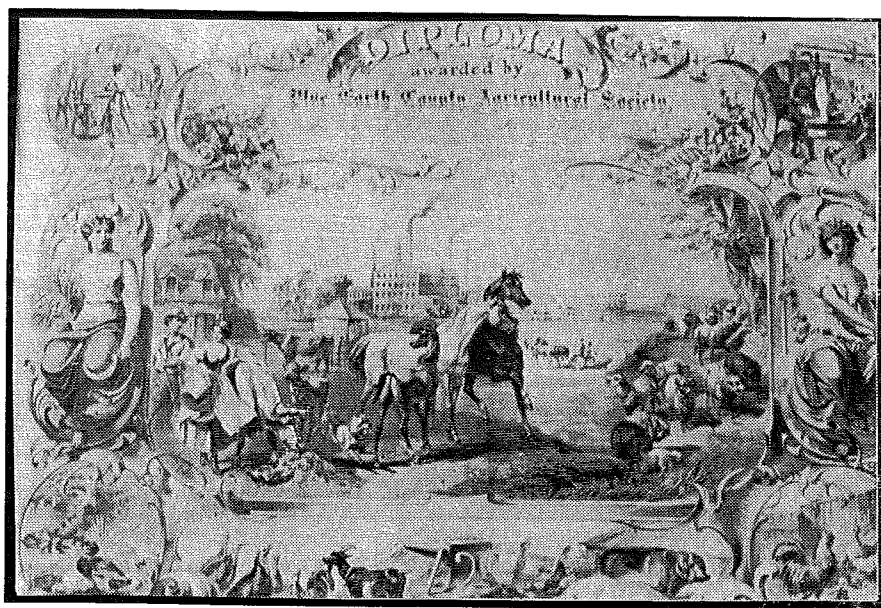
The 1995 Blue Earth County Fair marks the 136th Anniversary of the County Fair. The Blue Earth County Agricultural Association held Minnesota's first county fair on October 7, 1859 at the Minneopa House (now Minneopa State Park in South Bend Township). The fair was billed a huge success.

The second fair was held on October 2-3, 1860 in Garden City. From as early as 1857, committees were working on locating a permanent site for the fair. The two main sites under consideration were Garden City and Mankato. On April 14, 1866 the fair board decided that for reasons of convenience and economics the permanent location for the fair would be in Garden City.

The Garden City Fairgrounds was described as "one of the most picturesque natural surroundings in this part of the state." A reporter from the Mankato Review wrote of the fairgrounds in 1905, "Nestling deep in the hills that surround Garden City, with the placid waters of the Watonwan River coursing on three of its sides, its banks

towering high above the peaceful little valley, is located a tract of land comprising of some fifty acres more or less, that has had much to do with the making of history of this county.

It is here that for the past forty-three years the Blue Earth County Agricultural Society has held its fairs. The location is one of the most beautiful spots in a county noted for its



*Photo above:*

Diploma of the Blue Earth County Agricultural Association. This form award was published for the Blue Earth County Agricultural Association, circa 1868. The tinted lithograph, measuring 20 by 24 inches, was presented to the winners of each category.

(Photo from Blue Earth County Historical Society)



*Photo at Left*

L to R: Mr. Hemmingway and Mr. George Norman at the Blue Earth County Fairgrounds. Photograph undated.

(Photo from Blue Earth County Historical Society)

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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

Editor Kristina Jackson  
(Mankato State University Intern)

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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.

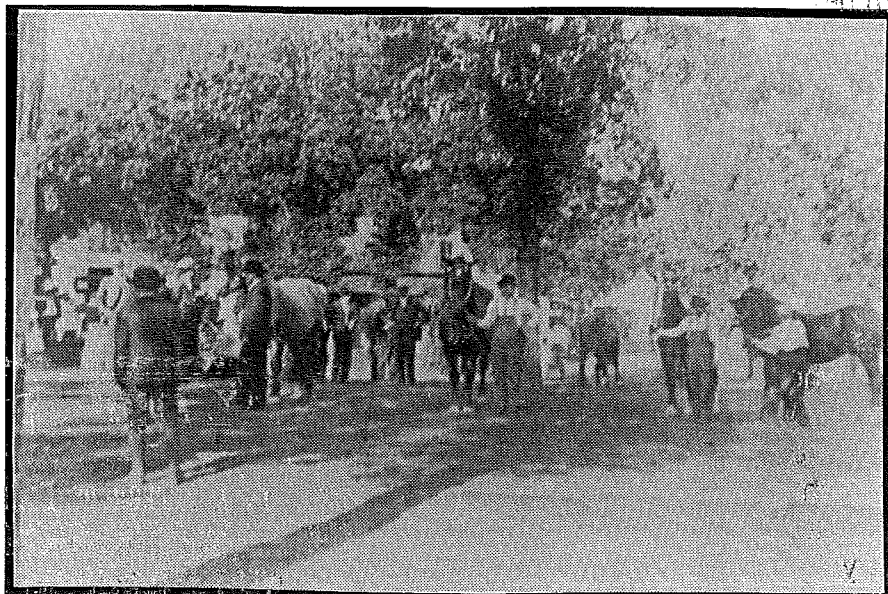
The Hubbard House is currently being restored and is listed on the State Historical Record, as well as the National Register of Historic Places.

Hubbard House  
606 S. Third St.  
Mankato, MN  
Closed for restoration

attractive landscape."

The fair promised exhibits of livestock, fruits and vegetables, needlework and culinary arts, as well as music, contests,

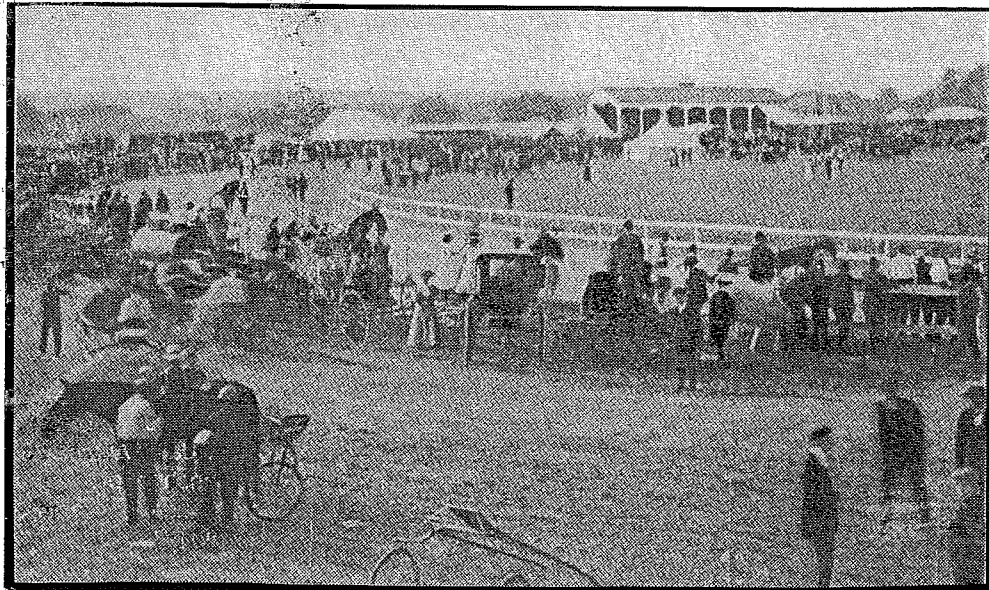
grandstand shows and food. And in 1995 the promise is the same - Good food, good times, fine exhibits and a chance to visit with friends. Come to the fair!



Above: Blue Earth County Fair horse show, 1910  
(Photo from Blue Earth County Historical Society)

Below: The fair of the Blue Earth County Agricultural Society was not the only fair to be held in Blue Earth County. Other fairs were held occasionally; Pleasant Mound and Shelby Townships participated in the Blue Earth Valley Stock Association fairs. The Southern Minnesota Livestock and Fair Association held fairs for a number of years as did the Mankato Fair Association.

The Mankato Fair was first held in 1873 north of Brooks Street and had a number of buildings including a grandstand. In 1884 the fair was held at Sibley Mound (now Sibley Park). By 1905 property was purchased in the area of First Avenue and Chestnut Street (largely within the property of Continental Can Co., now crown Cork & Seal Co.). A race track was built through subscriptions from Mankato merchants and citizens. Over the years the Mankato Fair was relatively successful, but during the 1930's the fair association was faced with financial difficulties and the property was deeded to the city. (Photo from Blue Earth County Historical Society)



# The Circus Comes To Town

by: Julie Schrader

Summertime also meant the coming of the circus, which was awaited with much anticipation by young and old alike. History records that circuses made stops at Mankato as early as the 1860's

In 1872, Al Ringling came to Mankato with help from his uncle, Nicholas Juliar of St. Clair. Ringling, who came from Baraboo, Wisconsin, found work as a harness maker at the William B. Walker Harness and Saddlery Co. on South Front Street in Mankato. He was also a member of the Chambers Brothers Musical Company, which performed at the Harmonia Hall next to Walkers Harness Shop. After the Chambers Brothers disbanded, Ringling, Frank L. Long, George Zenopolski, a Mr. Hall and others began a six-man circus.

William Walker recalled their first performance in a newspaper interview. "After working for me for some time, he and several others organized a small circus. The boys bought a tent and erecting the same between my shop and the Barrett Hotel on the corner of Second and Cherry Streets, gave their first performance.

There were but six men in the entire show then."

The show was given the name of Hall and Ringling Palace Shows. Performances consisted of tumbling, horizontal bar and trapeze acts, balancing and other stunts. There were no horses or animals. The tent was

described by Charles E. Wise, son of Mankato Review publisher, "There wasn't much to it, but then there wasn't much to Mankato then either. The tent was not a 'big top'. In fact it wasn't even round. It was oblong and maybe 24 by 36 feet in size." An article in the Mankato Review (May 11, 1880)

reports the following

## "The Palace Show"

"The first exhibition of the above show took place on Saturday night and was pretty well attended. Messrs. Hall, Long, Ringling each appeared in their specialties, and enlisted the hearty applause of the audience for the marvelous feats performed. This show leaves this week for a trip through the country, we wish it a liberal patronage."

After its premiere in Mankato, the show went by wagon to Little Cobb, a town in Blue Earth County that has since faded from existence, and then appeared at the Winnebago Agency as St. Clair was formerly known. The men depended on their opening performances in

continued on p. 6

**MANKATO, MONDAY, AUGUST 23**

**West Mankato Show Grounds.**

**FRENZIED**

**TWO WORLDS REFLECTED IN A MIRROR OF ETHNOLOGY**

**A GREAT DRAMA OF COSMOPOLITAN LIFE WITH A TYPICAL CAST**

An Entertainment which Pictures in Animated Tableaux the Glories of Life on the Boundless Plains, Reflecting Vistas of the Vast Sahara, and Assembling in Brilliant Conclave Horsemen and People of All Nations

**BUFFALO BILL'S WILD WEST**

and Congress of Rough Riders of the World

**PAWNEE BILL'S GREAT FAR EAST**

Depicting the Splendors of the Orient and Featuring the History of the Occident

The Whole World Has Contributed—Two Vast Continents Have Applauded

The Orient and Occident Here Unite in One Arena

The Pyramids, Sphinx and Sahara's Sands Recalled

Vistas of a Past Farther East. Epochs of a Distant Future. A Past and Present of the Most Magnificent and Patriotic in Heroic Scenes. Conquest of the Most Magnificent

**AN ORIENTAL SPECTACLE**

Comp. Pageantry and Splendor of the Romantic Far East

Introducing as a Particular Feature

**MUSICAL ELEPHANTS**

The Most Valuable Gem of the World Has Ever Known Before

**ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD**

Daring Men of Many Nations in Astonishing Equestrian Feats and Risking Displays of Saddle Expertise

South American Gauchos  
Bedouin Arabs  
Mexican Ranzeros  
German Cuirassiers  
Royal English Lancers  
Russian Cossacks  
U.S. Cavalrymen  
Royal Irish Dragoons  
American Indians and Cowboys

**INTERESTING, EDUCATIONAL, THRILLING**

**THE BATTLE OF SUMMIT SPRINGS**

A Vivid Re-enactment of the Redman's Final Conflict at Arms. Fought with Skill and Exciting Beyond Description. Introducing at Every Performance, Hain or Hain.

**Col. W. F. Cody** The Only Original Buffalo Bill

Whose Unerring Aim Caused the Death of the Indian Chief, Tall Bull, in the Original Battle fought in June, 1868, on the border line between Nebraska and Colorado, places now visited and cultivated.

**Eventful Pages From American History**

**GREAT TRAIN HOLD-UP BY INDIANS**

Showing the Perils of the Iron Trail, the Difficulties of Early Railroad-building, and the Redman's Cunning and Final Defeat

**FOOTBALL ON HORSEBACK**

The Newest Thing in Equestrian Sport, Indians and Cowboys in Spirited Contest

**LIFE ON THE PLAINS MORE THAN A QUARTER CENTURY AGO**

**A HOLIDAY AT "T-E" RANCH** ATTACK ON AN EMIGRANT TRAIN

Exhibiting the Pleasures and Pastimes of the Plainsman and Pioneer

**THE DISTINCTIVE, BOLD AND DASHING MONARCH OF OPEN AIR ENTERTAINMENT**

Re-enactments in Astonishing Equestrian Achievements

Exhibitions of Skill, Nerve and Manly Deeds

Water Races Mounted on Matchless Steeds

Military Manoeuvres by Artillery and Cavalry

Two Remarkable Shows in Personna

Marvellous Feats of Marksmanship by Robert McVittie

Vivid Pictures of Quaint Scenes of the Great West

Sports of the People of All Nations

Cowboy Sports with Unimpaired Skill and Daring

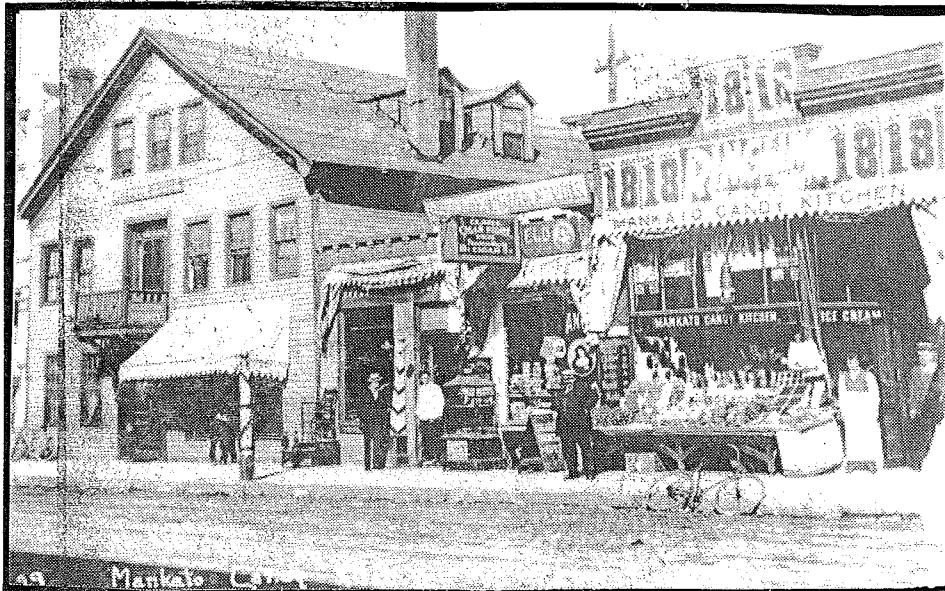
Two Exhibitions Daily—2 and 6 p.m.—RAIN OR SHINE. Admission (including seat) 50 Cts. All Seats Protected from Sun and Rain by Immense Waterproof Canvas Canopy. Grand Stand Chairs (including admission) \$1.00. Children under 10 years, half-price. On Sale Day of Exhibition at

**ED. L. LAMM'S PHARMACY**

Also coming to Mankato was Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Far East show. An article in the Mankato Review, dated August 23, 1909, reports cowboys and wild bucking bronchos, painted Indians, boomerang throwers, trained horses, musical elephants, Scotch bagpipe players, and the original Buffalo Bill.

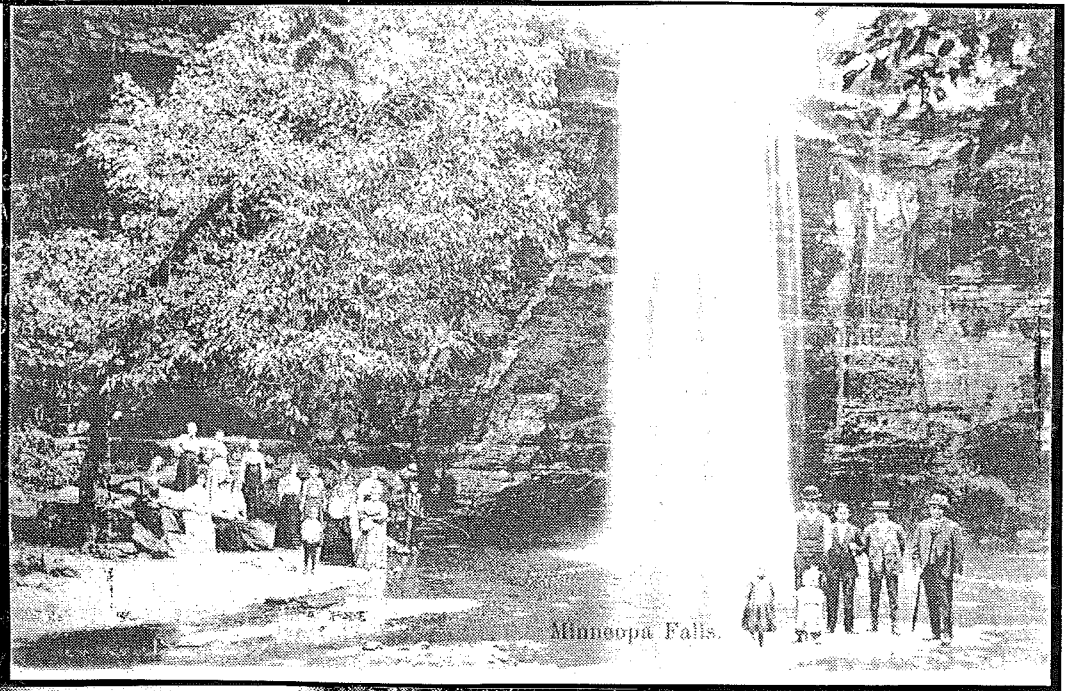
(Photo from Mankato Review, August 12, 1909)



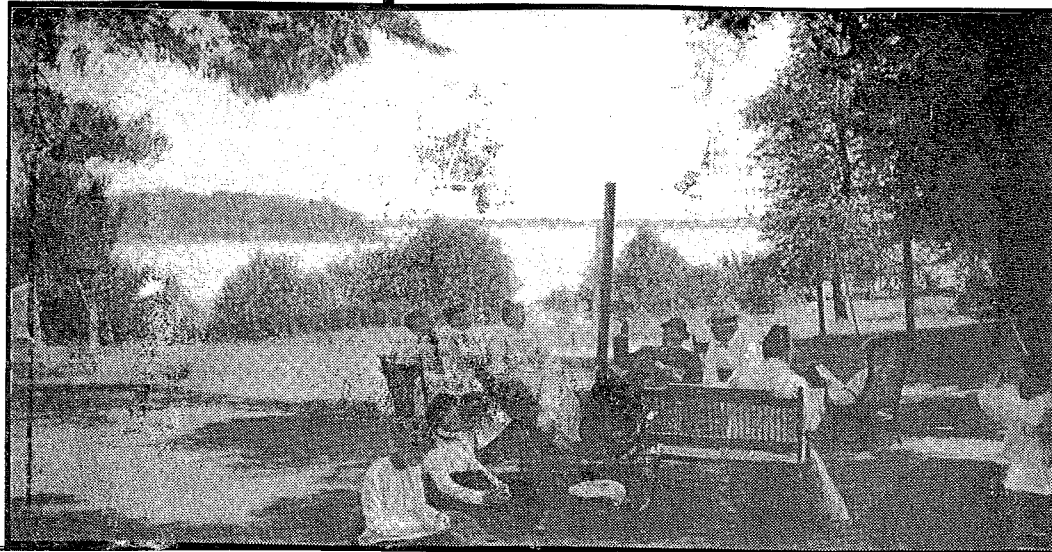


**LEFT:** Miller Ice Company, located on the corner of Owatonna and Hubbell Avenue in West Mankato, with posters advertising the "World's Greatest Show on Earth," the Ringling Bros. Circus, 1899. L to R: *Bill Miller and Harry Miller.*  
(Photo from The Heritage of Blue Earth County, 1990)

**RIGHT:** Minne (water) inne (falling) nopa (twice) was the name given to the stream and the two picturesque waterfalls, found two or three miles above its mouth, by the Sioux Indians. A bill passed in 1905 made the area a public State Park. The area had been known for its natural beauty and was a popular place for picnics and gatherings at the turn of the century, just as it is today.  
(Photo from The Heritage of Blue Earth County, 1990)



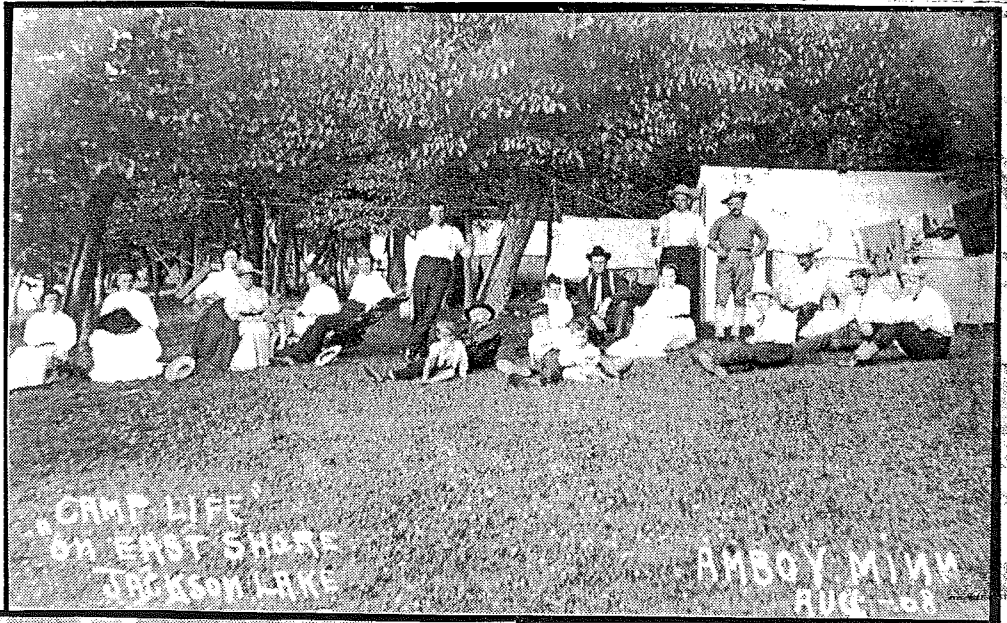
Minneopa Falls.



**LEFT:** Point Pleasant on Madison Lake was a popular summer resort. Jesse M. and Lucetta Barclay purchased the site in 1880. They built a hotel and erected cottages. A 1916 brochure described the hotel as, "a place to rest, surrounded by a dozen cottages, tennis courts, croquet grounds and bathing pavilion."  
(photo from the The Heritage of Blue Earth County, 1990)

**RIGHT:** Camping on the shores of Jackson Lake, ca. 1908. Jackson Lake was described as a beautiful lake, rather shallow, but large. There was fair fishing and excellent duck hunting there, and sportsmen came from far and near to enjoy its recreations. In 1914-1915, after some controversy, the lake was drained.

(Photo from The Heritage of Blue Earth County, 1990)



**LEFT:** The music of the Sterling Drum and Flute Corps was for many years a part of every celebration in the area. Organized in 1876 in Sterling Center, George Conrad, of Amos Fisk, H.M. Fisk, A.Lec. Ellis and Will Ellis played at picnics, Decoration Day, exercises, Fourth of July celebrations and community galas. Blue Earth County's fair at Garden City employed them every year for 40 years. For several years they were also featured at the Minnesota State Fair. (Photo from The Heritage of Blue Earth County, 1990)



**RIGHT:** Approximately two weeks prior to show day, the advance crew of the circus arranged for publication of advertisements. The most important tool used by the advertising crew was the lithograph or poster. Posters were placed on sheds, barns, buildings, walls and fences. The Mankato Candy Kitchen (219 South Front Street) is shown with posters for the Ringling Bros. Circus, July 18, 1899. L to R: Clifton House Hotel, barber shop, C.H. Jones Cigar Shop and the Candy Kitchen.

(Photo from The Heritage of Blue Earth County, 1990)



Coming Back to Mankato July 17. Bigger and Better Than Ever!

# RINGLING BROS.

WORLD'S GREATEST SHOWS

1000 People  
500 Horses  
300 Performers  
5 Big Arenas  
1 Aerial Enclave  
1-4 Mile Race Track

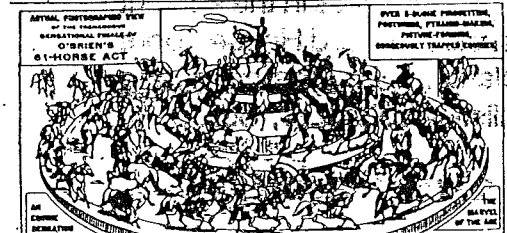
THE INVINCIBLE MONARCH OF THE AMUSEMENT WORLD.  
45 Railroad Cars  
25 Elephants  
100 Dons and Camels  
12 Acres of Tents  
\$3,700,000 Invested  
\$7,600 Daily Expenses



LAST DAYS OF THE CENTURY  
ON THE LIGHT OF LIBERTY  
OVER THE PEOPLE AND HISTORY OF THE WORLD

THE ONLY COMBINATION IN THE WORLD PRESENTING  
61 HORSE ACT  
61 HORSES  
IF ONE RING AT ONE TIME  
PERFORMED AT ONE PLACE

LOCKHART'S FAMOUS ACROBATIC RINGING, PLAT-LETTER ELEPHANT COMEDIANS.



HERR BOUDER'S WONDERFUL FUNNY ELEPHANT, BRASS BAND.  
BIG NEW FREE PARADE IN 30 SECTIONS  
ONE 50¢ TICKET ADMITS TO EVERYTHING. SPECIAL EXCURSIONS ON RAILROADS.  
TWO COMPLETE EXCURSIONS DAILY. AT 8 AND 10 P.M. DOORS OPEN ONE HOUR EARLIER.  
THE ACKNOWLEDGED GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH.

MANKATO, MONDAY, JULY 17.

Mankato Review, July 11, 1899

## Circus Continued from p. 3

Mankato to earn sufficient funds to start on the road.

In 1882, Al Ringling was joined by his six brothers in Baraboo, Wisconsin where they decided to work together toward creating a bigger traveling circus. In 1884, the first official show of the Ringling Brothers Circus was in Baraboo. The show continued to increase in size and by 1892 it had 31 railroad cars, acrobats, trick riders and clowns, a menagerie of elephants, camels, hippos, lions, tigers and bears. Parades precede all showings of the Ringling Brothers Circus for many years. Over the years the Ringling Brothers Circus returned to Mankato many times.

## Progress report on the Hubbard House

by: Mary Dooley

After months and months of tearing down, reinforcing, and repairing of the basic structure of "Our Old House" - all the really dirty jobs - the finished product is becoming more and more obvious.

Most of the ceilings throughout the house have been replaced. The woodwork also has been painstakingly cleaned and repaired or refinished. Also, a special UV film has been applied on the windows to protect the interior of the house from ultraviolet deterioration.

Where servants lived and worked, walls have been painted, although additional faux-graining on the woodwork still needs to be done.

In the family living quarters the library has its original wall-covering and the ceiling has been restored to its original splendor by repainting the pattern that reflects the design of the rug.

The dining room wall-covering had to be removed because of structural problems in the ceiling and was so fragile it could not be replaced. A fabric with almost exactly the same pattern (but unfaded) was available in stock, so now it compliments the Tiffany lamp shade over the table.

All the family bedrooms and Mr. Hubbard's office have

been papered with reproductions of patterns appropriate to the period. Silk screened paper was ordered from Bradbury and Bradbury near San Francisco. Perhaps you saw how it was prepared for the Victorian house restoration on "This Old House". The program was recently rerun on KSMQ-TV on cable.

The hallways now have "lincrusta" on the walls - a very heavy three dimensional material that is finished with a glaze.

The tile in the second floor bathroom has been repaired but the room in general was left as it was. This will contrast with the first floor bath which will eventually be restored to its 1905 decor, with wood wainscoting and a copper tub, also enclosed with wood paneling. The room is functional now and will be handicap accessible.

What is not done is the parlor. There have been many delays in getting the silk fabric for the walls; it is a special order. The latest information is that it should arrive in September. In that room, however, was one of the nice surprises. When the ceiling was removed the original painting of the patterned ceiling was revealed and could be copied. Now both the parlor and the library will have patterns that reflect the rugs on the floors.

# Attention Members: Uncle BECHS needs you!!!

by: Harley Goff

Yes, Uncle BECHS needs you now to call in and sign up for a tour of Hubbard House restoration duty! Join the corps of people who get a sneak preview of the beautiful Hubbard House interior restoration work that has been accomplished since the closing two years ago. Uncle BECHS needs a cadre of dedicated furniture cleaners, polishers, sewers, chair-spring tie-ers, upholsters, light-fixture installers, tinkers of all common around the house skills and sundry expertise to lay seige upon the remaining many, though small, tasks needing attention. All tours of duty will be short-lived, hours or days instead of years. Suffer your duty-tour in the comfort of your own home if you have the "right stuff," or perform your chosen tasks and duties in the elegant atmosphere of the Hubbard House. Uncle BECHS would like to reopen the Hubbard House doors yet this year, to welcome in the awed and huddled masses. Tactical plans call for Operation Kate & Ester to begin August 1st. Sign up now! Choose your rank (enlisted volunteer, Sergeant, Warrant, or commissioned) while your duties can be your choice.

**Ask not what Uncle BECHS can do for you, but what you can do for Uncle BECHS!!!**

**Contact:** Chief Warrant Officer Harley Goff

Cadre Recruitment

Hubbard House Restoration Committee

Phone: 345-7166, Day or Night after July 31st  
(6 rings by day or 4 rings by night)

**Contact:** Captain Linda Henry

BECHS Director of Intelligence

Heritage Center

Phone: 345-5566, Business hours prior to July 31st

**Contact:** Lt. General Betsy Winn

Commander & Chief of the Board of Directors

Member of every committee

Phone: 388-7451, Evenings & weekends prior to July 31st



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## Membership News

*Thank you to the new and  
returning members*

Sally Baringer  
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## Heritage Center

415 Cherry St., Mankato  
(507) 345-5566

## Exhibit Gallery

Tuesday - Saturday

10-12 and 1-4 p.m.

## Research Center

Tuesday - Saturday

10-12 and 1-4 p.m.

## Hubbard House

606 S Broad St., Mankato

Closed for restoration



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

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Mankato, MN  
56001  
Permit No. 343

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Phyllis Mullin  
315 E Jackson St  
Mankato MN 56001

*Right: Women's Tennis Club, ca.  
1925  
(Photo from Blue Earth County  
Historical Society)*



*Left: The "Baltics", a Mankato baseball  
team in 1899. L to R:  
Front Row: Billy Mead, pitcher; Harry  
Roberts, catcher.  
Middle Row: George Peayer, Bill Scellbau,  
Manager Charley Griebel, Charles Roos  
and Chuck Wood  
Back Row: John Dackins, George Krost,  
George Roos and Albert Roos  
(Photo from Blue Earth County Historical  
Society)*