

# Blue Earth County Historian

Blue Earth County Historical Society Quarterly Newsletter  
Fall 1997

## The Hubbard Family at Home

by Inella Burns

With the Hubbard House now restored to its 1905 splendor, one may wonder what the family was like who lived in the elegance of Spanish and Italian marble fireplaces, Tiffany lighting, silk and linen damask wall coverings, hand carved woodwork and rich carpets. To best appreciate the house is to know something of the Hubbard family and their social life.

Rensselaer D. Hubbard was born in 1837 on a farm of modest means in Otsego County, New York. With a restless ambition to compensate for his meager education, he headed for California at age seventeen where he tried his hand at various trades from farmhand to grocery store manager. On a return trip to New York in the early 1860's, he married a neighbor, Mary Esther Cook. The couple moved to Pennsylvania

where the enterprising Hubbard soon cleared a \$30,000 profit in the grocery business. In 1871 they were returning to California, where Hubbard planned to go into banking, when he decided en route to check out the frontier town of Mankato. He liked what he saw and decided to stay. Not long after they arrived, son, Jay was born.

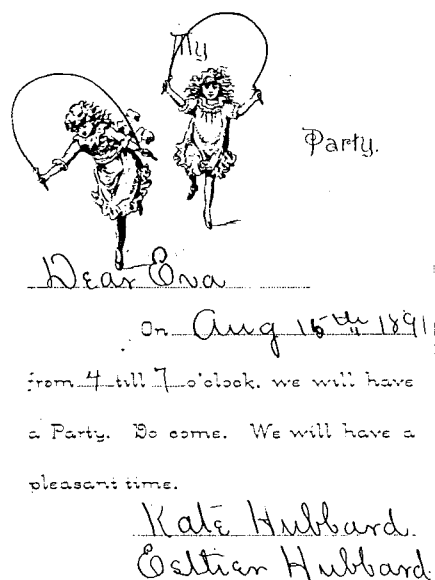
Hubbard quickly established himself as a prominent citizen and important financial figure, partly perhaps by building his elaborate French Second Empire mansion his first year in Mankato. In his book, *The Hubbard Milling Company*, Vernard Lundin writes, "Early pictures show him with the fashionable beard and mustache of that era, as fastidious in his dress as in the adornment of his home... Tasteful elegance was the hallmark of the Hubbard home, from its balustraded mansard roof to its attractively-fenced lawn where young Jay could play in summertime."

*The Hubbard family, around 1900, from left to right: Katherine (seated), Esther, Will Jenkins (relative), Jay, R. D. Hubbard, and Mrs. Frances Hubbard. Photo taken in the parlor.*



The Hubbard's apparently enjoyed a busy social life. Soon after the house was completed, *The Mankato Free Press* society column reported "a Yellow tea, tendered by Mrs. R. D. Hubbard in her elegant new house on South Broad Street. The spread was sumptuous, the service perfect, the room and table decorations dainty and the music delightful." In the high-ceilinged parlor, guests played lotto, "with numerous prizes the source of much merriment." But Mary Cook Hubbard had only six years to enjoy her new home and her many friends before she died.

In 1878 Hubbard married Miss Frank Griffith in the Episcopal Church across the street. After their two daughters were born, Hubbard enlarged the house, adding servants' quarters and an office as well as a bay window in the parlor. With this 1888 remodeling, the house reportedly became "one of the ornaments of Mankato...the inside woodwork finishing doubtless as fine as anything in the state".



Invitation sent by Hubbard girls in 1891.

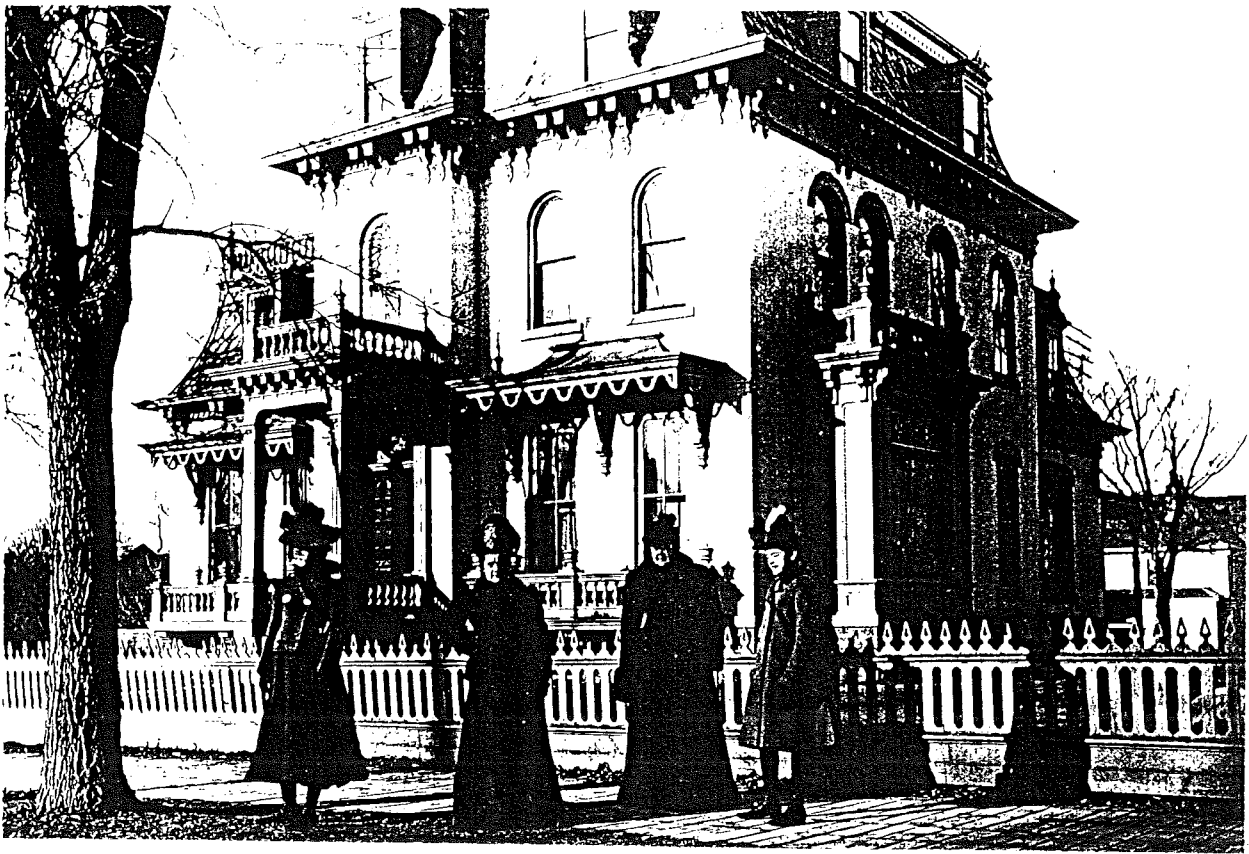
The Hubbard daughters, Katherine Dean and Mary Esther, were socializing at an early

age. *The Mankato Free Press* in 1891 reported: "Little Kate and Esther Hubbard (then four and six years old) have issued announcements to their young friends that they will be 'at home' from 4:00 PM to 7:00 PM tomorrow evening. The missives sent out are unique and attractive, and the little folks will have a wild time on the lawn." Seventy-five invitations were sent.

When the carriage house was completed in 1890, it was reported to be "the most tasty building of its kind outside the Twin Cities." The Hubbard children thought it a great place to play. On Kate's fifth birthday fifty-three young friends joined her for a party in the new "barn". Later on, Esther celebrated her eighth birthday with forty friends. Through the years, these special days were social events in the family.

One such social event was Kate's graduation from Mankato High School. The entire senior class of 1904 and their teachers were entertained by Mr. and Mrs. R. D. Hubbard and Mr. and Mrs J. D. Ray at an elegant five-course dinner party in the Hubbard home. A program of music was presented throughout the evening for the sixty-five guests to enjoy. In later years when Kate was at the University of Minnesota and Esther was at Stanton Hall, they often invited friends home for a weekend.

The Hubbard home was probably at its loveliest and happiest for the wedding reception of Kate and her husband Harry Ervin, Jr. In 1910. By this time the house had been richly redecorated with the silk brocade walls and Tiffany lighting replicated in the present restoration. Adding to this splendor were American Beauty roses and greenery in the parlor, gladioli and palms in the library, and Madame Chenay roses and smilax throughout the other reception rooms.



*Left to right, Katherine, Cara Hubbard (niece), Mrs. R. D. Hubbard, Esther, ca. 1900 in front of house.*

The BECHS archives contain many news items relating to the social life of R. D. and Mrs. Hubbard. They frequently entertained friends at bridge, whist, "63", and progressive euchre or lotto. Mrs. Hubbard sometimes entertained with a "thimble bee" or an afternoon of cards with friends. Lawn parties became popular after the house next door, where the carriage house originally stood, burned and Hubbard acquired and landscaped the property. The Hubbards obviously enjoyed sharing their home with friends.

The Hubbard House was opened to large groups for charitable causes as well. In 1893 more than two hundred guests came for a benefit entertainment and a program of plantation songs. The next year one hundred guests were invited for a musicale to help raise money for the Presbyterian organ fund. Mrs. Hubbard was active in the Episcopal Guild and at one time entertained a party of eighty guests. After Hubbard died in 1905, she continued to be active in church and charity work.

Probably the last big social event in the Hubbard home was a birthday party given by Esther, honoring her mother a few years before Mrs. Hubbard's death in 1934. Garden flowers of every variety decorated the candle-light home. Great baskets of flowers, all remembrances from her many friends, filled the reception room.

All this entertaining required servants. According to the BECHS archives, Christine Larson worked as a serving girl in the Hubbard home in 1893. She spoke of the

small kitchen, large pantry, and the long massive table in the dining room. At this time there were a cook and three serving girls. She felt "it was a great honor to work in their home, the most beautiful in Mankato, also the highest paying job for women."

Of the food the servants prepared in that small kitchen and served on that massive dining room table one can only guess, but *The Housekeeper's Cook Book*, published in

Minneapolis in 1894 suggests that for small evening parties, the hostess serve "sandwiches, a variety of fancy cakes, jellies, ice cream, coffee, chocolate, tea and fruit." Salmon salad, chicken croquettes, and pickled oysters could be added for a more elaborate entertainment. The suggested five-course dinner party menu includes "two finger rolls tied with a narrow ribbon beside each plate, two varieties of soup, fish, meat with two vegetables, salad, dessert and black coffee served in tiny cups with cut sugar and an offer of cream." Such menus would be in keeping with socially prominent Hubbard's and the richness of their home.

A glance back at the Hubbard family life makes today's visit to their home like a walk into the past. Strolling through the spacious restored rooms, one can sense what it would be like to be a member of the Hubbard family. ❖

Sources: Vernard Lundin, *The Hubbard Milling Company*, Housekeeper's Publishing Co., *The Housekeeper's Cook Book*, The Mankato Free Press, August 18, 1890; August 14, 1891; February 11, 1893; March 29, 1894; September 21, 189; November 21, 1903; September 3, 1910; February 10, 1928; September 5, 1931; April 5, 1937; BECHS Archives

## "Recipe for a Special Occasion"

### *Christmas Pudding*

*One pound of grated or chopped bread*  
*One pound of currents*  
*One pound of stoned raisins*  
*Half a pound of citron, cut in small bits*  
*Half a pound of suet, chopped fine*  
*Quarter of a pound of sugar*  
*One teaspoonful of salt*  
*One teaspoonful of clove*  
*Two teaspoonfuls of cinnamon*  
*Half a teaspoonful of mace*  
*One nutmeg*

*The juice and grated peel of a lemon.*

*Mix all these ingredients together and then add the yolks of six eggs, beaten, and mix in a large cup of milk. Last of all, add the beaten whites of the eggs. Boil in a buttered mold six hours. Serve with "Madeira Sauce."*

### *Madeira Sauce*

*Whites of two eggs*  
*One and a half cups of sugar*  
*Five tablespoonfuls of boiling milk*  
*One wineglass of Madeira wine*  
*Two tablespoonfuls of brandy.*

*Beat the whites to a stiff froth, and beat in thoroughly the sugar. Pour over the boiling milk and stir rapidly, adding the wine and sugar.*

Source: *The Book of Forty Puddings*, by Susan Anna Brown, 1882.

*Hubbard family  
 Christmas  
 decorations in  
 parlor, 1899.*



## Victorian Holiday Dining

Beginning with New Year's Day, traditionally a time for open houses, parties and receptions, Americans eagerly celebrated a succession of holidays during the Victorian period. Holidays provided opportunities for special meals for families and company, much as they do today. Despite the religious orientation of many of the holidays, their meals—breakfast, dinner and supper—often served as the central focus for the day.

Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners were probably the most carefully planned meals of the year for most families. Women typically began preparations days in advance, making pies and cakes several days before, and stuffing for the turkey. Jams and other preserves would have been made and set aside during the summer just for the holidays.



With the increased work load created by the upcoming holiday, women often collaborated on cooking, cleaning and baking, especially if they had no servants or, as was customary, had given the servants the day off. Almira Virginia MacDonald found herself in a predicament in 1882: "Thanksgiving Day—12 to dinner & no hired girl, but was able with mother & Anne's help to get a good dinner of roast turkey, chicken salad, onions, potatoes, cranberry sauce, lemon pie, mince pie, & cider...."

The MacDonald family's Thanksgiving meal, although simpler, was not far from the menu published in Fannie Farmer's *Boston*

*Cooking-School Cook Book* in 1896. The menu combined the symbolic foods that connoted "Pilgrim" and "America" with the elegance and complicated course arrangement of the Europeans.

Turkey was the traditional roast for Christmas dinner, too, although some families followed the English custom of serving roast beef or roast goose. *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1885 led novice cooks through the intricacies of roasting a

Christmas bird, as well as instructions for boiled turkey, with oyster sauce or puree of celery, and a galantine of turkey—boned and rolled around with pounded veal and chopped tongue, then boiled, and glazed with jelly when cooled.

Other foods *Godey's* recommended for a Christmas dinner included plum pudding with brandy butter, mince pies, and apple cheesecake. In 1897, the *Ladies' Home Journal* offered a Christmas menu that began with oysters on the half shell and included such oddities as "devilled spaghetti"—macaroni and cheese with bread

crumbs on top—and ginger sherbet. For the turkey, they recommended chestnut stuffing which, unlike bread, will not “draw the juices from the meat, leaving it dry and lifeless.”

The menu also featured a salad course of lettuce, toasted crackers and cheese balls. “The salad course is no small part of a dinner,” the magazine read. “If you cannot get lettuce or celery, do not object to the inner white portion of a hard head of cabbage. Serve it with French dressing, delicate crackers toasted in the oven, and hot cheese balls.” Since lettuce and celery were such popular items on holiday menus, many 19<sup>th</sup> century growers raised special hothouse crops for the Christmas season.

After all the midafternoon festivities, many families gathered again in the evening for supper. One family’s Christmas supper in 1893 had several tables—a large one for adults and smaller tables for the young people. The supper included coffee, bread and butter, chicken salad, ice cream, macaroons, and “Frank’s birthday cake with 7 candles.”

Other advice for Christmas suppers included “While man seems to be endowed with extraordinary capacity, and almost superhuman power of digestion at this festive season of the year, it is not well to have a heavy supper following the Christmas dinner.” A light meal at 7:30, consisting of clam, bullion, broiled oysters on toast, jelly cubes, and sponge cake would be preferable.

In many American families, New Year’s Day was another traditional occasion for feasting. A family recorded their feast: “I took the turkey & his surroundings—poor turkey! He was being splattered over the

### *Menus For Special Occasions*

#### *Thanksgiving Dinner, 1882*

Roast Turkey  
Onions and Potatoes      Cranberry Sauce  
Chicken Salad  
Lemon Pie   Mince Pie   Cider

#### *Fannie Farmer’s Menu for Thanksgiving Dinner*

Oyster Soup   Crisp Crackers  
Celery   Salted Almonds  
Roast Turkey   Cranberry Jelly  
Mashed Potatoes   Onions in Cream   Squash  
Chicken Pie  
Fruit Pudding   Sterling Sauce  
Mince, Apple and Squash Pie  
Neapolitan Ice Cream   Fancy Cakes  
Fruit   Nuts and Raisins   Bonbons  
Crackers   Cheese   Café Noir

--*Boston Cooking-School Cook Book, 1896*

#### *Christmas Supper, 1890*

Stewed Terrapin   Saratoga Chips  
Parker House Rolls  
Preserved Pears   Waffles  
Coffee

--*1,095 Menus, Breakfast, Dinner and Tea, ca. 1891*

#### *Christmas Dinner*

Oysters on the Half Shell  
Clear Soup   Custard and Spinach Blocks  
Olives   Celery  
Deviled Spaghetti  
Roasted Turkey, Chestnut Stuffing   Cranberry Jelly  
Sweet Potato Croquettes  
Peas Served in Turnip Cups  
Ginger Sherbet   Lettuce Salad   Cheese Balls  
Toasted Crackers  
Plum Pudding, Hard Sauce  
Coffee, Bonbons, Almonds

--*The Ladies’ Home Journal, December, 1897*

table in all directions by a couple of amateur carvers. We had a jolly meal ‘tho—and a long one ending with ‘apple snow’ and nuts, cold turkey, then bread and butter, cake and oranges.” ❖

Source: *Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts: Dining in Victorian America*, by Susan Williams (1985: Pantheon Books, New York).

## Mankato's Christmas Street Decoration Industry

*Source: Mankato Free Press, Nov. 30, 1940.*

A new seasonal industry of fabricating evergreen roping for Christmas street decorations developed in Mankato. Started in the mid-1930s by Neil Neilsen, Inc., at Marshall and Front Streets, the industry grew steadily each year. By 1940, the firm was making street decorations for 85 towns and cities in Minnesota, Iowa and South Dakota.

Balsam and white pine slashings (preferably balsam because it held the needles longer than any other evergreen) were used in the manufacture of ropes, wreathes and stars, which bedecked the shopping districts of communities for many miles around Mankato.

The evergreen slashings were hauled to Mankato by truck from two cutting areas, one on the shores of Lake Mille Lacs and the other about 150 miles farther north. By November 30, 1940, the firm had used sixty tons of the evergreen boughs.

The roping was formed over a core of sturdy wire (No.14), and the evergreen boughs tied on and wrapped with finer wire (No.24). The wire was purchased in large coils and spooled on a special machine for use of the workers. During one season, about 1 ½ ton

of No.14 wire and one ton of No.24 wire would be used, according to an estimate by Ernest Neilsen, the company's vice-president.

The manufacture to the evergreen rope and other street decorations began in early November of each year. The firm added about 35 men to its regular staff in making evergreen garlands while four women were added to fabricate the wreathes and stars.

Supplying 85 communities with the garland was no simple task. Their delivery trucks were on the road 24 hours a day during the holiday season of 1940.

The village of Balaton, in addition to evergreen roping, ordered one star of balsam to be erected over every store entrance in the shopping district.

Faribault had one of the more imaginative street decorations in southern Minnesota, with street light posts in the shopping district covered with silver evergreen roping. The biggest order for evergreen trimmings, in proportion to population, was Worthington.

Due to the overwhelming number of orders in 1940, the company worked well into the month of December to complete deliveries. Neil Neilsen, Inc. was recognized that year as one of the city's faster growing industries with the seasonal employment addition of almost 40 people. ❖



*Main workroom of Neil Neilsen, Inc., workers making evergreen roping for street decorations, taken November, 1940.*

## Blue Earth County Historical Society

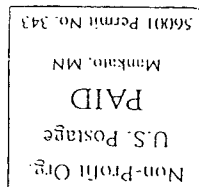
### Board of Trustees:

Harley Goff, President  
Glenn Bartsch, Vice-President  
Tom Salsbery, Treasurer  
Jo-An Lavitschke, Secretary  
Betsy Winn, Past-President  
Lona Falenczykowski  
Winston Grundmeier  
Jo Schultz  
Larry Lundblad  
H. Roger Smith  
Jane Baird  
Jane Tarjeson  
Katherine Hughes  
Kandi Demaray

### Staff:

Anita Baerg-Vatndal, Director  
Carol Oney, Archival Librarian  
Mary McGrew, Museum Assistant  
Bryce Stenzel, Museum Aide  
Marilyn Sween, Newsletter Editor

BLUE EARTH COUNTY



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



# Blue Earth County Historian

---

Blue Earth County Historical Society Quarterly Newsletter  
Winter 1998

Minnesota winters are notoriously fickle. Some years, such as our current one, see only a minimal amount of snowfall in our backyards, leaving skiers and other winter enthusiasts sorely disappointed. On the other hand, most people seem to enjoy being able to move about freely (for the most part) without the snow's lurking danger. Other years drop inches upon inches of snow onto our streets and country fields, often making it difficult to travel. Then there are the years where the snow seems to fall continuously, when we measure snowfall not by the inch, but by the foot.

Mankato has been witness to mega-snowstorms in years past. Some of the most famous blizzards occurred in 1909 and 1951. The storms of 1909, as you will read ahead, put telegraph wires out of commission, caused electric wires to snap, closed schools and wreaked havoc on the railroad system coming into town. In 1951, massive snowstorms late in the winter were responsible for some of the worst flooding Mankato has seen.

If this current winter has you longing for more snow, then reading these articles reprinted from the *Mankato Free Press* will serve as a reminder of what bad storms are like. If you are enjoying this year's reprieve from damaging storms, then reading these articles will make you even more thankful for the calm.

## **Mankato Hard Hit by Raging Blizzard; City Cut Off From Outside World; Trains Held Up**

*From Mankato Free Press, Jan. 29, 1909; page 1*

The hardest blizzard in fifteen years struck this section last night and raged all day today. The city was completely isolated from the outside world, both as regards transportation and telegraph and telephone service. Not a train was moving today, except a couple of passenger trains that started from this city, but it is not thought that they got very far. Wires and poles were snapped off by the weight of the ice that had formed on them and the wind that blew a terrible gale.

Rain fell practically all day yesterday, and in the evening turned to snow. The rain and sleet, driven before the wind, froze to poles and wires and to everything else, and the wet snow formed a thick coating outside of that. Sometime after midnight the wind began to blow from the north, and increased steadily in velocity until by daylight it was blowing a gale and the air was filled with blinding snow. Ice particles beat pitilessly in the faces and eyes of all who were obliged to go out and snow drifts encumbered their feet. The temperature also fell rapidly, and was only a few degrees above zero by morning.