

Blue Earth County Historian

Blue Earth County Historical Society Quarterly Newsletter

Spring 1997

Hubbard House Opens for Summer Season

The Blue Earth County Historical Society's R. D. Hubbard House officially opened for tours to the general public on Saturday, April 26th. The house is now open every Saturday and Sunday from 1:00-4:00 p.m. during the summer season.

Docents (tour guides) will conduct tours of the house, carriage house, and grounds to visitors, bus tours and educational groups. Information regarding the Hubbard family, turn-of-the-century interior decorating, Victorian and Edwardian social customs, and historic preservation will be included in each tour, or become topics for separate tours as well. Each tour will also point out features unique to the house, which has been carefully restored to bring back the original grandeur of the interior.

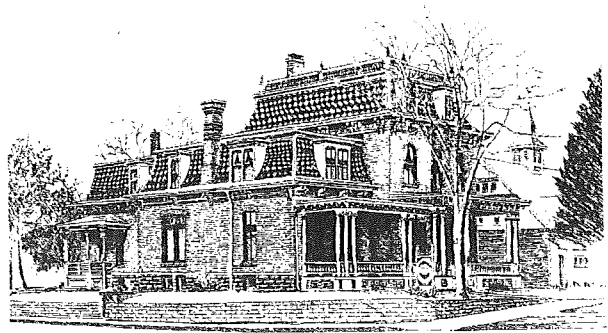
Special and educational programs and events are planned for the summer, which are intended to provide entertainment as well as a great opportunity to learn about Blue Earth County history. A garden party emulating those previously given by the Hubbard family is one such event, complete with games and homemade refreshments. Dressing in period costume is encouraged, and hats and parasols are always welcome!

Other special events include garden tours, an old fashioned ice cream social, and old car rides for children. These are but a few planned to bring both Society members and visitors to the Hubbard House for some fun and learning.

The Twilight Garden Club and the Master Gardeners will again plant and care for the beautiful gardens in the Palmer Centennial Garden. Several tree trimming and thinning projects will open up the "folly" and adjacent areas. It is hoped members and visitors will utilize these areas for picnics and other family activities.

Society members are admitted free of charge to the house, carriage house and grounds. Admission fees for nonmembers are as follows: adults, \$2.50, students, \$2.00, and no charge for those under six years of age. Groups of twenty or more receive a discount; please call the Heritage Center for further details.

Weekday tours of the Hubbard House and Carriage House are also available for school



children, Scout troops, senior citizen or other educational or community groups. If you or an organization to which you belong is interested in touring the house and grounds, please call the Heritage Center to arrange a time and arrange the type of tour desired (Hubbard family history, period interpretation of furnishings, or of carriages and wagons of early Blue Earth County, to name just a few).

If you are interested in becoming a docent (tour guide), a training session is planned for the month of May. The session will include extensive information on each type of tour offered at the house, tips on judging your audience's interest in the tour at any given time, and what to do when an emergency arises during the tour. It will also be a time to become acquainted with other docents, sharing helpful tips for giving successful tours.

Volunteers are also needed to greet visitors at the door, collect the admission fees and answer any questions which may arise while visitors are waiting for the next tour. Also needed are people who are interested in tools, carriages and wagons to give special tours of the carriage house, or to be available to answer questions regarding the numerous artifacts.

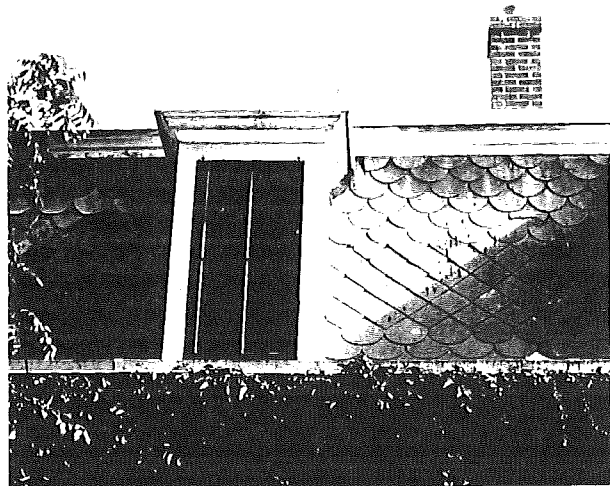
If you are interested in becoming a docent, volunteer or have another service to offer, please call the Heritage Center at 345-5566, and either Anita, Mindy or Carol will be happy to sign you up. Please join us for an exciting and eventful summer at the Hubbard House!

Hubbard House Awarded \$100,000 Restoration Grant

The City of Mankato has recently been awarded a \$50,000 Minnesota State Historical Society Bond-Funded Grants-in Aid Grant. The grant requires the city to match this amount with an additional \$50,000, thus providing \$100,000 for the restoration of various aspects of the R.D. Hubbard House. The Hubbard House is owned and maintained by the city, and operated by the Blue Earth County Historical Society.

Projects covered by the grant will include the stabilization and preservation of the foundation walls, which have deteriorating mortar joints, particularly on the exterior. The interior of the basement will be completely re-plastered after the mortar is replaced, thus providing smooth surfaces for new, contemporary educational exhibits and the accompanying graphics.

The roof of the parlor's north bay window will receive a copper facade comparable to the original, and a painted wooden balustrade similar to the third story's roof will be added, to restore the bay to its original appearance.

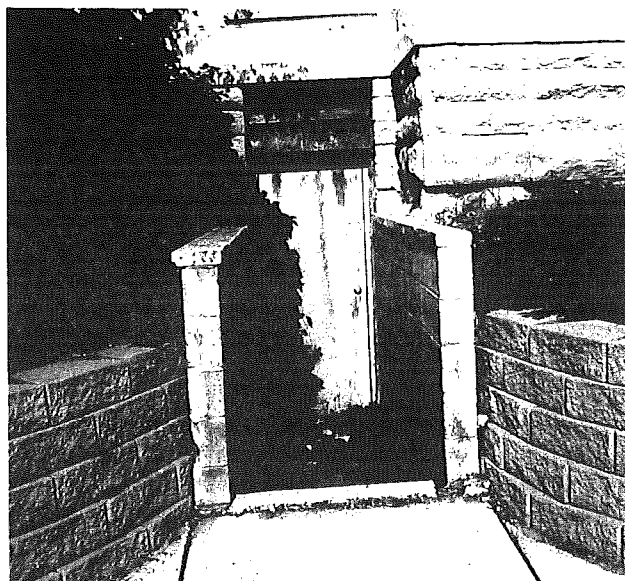


Damaged and missing slate tiles on the roof threaten the already restored interior of the house, as well as detract from the architectural beauty of this mansion. The tiles will be completely removed, repaired and new ones made, and the shingle fasteners replaced, in order to make the roof as it appeared originally.

The current dormer facades on the third floor's mansard roof are made of galvanized tin, which has been improperly flashed to the slate roof. Windows

on the third floor will be replaced, or at least repaired, along with the replacement of the flashing.

The three chimneys on the house have been altered from the original plans. They also need tuck pointing and proper chimney caps. The grant provides for this and the restoration of two of the chimneys to their original appearance.



One long-awaited project for which the grant provides funding is for the construction of a handicap accessible entrance to the basement of the house, where the educational exhibits and a portion of a log cabin are housed. These exhibits are currently accessible only by a rather steep stairway with numerous steps. Under this grant, funding has been provided to use the original basement door as the point of entry, and for building an interior ramp down to the basement floor. Educators and those with special needs will welcome this long overdue project.

The Hubbard House will remain open for tours during the restoration projects, with the exception of the basement educational exhibits (which will be moved to temporary storage). However, the exhibits will be reinstalled with a contemporary, hands-on environment, allowing children (and adults) to touch and explore history with all of their senses.

Wanted: Docents

The Blue Earth County Historical Society wants you!! Needed are people to serve as docents (tour guides) at the Hubbard House and Carriage House, as well as the Heritage Center exhibit gallery.

Docents will be giving a variety of tours to educational groups and tourists, community groups, special interest groups, and to the general public on weekends during the summer season.

Individuals who have the ability to easily communicate with groups have one of several desirable traits for a good docent, while the ability to judge the interest level of a group at any given time during the tour is another. At times, the "canned tour" may not always be appropriate for school-age children, while a group of historic preservationists may ask for every scrap of information available on the interior wall coverings.

Another important facet of a docent is the genuine desire to learn more about the history of Blue Earth County. Many groups are interested in the early settlement, and today's correlation to early business establishments.

A training session is planned for May, at which time extensive information on the Hubbard House will be covered. A handbook will also be distributed containing material docents should "study" to give the most accurate and informative tours possible.

If you are interested in becoming a docent, please call the Heritage Center at 345-5566. **We need you!**

Wanted: Volunteers

If conducting tours is not your specialty, perhaps you would be interested in volunteering for one of the many other duties necessary for the successful operation of the Hubbard House and Carriage House.

The Society needs people to serve as greeters for visitors at the door of the Hubbard House, welcoming them into the house, providing tour or ticket information, as well as answering any questions they may have about the house, carriage house, Hubbard family or the Historical Society.

Other volunteers will be needed throughout the house and carriage house to ensure tour participants are staying with their group, explaining that the preservation of artifacts and interior features depend on their being handled only by trained staff and volunteers, as well as ensuring the artifacts are in the proper place for the next tour.

Volunteers are needed to talk about the carriages, wagons and buggies located in the carriage house, and also to explain tools and methods used to care for animals and tack years ago. While these will not be formal tours, they will aid visitors in understanding transportation in early Mankato.

If any one of these or other volunteer opportunities interests or appeals to you, please call the Heritage Center at 345-5566, and we will be sure to utilize your talents to benefit the Society.



We Need You!

1997 Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting for the Blue Earth County Historical Society was held Tuesday, March 25, at the Summit Center. President Harley Goff began the meeting by relating the many projects and grants which the Society has received in the past year.

Financial and audit reports were given by Tom Salsbery, Society treasurer, and Michael Burkhardt, CPA. The Society realized almost \$9000 in excess income, and has developed an ambitious budget for 1997. Programs conducted by the Society are expected to generate \$15,000 in income and will help offset some of the operating expenses.

President Goff discussed plans and projects for the coming year, which included a \$100,000 grant to restore specific exterior elements of the Hubbard House. Also in the works are plans to redesign the educational exhibits in the basement of the Hubbard House, as well as a grant to continue work on the servants quarters in the house.

Former Executive Director Liz Brown presented a recap of programs and volunteer efforts for 1996 (volunteers gave over 3000 hours of their time to the Society), and introduced staff members, who were praised for their hard work and accomplishments throughout the year.

The new executive director, Anita Baerg-Vatndal, was then introduced. She spoke of "making history come alive" through educational programs at the Heritage Center, Hubbard House, and throughout the county. She encouraged members to become more involved in the many volunteer opportunities available in the Society.

Introductions were also made of the members of the Board of Trustees. Outgoing board members Elmer Goodrich and Tom Weight were thanked for the time and effort they have given to the Society. The Nominating Committee presented a slate of six new board members: Jo-An Lavitschke, Larry Lundblad, H. Roger Smith, Jane Baird, Katherine Hughes, and Jane Tarjeson. All were approved by a unanimous vote of the membership.

David Nystuen, Field Services Coordinator for the Minnesota Historical Society, spoke on the topic "Explore Minnesota and Its Hidden Treasures." Mr. Nystuen has spent over thirty years assisting in the growth of local historical societies, to help organize and maintain their facilities and artifact collections in a variety of ways. His colorful slides were of great interest, and his humorous dialog

provided an entertaining evening for all who attended.

The meeting closed with refreshments and a time for socializing. A good time was had by all!



Blue Earth County Historical Society

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Rebecca Schusta, Museum Aide

From the Director's Desk. .

Last night I attended an event that was both invigorating as well as challenging, and at times even humorous! The event was the Blue Earth County Historical Society's Annual Meeting, and the excitement was the result of hearing positive reports about the Society's challenges and successes this past year.

As the new director of the Society (that day was my first on the job!), I was uncertain as to what the meeting would entail. It became apparent that members are very proud of the Society, as evidenced by the sparks of pride in their eyes upon hearing how the Society has moved ahead financially after a year of hard work to increase income for the Society. I also heard pride in the voices of some members who were recounting several successful restoration efforts at the Hubbard House.

However, I also discovered the need for more membership involvement in Society activities, thus enabling a continual expansion of its vision. Membership involvement is needed to initiate more programs, activities and opportunities to help educate both visitors and school children about the excitement which history can generate. "History Comes Alive!" is just one project members can help develop, one which will focus on the everyday lives of people like ourselves.

Projects such as the creation of teaching kits about Blue Earth County history will help educators make history come alive for children. Members can help by writing scripts as well as gathering items from the past that children can actually touch and use. They may even accompany certain kits to demonstrate the usage of household and farming items by early settlers and pioneers.

Joining the ranks of docents and volunteers at Hubbard House this summer is yet another avenue for members to help make history come alive for visitors and tour groups.

Making history come alive is an ambitious goal, one that will require both time and effort on the part of the entire membership of the Society. Members' participation is critical to ensure the continued success of the Society. Yet after attending the Society's Annual Meeting, I know the potential is there and I will work to promote it in the coming year!

Thank You!

The Blue Earth County Historical Society sincerely appreciates the contributions of individuals, organizations and businesses. These contributions help to build the programs and services people have come to associate with the Society, and we thank those listed for their generous contributions: Marlys Hinsverk, Don Kvasnicka, Mildred M. Jones, Richard Nienow, Jo Schultz, Orville W. Jensen and Mary Ann Jensen, Bert E. and Inella Burns, Ronnie Burton, Kelly Duncanson, Cambria Township, F. B. Clements Foundation, Marian Muir, and several anonymous donors.

Wish List

The Society is looking for the following items to assist in daily operations at the Hubbard House and Heritage Center. Needed are garden tools, garden hoses, a wheelbarrow, a typewriter with a movable carriage, shelves for storage areas in the gift shop, \$50.00 to purchase a microphone system, and a Fax machine for the office.

If you have any of these items or wish to donate money toward them, please call the Heritage Center at 345-5566 on Tuesday through Friday. Thank you in advance for any assistance you can give us!



Anita Baerg-Vatndal, new executive director.

Meet a Volunteer. . .

Alma Severson

Alma Severson began volunteering for the Society in 1987. Her current projects include pasting and filing newspaper articles for researchers of family history. Previously, she indexed the *Good Thunder Herald*.

One of Alma's largest projects involved transcribing all the headstones in Blue Earth County cemeteries. Her ability to read and translate the German language on many of the older headstones was of great help to complete the entire project. She also typed all of the information into books in the archives, now available for researchers and genealogists.

Alma has remained active with outside hobbies and interests, including bowling (three times a week in a senior league), knitting, crocheting, and collecting antiques. She also helped her son recover from the flooding this spring, standing for many hours in rather wet, uncomfortable conditions, yet gave no complaint except that she wished she could do more!



Millie Nisja

Millie Nisja was born and raised in Mankato. She moved to North Dakota, where she was employed as a county auditor for twenty-three years. In October, 1995 she moved back to Mankato.

Since the summer of 1996, Millie has volunteered at the Heritage Center, filing and indexing newspapers and photographs for genealogists and researchers.

Her hobbies focus on genealogy of her own family, and embroidery. Welcome home, Millie!



Dear Members. . .

This letter was recently received from a Michigan genealogist looking for information about some "mysterious" relatives. If you can help her, please write directly to her. We hope someone will have a "clue" to aid her in solving this "mystery."

Dear Society Members:

I would like to find out information about Henry George Thoms. He was a barber and lived in Mankato in 1870, until moving to

Denver, Colorado. He was born in Hanover, Germany. He had two sons, George W., and William, and a daughter named Christine.

William, the second son, had eight daughters. Their names were Sophia, Louisa, Helena, Hannah, Ida, and three more who have not been named. I am especially interested in contacting or learning about the daughters I do not have names for.

Thank you,

*Sally Thoms Miller
7109 Rolling Hills Drive
Hudsonville, MI 49426*

"Steamboats Around the Bend" Exhibit Opens

The 100th anniversary marking the arrival of the steamboat *Henrietta* in Mankato is celebrated with a new exhibit at the Heritage Center. "Steamboats Around the Bend" celebrates the date April 27, 1897, marking a century since steamboats last journeyed up or down the Minnesota River.

The history of steamboats on the Minnesota River is covered in the exhibit, which includes historic photographs of several of the steamboats that docked in Mankato from 1852-1897. These boats served both the transportation needs of passengers and businesses. One exhibit highlight is a steam whistle recovered from the steamboat *Julia*, which sank near Mankato in 1867.

The exhibit has a model of the *Cummings* ferry, which was used to assist passengers crossing the Minnesota River near Sibley Park. This crossing was the site of General Sibley's trading post at the mound which later bore his name.

Farmers of Nicollet County used the ferry to bring hay, their main cash crop, across to Mankato. The ferry was utilized extensively in an era before bridges were built to connect both banks of the river. The ferry boat was used from 1853 to 1881, when the first iron bridge was built between Mankato and North Mankato.

A natural levee at the bend of the river provided a landing both for the ferry, which connected Mankato with Nicollet County, and for the steamboats, which connected Mankato and the eastern United States. Warehouses and commercial businesses were established on the levee to serve steamboat traffic.

In 1855, J.J. Shaubut built a store which served as headquarters for all the steamboat traffic on the Minnesota River between St. Paul and Mankato.

Among the names of steamboats traveling the Minnesota River between St. Paul and Mankato were the *Berlin*, *Nominee*, *Uncle Toby*, *Antelope*, *Clarion*, *Little Dorrit*, *New Ulm Bell*, *Express*, *Mollie Mohler*, *Otter*, and the *Mankato*. A list of all the steamboats that traveled "around the bend" of the Minnesota River past Mankato and their dates of docking is of special interest to many visitors.

The steamboat has been thought to have brought the first white settlers to present day Mankato. The *Anthony Wayne* was the first steamboat to penetrate the Minnesota River (then known as St. Pierre or St. Peter's river) as far as Mankato. Vying with another boat, called the *Nominee*, to see which could push the deepest into the river's wilderness, the *Anthony Wayne* reached Mankato with a load of sightseers on July 18, 1850.

Shortly thereafter, the *Yankee* came to Mankato and proceeded to what is now Judson before being turned back by lack of provisions, 104° F heat, and mosquitoes. On board the *Yankee* were Parsons K. Johnson and Henry Jackson, who less than two years later were to found Mankato.

The *Tiger* was the first boat to bring settlers to Mankato, making three trips in 1852. Later that year, the *Black Hawk* arrived, and it has been claimed that every person within a three mile radius rushed to the landing when the whistle sounded. Mankato had six boats arriving in 1852, which was considered quite impressive at the time.

Regular trips were made from St. Paul to Mankato in 1853, but 1854 was a different story. It was not until May 20, 1854, that the steamer *Globe* was able to make the trip, the other ships having been deterred by the low water. Contemporary accounts of the period state that residents were "right glad to see the boat, for their provisions were about exhausted, and nearly all inhabitants had been living on fish alone for weeks." The navigation that year was short-lived due to low water levels in the river, and soon after the *Globe* left, the river level dropped again and there were no more steamboats that year.

The year 1855 was better for steamboats on the Minnesota River, with 109 arrivals recorded. The next year had 207 arrivals recorded, from about April to late July. In 1857 the river was high throughout the season, and traffic was heavy as more settlers began to arrive.

The next year, 1858, the river was high again, with 310 steamboat arrivals recorded at the Mankato landing. After an early start on March 27, 1859, traffic fell off. This was the year when a boat called *The Freighter* went past Mankato with the intention of traveling as far as Big Stone Lake, the source of the Minnesota River.

However, the crew became inebriated in New Ulm and, before they were sober again, the river level had started dropping, and the boat became stuck about two miles from Big Stone Lake, where the keel remained for many years.

The summer of 1860 was another poor one for steamboats due to little snowfall the previous winter. On March 22 the *Time and Tide* arrived, the first boat to come from St. Paul. The larger boats were able to reach Mankato for only a few days in April, and again for a few days in June. A few smaller boats were able to make the trip, except during mid-summer.

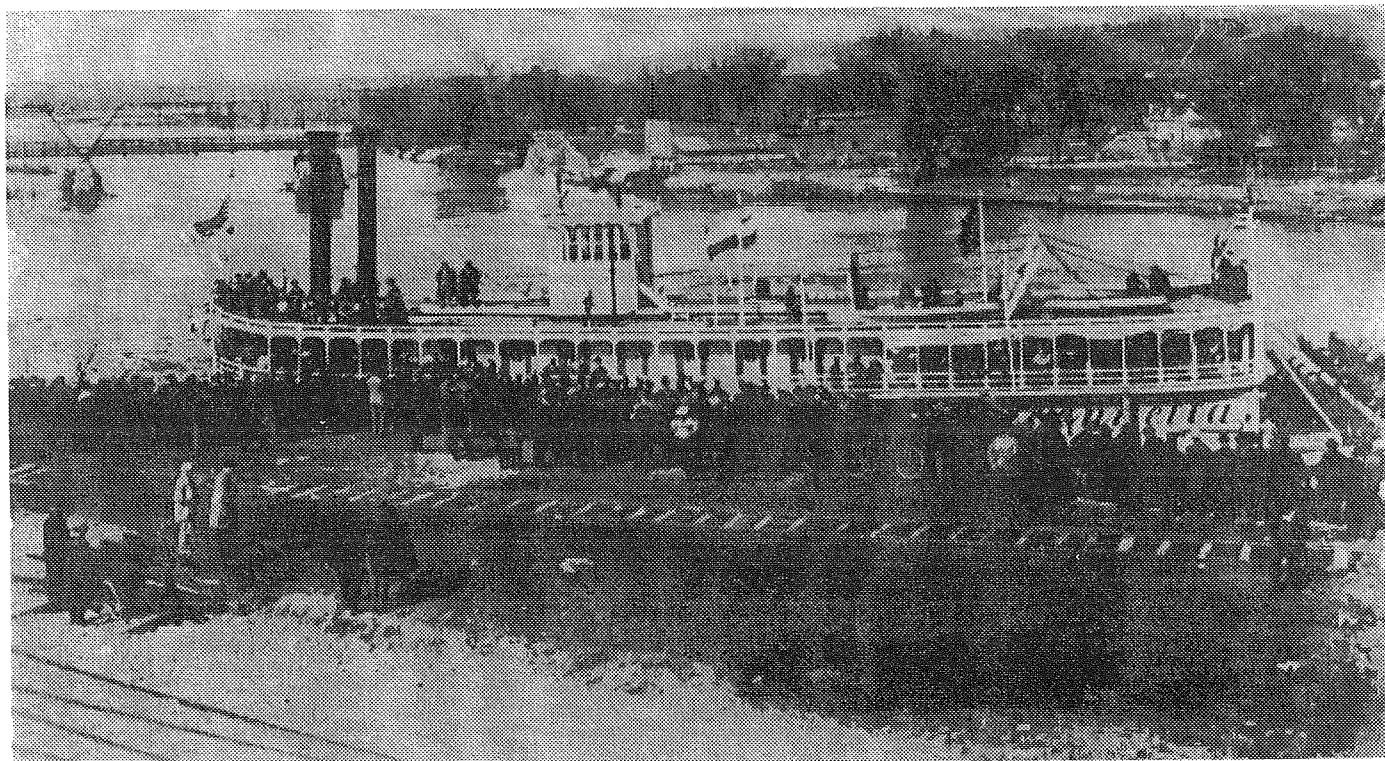
Good navigation returned in 1861, when two of the largest boats put on the river, the *City Belle* and the *Fanny Harris*, began making trips to Mankato. A severe winter with heavy snowfall in 1862 brought another good year for navigating the Minnesota River. There were 80 arrivals that spring and summer, and the steamboats were vying for which could make the best time between St. Paul and Mankato. The *Favorite* made the trip to Mankato in 19 hours, and returned to St. Paul in 12 hours.

Competition between steamboat lines cut the price of a passenger's fare between the two cities to fifty cents for a short while. The trip between Mankato and St. Peter could be made in a little over two hours. In 1862 the steamboats hauled a considerable amount of wheat, carrying up to

62,000 bushels that year by July. The rate for hauling the wheat was five cents per bushel.

The *Henrietta* was the last steamboat to sail to Mankato, leaving Stillwater on April 23, 1897. On April 27, the *Henrietta* came to Mankato bringing an excursion from St.

Peter. The boat returned to St. Peter the next day with 250 passengers (who had been charged 75 cents each). Thus ends of the history of steamboats on the Minnesota River.



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