

Blue Earth County Historian

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One of Eagle Lake's two hotels was the "Hilton", pictured here in the late 1800s.

Once Again A Boom Town

by Shirley Grundmeier

Sources from Blue Earth County
Historical Society Archives

If your great-grandmother, who lived in Eagle Lake a century ago, could return today, she would never know the city. She - and your great-grandfather - were proud, and justly so, of the village and its accomplishments back in the years 1882-1892. How did it differ from today? Well, let's hop onto the Time Machine and go back in memory to that small village in Southern Minnesota known as "Eagle Lake.

This is how *Shoemaker's Business Directory* saw our village back in its 1881-1882 edition: "Eagle Lake is a station on the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad five miles East of Mankato, with two steam saw mills, a steam flour mill being erected, a planing mill, an elevator with the capacity of 12,000 bushels, a water power mill, a pine lumber yard, and extensive wood yard, three churches, and a population of 350."

By 1882, Eagle Lake was already a mature village, with a history dating back to 1856 and the first white settlers, like the Burgess and Cummins families, who arrived in wagon trains. Over the next few years, the settlement underwent several name changes. It was called Burgess Mill until 1870, when the railroad was built and the first post office established. The name given then was "Speier," suggested by a homesick German immigrant. Three years later, the name was changed to Eagle Lake because of the village's location in "the western part of LeRay township, on the southern shore of the lake. The village was first surveyed in 1872 and in the next year, another site was surveyed; the village is located on both surveys."

The *Mankato Free Press*, in June 1882, gives Eagle Lake's population as 400, "most of whom are Americans." The town now boasted, in addition to Shoemaker's listings; "one graded school, three blacksmith shops, five general stores, a drugstore, meat market, and two wagon shops. A big industry in the area was the manufacture of sugar cane into golden syrup, with an estimated 20,000 gallons shipped from LeRay township annually. Also, corn, wheat, oats, potatoes and all kinds of cereals and vegetables grew "in great abundance." Eagle Lake also had two hotels, popular because of their proximity to Madison Lake's Point Pleasant, "a pleasure resort of equal importance to the celebrated Lake Minnetonka. Here thousands of visitors from South and East come annually to spend the sultry months of July and August in ample accommodation (CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)

not equaled outside of Minneapolis and St. Paul." One of Eagle Lake's two hotels was the "Hilton."

Visitors and immigrants alike were attracted to the large tracts of timber land that were selling to settlers for \$5-10 per acre, enabling "men with limited means to secure comfortable houses at living rates."

The glowing prediction was made that "the day is not far distant when the emigrant from over-crowded city and rocky knells of New England will see in the timber towns of Blue Earth County, attractions that are not found on the treeless wastes of the great American desert."

In October of 1882, the Mankato *Public Spirit* noted that Eagle Lake had "an absence of old men engaged actively in business; they are all bright-eyed, keen, active men and all seem alive to the advancement of their town." One hundred years later, this would still be true.

New industries in 1889 included a cheese factory, a "500-cow cheese factory" no less, which within a year was producing 200 pounds of cheese per day. Shipments were being made to "New Ulm and more distant points with very satisfactory results."

But not all was peace and tranquillity in the burgeoning village: in August 1883, burglars entered the store of Phelps and Allyn, and their take totaled \$175. The burglary occurred at 3 a.m. and Mr. Allyn probably would have heard it except that:

"It had always been the custom of Mr. Allyn to attach an alarm over his bed that was connected with the doors of the store, but on this particular evening one of his horses kicked him quite severely and the pain was so intense that he could think of nothing else.

Strange how things happen. This was a costly kick."

And in 1890, the Cummins and Kelly store was the scene of a destructive fire, so severe that firemen from Mankato were finally summoned to help. Eagle Lake had no facilities for fighting the fire "and the efforts of those present were directed to saving goods. In this way four or five hundred dollars worth were saved." The fire spread to adjoining buildings and homes and the "good people of the town were on the grounds by the hundreds bringing pails of water, applying it where it did the most good" and "working until they were thoroughly exhausted. The Mankato fire department responded with great promptness but arrived too late to be of much assistance. They showed their good intentions, nevertheless."

In 1881, a new schoolhouse was built to serve the educational needs of Eagle Lake. (The first had been opened in 1859, was taught by Miss Hannah Haslip and served 14 pupils.) The new schoolhouse was quite lavish for its time, having two stories with one room on each floor, a water pump in the front yard and outhouses in the back yard. Sinks and running water had to wait until 1922, but the trusty outhouses were still in use until 1964! The spiritual needs of the growing community were met by the three churches and medical needs by a doctor who came in 1877.

Eagle Lake appeared to have hit its peak by 1892, when *R.L. Polk's Directory* noted the population was 450, an increase of only 50 in ten years. The trend continued: in 1902, when the village voted to incorporate, its population was down to 367. Industry continued to decline and Eagle Lake became primarily a residential site. By 1956, only 310 people lived there.

Let's take our Time Machine forward a century to the 1980s. In 1988 the population in Eagle Lake was a booming 1,470. In just 30 years, the head count had risen from the 310 in 1956, to almost 700 in 1968 and an awesome 1,000 souls in 1970. And, in 1990 it was a grand total of 1,703.

Where are they coming from?

"All over," according to Eagle Lake's city clerk, "from California, Mankato, Iowa, with most of them working in Mankato and Waseca."

Why are they coming? Because homes and lot prices are within the average person's price range, building permits aren't required for minor home repairs and additions, and children are safer: "The whole South end in the summertime is one gigantic playground."

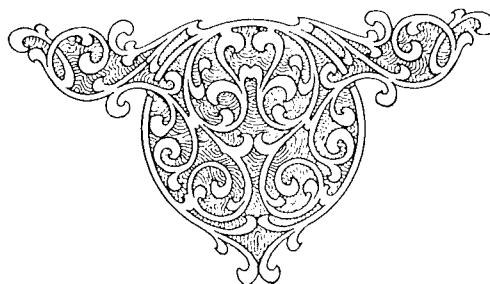
And there's the neighborliness: "Everybody here wants to help. They are pretty close-knit. The older people try to get the younger people interested. A lot of work is done here because people want to give their time for free."

Schools, too, have kept pace with population growth, as their enrollment rose from 116 in 1980 to 162 in 1989. Over the years, children in Eagle Lake were sent to a variety of schools, especially after consolidation with Mankato District #77 in 1969. There was a time when budget needs posed the threat that Eagle Lake would not even be able to keep its lower elementary children in school locally. But now, the new, state-of-the-art Eagle Lake Elementary School, with the capacity for 300 students, will allow the children to remain in their own community through the fifth grade. This is not to say that Eagle Lake residents don't support whatever school(s) their children attend. On the contrary: a few years ago, when four of the local girls who spearheaded the girls' basketball team at Mankato's East High

were on their way to the State Tournament, some 200 Cougar fans from Eagle Lake cheered them on.

Such camaraderie doesn't happen overnight. But it happens more often in a town where the Jaycee Women put out a booklet called "Welcome! To Eagle Lake." Spelled out among its many pages of services are such things as the "Kiddie Pop-In Babysitting Co-op," the "American Legion Auxiliary Tiny Tots," the "Golden Eagles Senior Citizens Club," and Tee Ball, Little League, 4-H Club, Brownies, Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, Campfire, American Legion Post 617, Auxiliary and Junior Auxiliary, the Jaycees, Jaycee Women, and the Lions Club. And there are still at least three churches even after a hundred years. And there's the listing of some 40 successful local businesses, most of whom supply services or products relating to residential life in the Eagle Lake Community. (And there's always Mankato, now just three miles away!)

Yes, great-grandmother and great-grandfather would find it hard to recognize a familiar landmark in today's Eagle Lake. But it would be easy for them to find the old familiar values among the people who live there now, where the "quiet, neighborly community" still exists, with "many citizens involved in organizations aimed at the betterment of the whole community." And they are just as proud of Eagle Lake as their forebears were. ❖



First Lime Twp. Settler Lived Year In Bark House

By Frank Franciscus

Taken from the Mankato Free Press, Oct. 14, 1942

Starting life as the first settler in Lime township, Blue Earth County, Matthias Schumacher and family spent the first year of their pioneer life in a home made in the dense forest, which then existed in that region, in a house made from the bark of the trees on their claim, which they preempted in 1855. The land was bought from the government at the rate of \$2.50 per acre, payable at 50 cents per acre per year until paid for.

Matthias Schumacher was born in Bavaria, Germany, came to the United States in 1845 and was employed at Buffalo, N.Y. for a time. While in that state an old schoolmate of his back in Bavaria came to New York after the death of her husband. She was Anna Marie Keuchler. Accompanied by two of her children, the young widow was delighted to meet her school mate. Old friendships were renewed, and the romance was brought to a climax by the marriage of Anna and Matthias in Schwormville, N.Y. October 23, 1852.

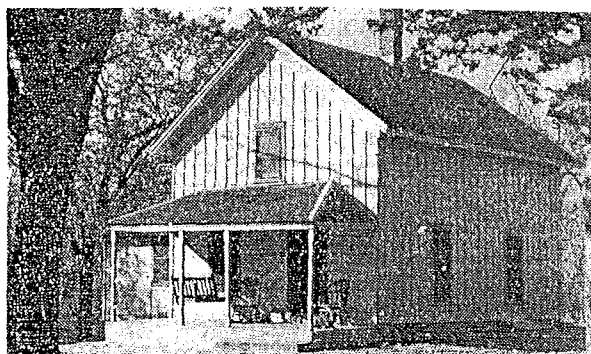
Anna's voyage to New York state was a long and sad one for her, because one of her three children took sick during the eighty-one day trip by sailing ship and was buried at sea.

Three years after their marriage, Matthias and Anna decided to go west and seek a home for themselves in Minnesota. They arrived in Lime township May 29, 1855, with all of their earthly goods, and after driving some distance through the densely wooded region about five miles east of Mankato, they decided to make their home near the old Indian trail.

This trail led from Traverse des Sioux, Sleepy Eye's village, near Caroline Junction,

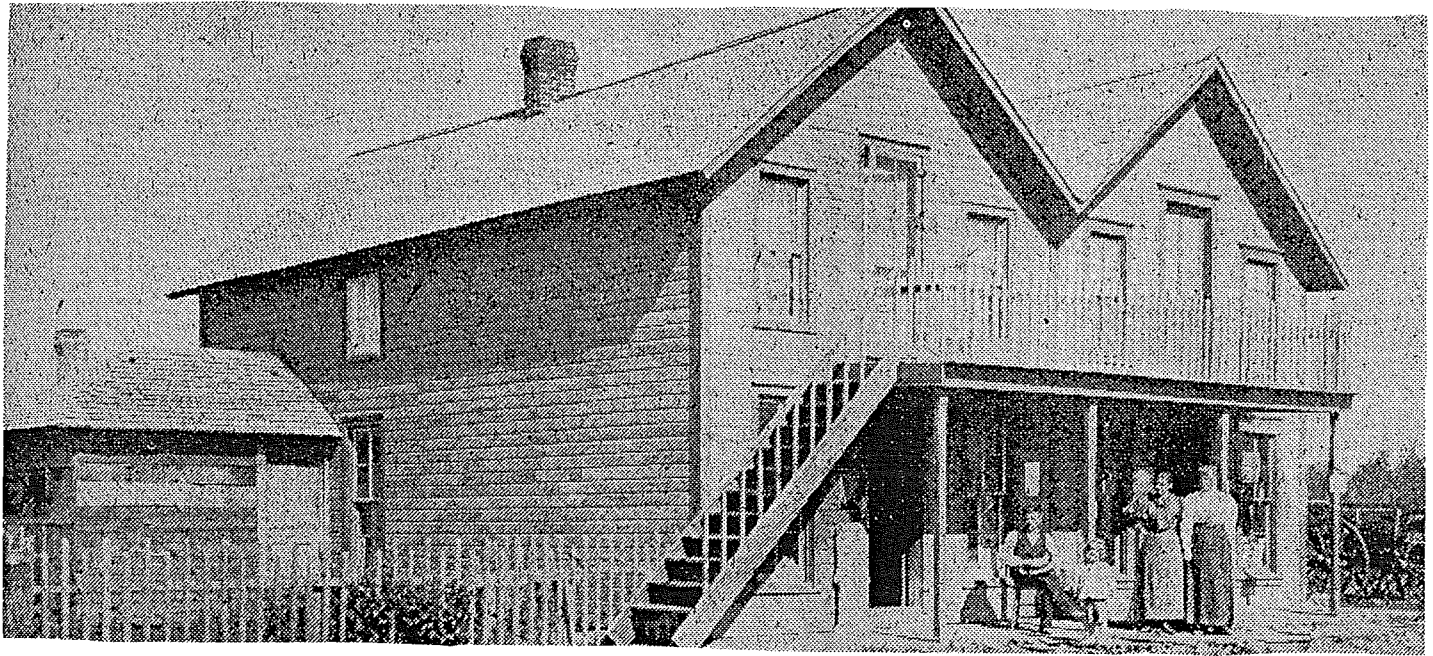
up the hills past the McGraw residence and William Moses home and east of the Gus Boehland home. A short distance beyond, the trail leading to the Winnebago Agency, at what is now St. Clair, crossed a heavily wooded knoll. This is where the young pioneers decided to make a temporary home. Not having the time or the help to erect a log house, the couple decided to build an adobe of the bark of the large trees nearby. Posts were sunk in the ground, and sapling poles were lashed to them at intervals with basswood bark.

On the outside of this network were fastened large slabs of the heavy bark of the huge trees growing there in abundance. Thus fashioned, their home was a crude one. Though humble, it was home sweet home to the Schumacher's. They lived there until that fall when a small log home was built near the Indian trail. The couple, however, was destined not to occupy that place of residence long. A change in the Winnebago agency trail forced them to abandon that house. Not daunted, the young pioneers decided to build another log house, which was erected in 1860.



Schumacher homestead in Lime Township, built of logs in 1860. It was sided in the late 1930s.

In later years the outside of the house was boarded up and the inner walls were nailed with strips, lathed and plastered. Running water was installed in the late 30s. As of 1942 the house was still in perfect condition and had been continuously occupied by some member of the Schumacher family the entire eighty-two years. ❖



Ralph Healy's Store in 1897. Ralph sold it to Omar Mullin in October, 1904.

Beauford Corners

by Gail Palmer

Traveling south on Highway 22 toward Mapleton, one sees evidence of the once-thriving village of Beauford Corners. The unoccupied creamery is a reminder of its many prosperous years. The United Methodist Church is viable evidence of the importance of religion in the lives of the area's people for more than a century.

The names on the mailboxes reveal a rare stability in the ownership of the fertile land, which has been passed down from generation to generation. Many names have not changed on the mailboxes for decades: Mauer, Morrow, Sellers, Getty, Minkel, Runke, Cramer, Coy, Kreig, Hislop.

The former District 86 schoolhouse is now converted into an attractive family dwelling. The headstones in the United Brethren Church cemetery record the names of many pioneer families and their succeeding generations. Several of the original houses

are still occupied. Two newer businesses operate on each side of the highway.

Beauford Corners is just one example of many villages around the country that prospered in its early years and later fell victim to unforeseen circumstances.

Beauford Township, just south of Mankato, was part of the Winnebago Indian Reservation until the Native Americans were removed from the land in 1863. What remains of the Beauford corners settlement is located on the north side of the Big Cobb River about 12 miles south of Mankato on Highway 22.

According to the minutes of a county commissioners meeting held on March 13, 1866, the town of Beauford Corners was created on the petition of Charles McBeth and the 26 other settlers. The first town meeting was held at the home of John Frey, located in Section 11, on April 11, 1866. (CONTINUED ON PAGE 6)

Two years earlier, the town's first settler, James Morrow, Sr., a Scotsman, claimed the

northwest quarter of Section 25 upon which he built a log cabin in early September 1864. Other early settlers included Albert Arza, Seth Gatis, and Soshia Rogers. Jennie McBeth was the first child born in the township, on Oct. 1, 1864.

The township's first school, District 86, was created on Oct. 1, 1866, in petition of Franklin Child and others. The first teacher was Miss Ackerman, and school was held in the Moreland sawmill building near Child's home. A frame school was built in the next year on the north side of Big Cobb River.

In February 1867, a mail route was established from Wilton in Waseca County to Garden City. It crossed the Big Cobb near Child's residence. In the spring a post office was established at the Child home with Mrs. Child acting as postmistress. The mail route was abandoned in 1875 and Beauford was without a post office for six years. Then in July 1882, Leander Findley was appointed postmaster of a new post office. In those early years, mail was delivered weekly. In 1896, delivery became daily. On Aug. 15, 1904, the Beauford post office was discontinued and service was supplied by rural mail carriers.

Through the efforts of Franklin Child, religious services were held in the school house in the 1860s. The United Brethren Church was incorporated on Feb. 9, 1884, with the Rev. Simon George as pastor. A lot was secured near the store and a 24' x 40' church building was built that summer. By the fall of 1885, the church's interior was finished and furnished with pews. The elected trustees were Sarah F. Child, Charles Wing, and William Hislop. The Rev. J.W. Fulkerson was the Presiding Elder. On June 20, 1886, the church was dedicated.

The building served area parishioners until 1953, when a larger building was constructed. In 1969 the name was changed

from United Brethren to United Methodist Church. The number of members has changed little during the past half-century and now consists of approximately 100. As in many areas, the church served as a united force of the settlement.

At one time, many businesses, including grocers, blacksmiths and co-ops, flourished within Beauford Corners.



Omar Mullin built this store across from the Creamery, photo from 1914.

In October 1874, John Kimpton bought a small tract of land and built a 12' x 20' store, consisting mostly of tobacco and bitters. His customers were largely wood choppers and haulers. Around 1894 Elmer Getty started a new store and in 1896 built another store to house his business until it ended in 1906. Later this building was converted into a private dwelling.

In 1897, Frank Nitzel started a business which he operated for about one year. In October 1904, Ralph Healy sold his stock of merchandise to Omer Mullin, who built a new store building across from the creamery and moved the goods there.

At one time there were three general stores in Beauford Corners. These stores changed ownership frequently. From 1940 to 1948, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Haberer owned and operated the last store. They sold the business to Heinie Schultz who in turn sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Art Husmo, who closed the store in 1954.

In 1880, Joseph Latourell opened a blacksmith shop operation. He was succeeded by William Sherman. After Sherman, a Mr. Johnson operated the shop, and Edward Ruhncie was the last one to operate the shop. It closed in 1897.

In March 1895, the Cooperative Creamery Association was organized with Al Madison acting as president and Charles Herzberg acting as general manager. A creamery building was constructed in June and Omer Mullin was the buttermaker.

The operation was a success from the beginning and was one of the most prosperous creameries in the county, making around \$35,000 worth of butter besides supplying all its patrons. A new building was constructed in 1931 and the creamery enjoyed 24 more years of success. In 1961 it was converted into headquarters for a mink ranch.

There is no doubt that in its time, Beauford Corners was a thriving community, filled with a dominating spirit and close-knit neighbors. But due to a number of circumstances, Beauford corners could no longer survive as a prosperous community.

As the railroad gained prominence in the late 1800's, cities along railroad lines thrived from the business and many new cities sprang up around the tracks. But in

~~1 1/2 tablespoons flour~~

~~Pastry for a double-crust 10-inch pie~~

Beauford Corners, no railroad chose to build a line through the village, allowing other communities closer to the lines to grow and mature.

A rash of business closings meant even less vitality for the town. When villagers realized they could buy better lumber in Mapleton, Good Thunder, and Mankato, the sawmill in Beauford Corners closed. There was less use for a blacksmith shop when farmers

started to use tractors instead of horses. In August 1904, the post office was discontinued and people in the area had no need to come into Beauford to get their mail. In the early 1950's, the last of the town's general stores closed for a lack of business. And in 1955, the creamery closed and was vacant for six years.

Also, automobiles made the population more mobile, and many residents chose to shop in bigger towns where the selection was better. Students were bused to Mapleton beginning in 1953 when District 86 closed its doors.

Beauford is a unique situation, never following the common pattern of most small towns of its time. Instead of reaching a maximum population peak and then falling off and dying out, it has crept up slowly to a population of about 50 and maintains itself at this point. It has managed to change its functions, thereby avoiding death as a community. Only time will tell if this sleepy little hamlet can manage to survive in this unique manner which has been its trademark for the past century. *Gail Palmer taught in rural schools in the Beauford area from the 1930s to the 1950s.* ❖

1932 Grape-Skin Pie

2 to 2 1/2 cups grape skins and juice
drained from pulp

1 cup sugar

1 1/2 tablespoons flour

Pastry for a double-crust 10-inch pie

Wash the grapes and press out the pulp. Now drain the juice from this pulp onto the skins and discard the pulp. Combine sugar and flour; add to the skins and juice. Place grape mixture into a 10-inch pie pan lined with pastry and cover with a top crust. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.

Forgotten Recipes, by Jaine Rodack

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