

Blue Earth County Historian

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Blue Earth County Historical Society Quarterly Newsletter
Winter 1999

A simple hill becomes Mankato's premier ski area

For more than sixty years, snow enthusiasts from near and far have come to Mt. Kato to ski and enjoy the crisp, cool air of winter. For those do not hibernate during Minnesota's famously cold and long winters, the ski area is a wonderful place to spend quality time with friends and family while enjoying a winter sport.

In the following article, former Blue Earth County Historical Society intern Robert Russell has detailed the history of Mt. Kato. It's a fascinating look back into the past, and whether you like to ski or not, the story of Mt. Kato is sure to please.

By Robert Russell

Sixty-one years ago this year, Harvey Anderson started developing a small ski area just south of Mankato, just out on Carney Avenue on Route 66. Anderson wanted a place for himself, his family and a small group of enthusiasts where they could enjoy outdoor winter activities.

The idea for the ski area started in 1913, when Anderson attended a ski tournament in Chippewa Falls, Wis. He had a conversation with one of the better ski jumpers in the nation, Anders Haugen.

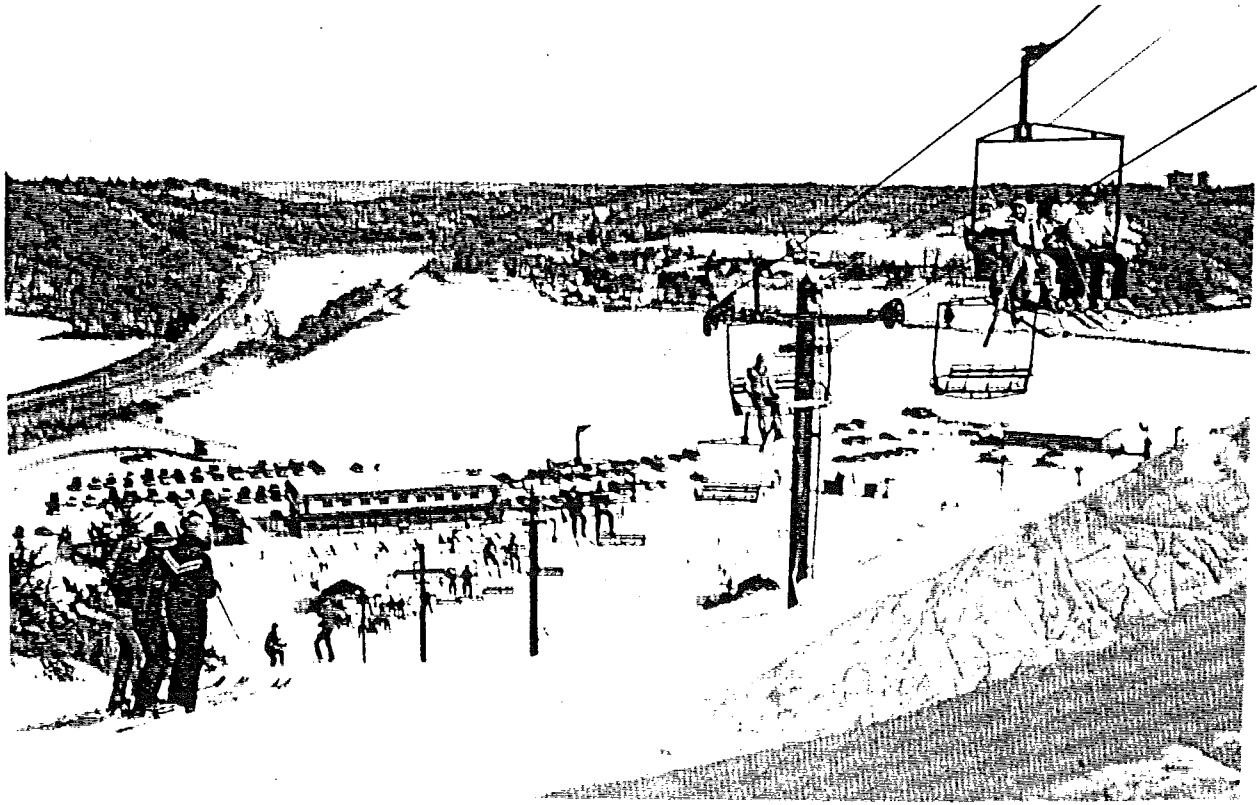
Anderson got Haugen to design a ski jump for Mankato.

Anderson and Pete Thompson, Don and Gene Paegel and Vince Peters sought a place to strap their 13-pound skis on their feet and soar. Their first jumping hill was at the end of Belgrade Avenue in North Mankato, right above the water works. This worked for a couple of years, but increasing auto traffic forced a move in 1931.

Another hill was found on James Avenue on the Mankato side of the river, but again they were forced to move due to housing development. It was then that Harvey noticed that a side of a hill out on the Indian Lake Road was a natural amphitheater that looked just right for skiing, tobogganning, bobsledding and of course, ski jumping.

The hill, named Skihaven, opened for winter activities only on weekends in 1937. There was no ski lift of any kind, and if a person could climb the hill, the coming down was free. Four graduated ski jumps allowed enthusiasts to enjoy their unusual sport to their heart's content. There was no snow-making equipment, so the skiers had to rely on Mother Nature. Because there was no grooming, a group of skiers had to sidestep hills first to make them ready for riding. This would smooth down the snow and pack it so it stuck to the ground underneath. Much of the time Anderson

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Mt. Kato ski area, as it looked in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

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could be seen shoveling snow into the toboggan trough to make the two hundred yard run workable.

In 1945 Anderson hooked up an old Buick engine to a bullwheel arrangement which gave the ski hill a three-person rope tow. Now it was possible for the skier to get in more skiing than climbing time. The downside of the new convenience was that the rope was heavy, slippery, and fast. By the end of the season, a person could easily count on going through a couple of pairs of mittens and a ski jacket. Also, four or more riders would be too much for the weight of the engine and the system would stall. Skihaven at this time started to charge a lift fee, and people skiing had to stop at a small ticket booth off Route 66 and deposit a couple of dollars for a day's (or night's) entertainment. A few lightbulbs on the hill

was enough for night skiing, but skiers had to look left and right for any train traffic that might be coming down the track at the time they crossed into the Skihaven parking lot.

In 1951, Anderson hired two men from northern Minnesota to build a log cabin on the premises. Telephone poles were used, which meant the cabin could be no longer than ... a telephone pole. It became Skihaven's lodge, a place to get warm, change clothes, and maybe get a bite to eat. Dolly's counter always had a fresh stack of goodies, run by Dolly Anderson herself. What would Skihaven be without hot chili, burgers, cookies, or the specialty of the house, Dolly's barbecues? Dolly would stay up until three in the morning getting her barbecues ready for the next day's skiers.

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After some time, she turned her "secret" recipe over to Randall's so they could make the sandwiches, but even then she had to doctor it up for her "just right" flavoring.

In 1966, major upgrading took place at Skihaven. The rope tows were electrified and more lighting made skiing safer. More land was purchased to create a number of new trails. A snowcat groomed the hills daily and a poma lift was added to the rope tows. A ski rental building was added to make the area bigger for skiers. Even though Skihaven was becoming modern, Dolly still served her barbecues and Harvey Anderson continued to play his musical instruments and tell stories.

In 1977 Skihaven was sold to Afton Alps and became Mt. Kato.

A fine way to enjoy winter

Mankatoans (and Minnesotans in general) have always found fun ways to deal with the less-than-perfect winter weather. Besides skiing and other winter outdoor recreations, winter carnivals were always a fun way to make the most of the cold season.

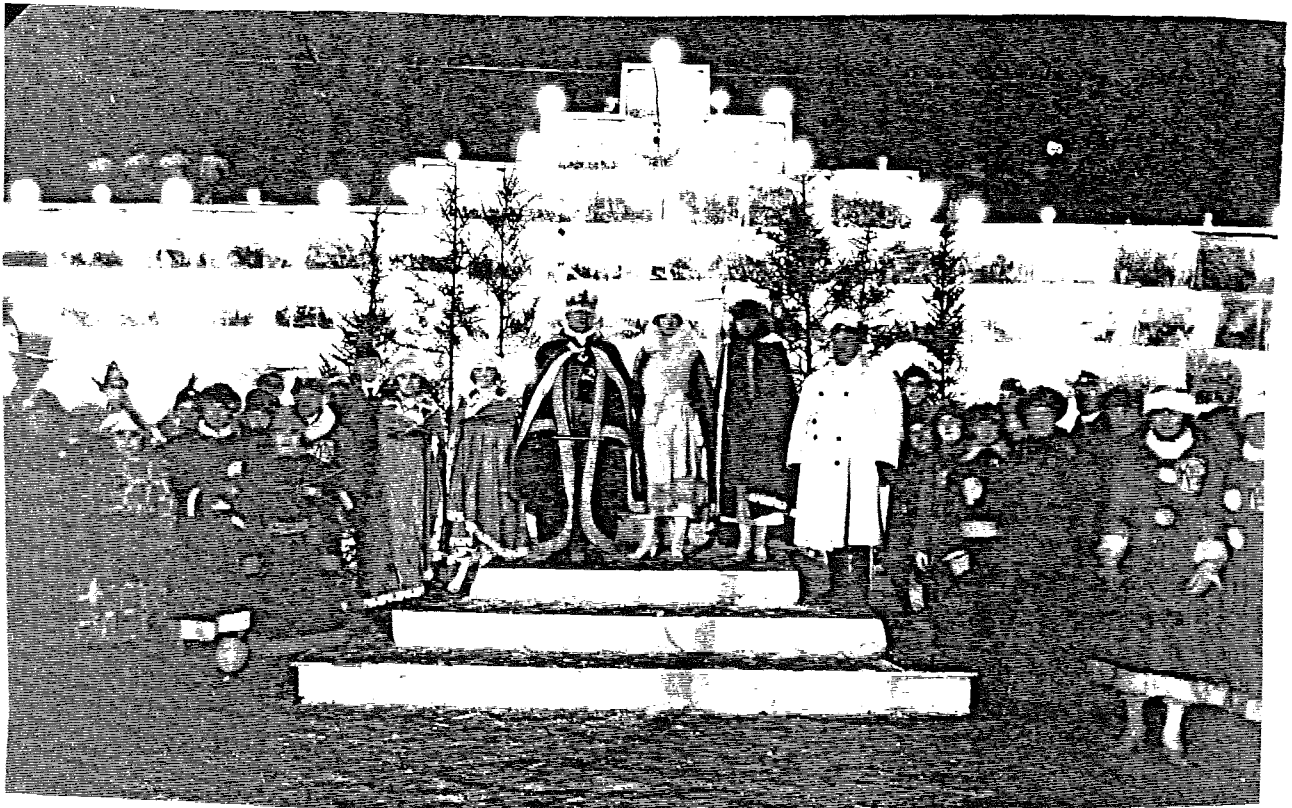
In January of 1920, Mankato hosted a prominent winter carnival, complete with an ice palace and royal court. A schedule printed in the Jan. 19, 1920 Mankato *Daily Free Press* lists activities such as amateur fancy skating contests, tobogganing on a scenic slide on Main Street, dancing, an exhibition curling contest, exhibition races by Alaskan dog

teams, a parade and queen coronation.

As mentioned in the *Daily Free Press*, Earl C. Sly of Minneapolis, representing Pathe News, arrived to take "moving pictures" of the carnival. The article stated, "The pictures will then be shown all over the United States by the Pathe News."

The carnival was quite colorful and bright. The headline in the Jan. 20 edition of the newspaper reads: "King Ferdinand Reigns and the Kato Carnival is in Full Swing — Splendor is Dazzling — Sights Blaze with Colored Lights and Decoration — Queens at the Court — They Paid

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Winter Carnival royalty in front of the ice palace, January 1920. (Photo courtesy of BECHS archives.)

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Homage When Rex Mounted Icy Throne; Blare of Trumpets."

Also, "Clad in their gaudy carnival costumes, with the queens in regal array, the singers on the platform, with the ice walls as a background, red flares and colorad lights illuminating the scene, formed a picture difficult to equal."

Toward the end of the festival,

Pauline Koke was voted Queen of the Carnival. Stella Chambers, who finished second in voting, was the princess. The Jan. 22 *Daily Free Press* reports: "interest and enthusiasm in the queen contest last evening was at a high pitch and until the very closing hour of the contest, the candidates kept up their work."



Five championship ski jumpers came to Mankato from Colorado and Wisconsin for winter carnival skiing events in 1920. (Photo courtesy of BECHS archives.)

The Mankato Winter Carnival in January of 1920 featured an ice palace. (Photo courtesy of BECHS archives.)



Mankato winter carnival royalty, January 1920. (Photo courtesy of BECHS archives.)

News from...

Mary McGrew, Museum Assistant

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New and Renewing memberships for October, November and December:

Vee Williams	Rex Macbeth	Ken Gertjejansen
Carol Hoffman	Margaret Norris	Rachael Hanel
Charles and Marilyn Barnard	Nancy Powell	Eleanor Kudrle
Glenn and Helen Erickson	Paul Schumann	Shirley Schaub
Leona and Tom Schweim	Jerry and Caroline Baerg	Ruth Mary and Al
Ramona Mueller	Jane Geurs	Scheidel
Lynette Freyberg	Granville Gutterson	Helen Wiedenheft
Tanja Anderson	Home Magazine	Aeleen Eick
Richard Olson	Walter Jones	William Bassett
Dotson Co., Inc.	Don Kvasnicka	Patty and Chris
Lois Manthe	Sandra Mitchell	Conlin
Tony Kenning	Kimberly Anne Willis	Thomas Adams
Marilyn Cole	Doris Diel	Donna Casella
Nathan and Lisa Ward	Win and Shirley Grundmeier	Kandi Demaray
Marlin Peterson	Evelyn Deike Mikkelsen	Bill Everson
Howard Van Otterloo	Renee Mathiason	Susan Hynes
Harold and Virginia Leeman	Donald Stempert	J.L. Kubicek
Gertrude Bates	Mary Barrett	Keisha Swanson
Sal and Rose Frederick	Robert Junge	Keir Townsend
Dr. and Mrs. Paul Hustoles	Wynn and Pamela Kearney	Land to Air Express
Doris Berger	Mr. and Mrs. George Anderson Jr.	Crescentia Bisch
Lona Falencykowski	Mary Dooley	

Our membership now totals 503.

Donations

Greg Anderson
Mary S. Gray Trust
Glenn Bartsch
Mildred M. Jones Trust

Tours

The group tours, including area schools, totaled 1,071 tourists from April to December.

A special thanks to our volunteer tour guides:
Katheryn Hanson, Ken Ziegler, Jo Schultz, Lona Falencykowski, Betty Cords, Beth Norman, Catherine Scharfe, Rachael Hanel, Orv Jensen, Beth Zimmer, Elaine Lee, Win and Shirley Grundmeier, Bill Ries, Dar Heffron, Phyllis Votca, Delilah Keenan, Fran Hoff

From the desk of.....

Kandi Demaray,
Interim Director

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Happy New Year, everyone! It was a busy, but fun end of 1998 for BECHS...volunteers helped decorate the Hubbard House in mid-November, as we wanted it done early for all the scheduled upcoming tours and special programs. We were also able to keep the mansion open with the help of volunteer tour guides, on weekends from Thanksgiving to Christmas. The Hubbard House looked stunning, both inside and out.

The Christmas Open House on Dec. 7 and 8 was another wonderful event. The weather had been mild, so people even drove over from Owatonna. Costumed guides explained the distinctive furnishing of the rooms and Laura Goff and Beth Moe presented a skit of the "Hubbard girls" getting ready for a party. Members from the Minnesota Valley Chorale provided a beautiful sound heard throughout the house. Tom Hall, who is doing our "faux wood graining" in the servants quarters, was also on hand to demonstrate his interesting craft. Refreshments were served in the Carriage House, where we had set up a gift shop from the museum store. The Bert Burns family donated many wonderful coffee table books for sale and they were a huge success. We had the drawing for our Amish quilt, which was donated by Mary Dooley, and for

which we sold more than 450 tickets. The winner was Vickie Parsons of Vernon Center.

A super big "thank you" to all the volunteers and BECHS Board Members who helped with this year's event: Jo Schultz, Janet and Harley Goff, Jo-an Lavitschke, Jeff Walker, Larry Lundblad, John Resmerski, Jane Tarjeson, Mary McGrew, Carol Oney, Betty Cords, Kathryn Hanson, Eleanor Wittrock, Ramona Mueller, Dave Boyce, Shirley and Win Grundmeier, Laura Goff and Beth Moe, Steven Jansen, Jane Baird, Kandi Demaray and Tacie Schwartz.

We also participated in the non-profit bake sale at Madison East on Dec. 5. Volunteers who bakes goodies were: Tom Salsberry and family, Jane Bair, Jo-an Lavitschke, Jeff and Donna Walker, John Resmerski, Jane Tarjeson, Tacie Schwartz and Christine Cyr, Ramona Mueller, Jo Schultz, Millie Nisja, Kathryn Hanson, David Boyce and Kandi Demaray. Volunteers working our tables were: Kathryn Hanson, Alma Severson, Jo Schultz, Shirley and Win Grundmeier, Jane Baird, Jane Tarjeson, Jo-an Lavitschke, Mary McGrew and Kandi Demaray.

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BECHS now has a radio program which can be heard at 11 a.m. every second and fourth Monday on KMSU - 89.7FM. We invite you to tune in to hear about upcoming BECHS events and interesting programs on Blue Earth County's history and its people. Dave Boyce, John Resmerski and myself and all board members have been putting the shows together. We've already had some great programs from John on the poetry of Charlie Waterman and Blue Earth County's only outlaw, and Jack Madsen talked about "Remembering Rapidan." Others who have taken part in the radio shows so far have been: Lona Falenczykowski, Dave Boyce, Harley Goff, Jean Lundquist, Kandi Demaray and Marcia Baer.

We're delighted to have two interns from Minnesota State University, Mankato, working with us this semester. They are Lea Ann Peterson, a textile and clothing major from Rochester, and Caia Frederickson, and English major and history minor from St. Peter. Board Member Jane Baird's college class of internal auditing will also be studying BECHS as part of their project reviewing and documenting operations procedures.

News from...

Jane Tarjeson, BECHS Board president

Was your New Year's resolution to do something different and exciting before the end of the century?

Do you have four hours a week or month that you could volunteer your time and talents to BECHS?

Opportunities vary: needed are tour guides at the Hubbard House and at the museum (training provided), office help, filing, newspaper clipping, artifact accessioning (you get a first-hand look at the artifacts!), and many other interesting opportunities. What would you like to see for programs or activities at BECHS? You can make a difference!

Five years ago I started volunteering at BECHS, helping Carol in the research room. I was amazed at the vast resources available. The vertical files are overflowing with folders containing information on pioneer families to present-day families, businesses, organizations, locations, events, and pictures. The shelves are filled with informative books and hours can be spent at the microfilm reader looking through the newspapers of Blue Earth County, church and cemetery records, census records — everything you wanted to know or was curious about Blue Earth County is at BECHS. And that is just one area of the Historical Society, the museum and Hubbard House each contains a wealth of fascinating information and artifacts.

I invite you to stop in and visit the Heritage Center at any time. I am usually in the research room on Saturday afternoons if you would like to stop by and chat.

Also, if anyone has an interesting story or experience concerning a fire department in Blue Earth County, please write to us at Blue Earth County Historical Society, c/o FIRE, 415 E. Cherry St., Mankato, MN 56001.

From the desk of.....

Carol Oney, Archival Librarian

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Greetings from the Archives and Map Room! Best known as the research library, this is an area of the Society that is quite often buzzing with activity. This year has been a full and busy one with over 700 people coming to visit us. It is open for use by Society Members and staff as well as the general public. Society members can visit our facilities free of charge while non-members are charged a \$3 user fee. Both groups pay the 25 cents per photocopy. More often than not, genealogy is the topic of choice. The uprising of 1862 is another big item of interest.

We see many researchers who combine vacations with family history and who may ultimately decide to become members of our Society. Local people are also becoming more and more aware of the wealth of historical information available and located right in our own community. Not only do we see family researchers, we are also utilized by businessmen seeking historical background of their companies, *Free Press* reporters borrowing photos and gleaning our files for new material, students writing papers for high school or college, and people who have just a keen interest in history.

Other examples are when roadways are being built or re-routed, the state sends in professional research teams who study the

history of that particular area and what impact construction will have on the surroundings. We also shared historical information with Nicollet County Historical Society in regards to the North Mankato's Centennial.

Before going any further, I would like to briefly introduce myself. My name is Carol Oney and I have just completed my sixth year as Archival Librarian (seven if you count a year of volunteering). I am one of two full-time employees of the Society and am assisted by many talented and able volunteers. Mankato has been my home since 1966. It was at that time I entered MSC as a freshman from the Albert Lea/Emmons area. Becoming a librarian had always been a life long dream of mine. Archeology was also a great interest. I hold two degrees from Mankato State College/University — a BS in Art and Art History minoring in library science and a MS in Media and Technology (library science) specializing in Art and Art History, the latter having helped give me the training for this position. Answering genealogy questions, either by phone or mail, takes up a large part of my day. Some of you may have already met me through correspondence or personal visits. Other duties are assisting patrons with their

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research, writing up paperwork for incoming donations and lastly, but not least, completing the process for becoming a part of our permanent collection. Donations usually fall in one of two categories, archival and artifacts. Archival materials are paper items such as books, photos, maps, letters, newspapers, and news clippings, pamphlets, personal and business records. Artifacts deal with three-dimensional objects such as clothing, tools, home furnishings, industrial products, etc.

Besides our many visitors, a large volume of mail-in and phone requests has also besieged us. Letters have come in from almost every state in the Union, including the North Pole (Alaska), as well as several foreign countries. We may not be on the Internet, but our website is posted for all to see. We have assisted in finding birth parents, provided a one and only picture of a great-uncle (writer was from Wales), located the grave of long-lost relatives (writer was from England and the only clue was a misspelled Minneopa), and an English translation of a Norwegian hymn. The list goes on and on — I love my work!

Even letters sent to the City of Mankato or *The Free Press* make their way to us. One request in particular has caused more than a little excitement this past week. Since last fall, I have assisted a medical researcher in writing a paper.

Very few details were available at first. Eventually, we were able to provide photos of the subject from a 1943 Katonian year-book. Photo copies gave way to actual prints and the "paper" (or so I thought), will soon become a book, as well as a documentary to be shown on Dateline and A & E, as well as in *Newsweek* magazine. The subject in question ... Sybil, a famous psychiatric patient

with 17 personalities. It has been proven that she was actually a former student at Mankato State Teacher's College. A few helpful details here and there have mushroomed into an event of nationwide proportions.

The past two years, 1997 and 1998, have also seen a sharp increase in donations, without which we wouldn't have a historical society. It is our purpose to collect and preserve historic items to share with present and future generations. We are delighted that people think of us when deciding to part with a family treasure or are breaking up an estate. As nice as it would be, it is nearly impossible to list each and every item received along with its donor. Please rest assured each and every donated historical object is greatly appreciated and is properly acknowledged. Please let us know if this hasn't been the case.

Among the highlights of the year were a number of bridal dresses dating from the late 1890s up to the 1930s, ranging from a sturdy black taffeta to lovely lacy creations. In the case of the black wedding outfit, also included were several other "shirtwaists" to be worn interchangeably with the skirt. A future exhibit of wedding dresses is possibly in the works.

Our photo collection is growing steadily by leaps and bounds, thanks in part to society member Glenn Bartsch. He keeps an eye out for BEC postcards and has quite often filled in large gaps in our collection. Lake Crystal, Madison Lake, & Mapleton are among the towns newly represented. Old photos are always welcome, especially if they are identified and pertain to the BEC area. Sometimes donations come from some unlikely sources. A while ago, a gentleman

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from Utah sent a Mankato school picture back to its home in BEC. Several years ago, a nearby historical society sent us a postcard of a BEC farm with a round barn and landscape completely devoid of trees. The house is very recognizable with its three-sided porch full of windows. It is still there minus the barn, but shaded by a multitude of trees. Surprising what happens in a period of sixty years. Sadly, there are very few round barns in existence; however, this postcard helps preserve the past and its precious memories.

Another individual to whom we are deeply indebted is Miss Grace Jefferson, a descendent of an early resident, Adam Jefferson, and a long-time Society member. She has provided monetary support in the area of education and "The Young Historian" program has reaped the benefits of the fund. In the past, youngsters in grades 3 through 6 have learned how to make tie-dye T-shirts, make paper, and appreciate the intricacies of Ukrainian egg-decorating. Unfortunately, this program has been put on hold for several years due to staff changes. Hopefully, the New Year will see a reinstatement of this program.

Until the next newsletter Happy New Year!

At the Museum Store...

The Museum Store is located at 415 E. Cherry St. It offers books focusing on regional interests, native American interests and local authors. In addition, the store also offers paperweights made from Minnesota stone. Cost is \$4.50 for a large paperweight, \$3.50 for a small one. Also available is Jim McGuire's jazz CDs, \$13 each.

Also available are Betsy-Tacy gift items and books.

Recently a Museum Store catalog was sent to you listing various books and items carried by the Museum Store. Call the office at 345-5566 if you need another copy, or if you know a friend who would be interested in receiving this catalog.

The Museum Store Committee welcomes your suggestions on what you would like to see in this store. Remember — this is "your" store, staffed and operated by the Blue Earth County Historical Society. Your patronage is appreciated.

What's new?

Victorian Valentine's and postcards. Prices range from 25 cents to \$2.

"The Indians' Revenge" by the Rev. Alexander Berghold in 1891, reprinted by Monument Press. Time, places, persons and the circumstances of the 1862 Indian uprising focusing on New Ulm and the surrounding areas. 240 pages, illustrations. \$10.

"1857 United States Census of Mankato Township, Blue Earth County." Transcribed from the 1857 Minnesota Territorial Census Schedules by Katherine Hughes. This 46-page booklet lists the people that were living in the Mankato area in September 1857. Information on census includes first and last name, age, place of birth, native or naturalized voter and occupation. Census is indexed by name. \$5.

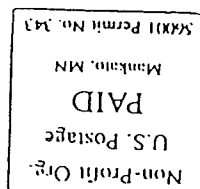
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