

The Blue Earth County Historian

Blue Earth County Historical Society. Spring 2000

Pierre Le Sueur and the Crisis in Franco-Native American Relations 1695-1702

This article was written by Tyler Crogg, BECHS Research Center volunteer and recent addition to the Board of Trustees. He has a deep interest in the French period and wrote this article for *The Historian*. - Editor

On the 300th anniversary of Fort L'Huillier's founding, the questions of the fort's exact location, the mine of blue clay, and the fate of the two tons of blue earth shipped to Paris for royal assayers have dominated recent histories of Pierre Le Sueur's Minnesota River expedition.

What most histories have failed to cover, or only briefly mention, is Le Sueur's role within French imperial policy and the general crisis in Franco-Native relations in the Upper Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi River Valley region during this period. The purpose of this article is to place Le Sueur's expedition within the shifting design of French North American policy.

The latter period of Le Sueur's documented residence in the Upper Great Lakes region from 1689 to 1702 was the most critical period in the history of New France. The concerns of uncontrolled expansion of the fur trade, increasing inter-tribal rivalries, a building anti-French sentiment among some Great Lakes Native American nations, growing English commercial threats in the Great Lakes area, and the sudden closing of the Great Lakes trade in 1697, dominated discussion and correspondence between French officials in Quebec and Paris.

The two Native nations of prime importance during Le Sueur's residence in the Upper Great Lakes and Mississippi Valley were the Fox and the Dakota. The Fox occupied southern and eastern Wisconsin. They were one of the few tribes in Wisconsin until the mid-1600s when the Iroquois Confederacy drove the Ottawa, Ojibwa (Chippewa), Huron, and other tribes west into Michigan and Wisconsin. The Fox rivalry with these interlopers was sporadic, but their hostility towards the Dakota bands of western Wisconsin predated European contact.

The Dakota, known to the French as the Nadouesioux or Sioux for short, resided in western Wisconsin and eastern Minnesota during the 17th century. The eastern Dakota were composed of four bands collectively called the Santee. They are the Mdewakanton, Wahepeton, Sisseton and Wakpekute. The Santee bands, which resided along and near the Mississippi, St. Croix, and Minnesota Rivers, were the focus of Le Sueur's activities. They were transient hunters and gatherers, moving

seasonally from the rice lakes of northern Minnesota to the mammal-rich deciduous forests along the Mississippi and tributary river valleys and south to the bison herds along the Minnesota River. This seasonal movement presented difficulties for French traders.

Like the previous Frenchmen who traveled into this region, Le Sueur's expedition was a combination of geographic reconnaissance, trade and diplomacy with regional Native Americans, specifically the Dakota. Le Sueur's presence and interest in the region was a long-term affair. He had been in the region since 1682 and had served under trader Nicolas Perrot for about five years along the Upper Mississippi River. After his service under Perrot, Le Sueur was commandant at the Chequamegon Bay post on Madeline Island, Lake Superior from 1693 to 1695. Before his death in 1704, Le Sueur had planned to return to the Santee Dakota utilizing the new Louisiana colony as a base of operations.

Le Sueur's work among the Santee bands and Fort L'Huillier's temporary existence produced severe consequences in the following decade. The Wisconsin tribes (the Ojibwa, Ottawa, Mascouten and especially the Fox) were at increasing odds with Santee Dakota bands over trade access and natural resource issues.

The Wisconsin tribes could not understand why the French, specifically Duluth, Perrot and Le Sueur, would wish to trade with their common enemy. Through the history of New France, the Dakota occupied the far western edge of the French trade network. If direct French trade with the Dakota nation was secured, all tribes to the east would forfeit their middleman status within the trickle-down economic network.

Pierre-Charles Le Sueur's background was typical of a senior voyageur. Born in Artois province, northern France in 1657, he came to Canada around 1680, roughly the same time Duluth was cultivating the first contacts among the Dakota. Le Sueur's first documented involvement in the fur trade was a contracted voyage to Michilimackinac in 1682. His memoirs cite his first travels along the Upper Mississippi in 1683.

Le Sueur's next documented presence is on May 8, 1689, under the command of the trader-commandant, Nicolas Perrot. Perrot worked at several posts in Wisconsin and along the Mississippi since 1665. The 1689 proclamation taking possession of the lands of the Dakota at Fort Sainte-Antoine (located near the confluence of the Chippewa and Mississippi Rivers) is undersigned by Perrot, Le Sueur, and several other traders and Jesuit fathers.

Pierre Le Sueur Article Continued on Page 3.

The Blue Earth County Historian *Spring 2000*

The Blue Earth County Historian is published quarterly for the members of BECHS. BECHS has the mission of collecting, preserving and publishing material relating to the history of Blue Earth County.

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The store carries a selection of Marian Anderson prints and cards, plus many more unique gift items. Please stop by for those graduation, birthday and Mother's Day gifts.

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Thank You All Very Much!

Pierre LeSueur continued from page 1.

In 1693, Le Sueur lobbied then Governor-General of New France, Comte de Frontenac, for a commission to maintain a post at Chequamegon Bay. He succeeded in his request, but not without protest from Intendant Borchart de Champigny. The intendant was second-in-command of the colony and oversaw legal, martial, and internal colonial issues. Intendant de Champigny believed trade expansion was a waste of valuable manpower needed in Canada, and that the trade itself was riddled with corrupt officials and traders. This would not be Le Sueur's first confrontation with de Champigny, who served as Intendant until 1703.

Besides trade, Le Sueur was also responsible for maintaining peace between the Ojibwa, Dakota and other nations residing near Chequamegon Bay. His fluency in Ojibwa-Algonquin and Dakota-Sioux languages was of primary importance for negotiations. The mediation between warring tribes, especially the Santee Dakota and their rivals, had been initiated by Duluth 1679-82, and Le Sueur's mentor, Perrot 1665-98.

Both Duluth and Perrot pushed for peaceful relations so trade could flourish in the Upper Great Lakes and Upper Mississippi Valley region. The Fox tribe was continually on the warpath against the Dakota and Ojibwa nations. Perrot wrote in his memoirs, "as a beginning destroy the Renards (Fox Indians); in order to cause everything to flourish."

In 1695, Le Sueur returned to Montreal with headmen from the Ojibwa and Santee nations. The Mdewakanton headman, known as Tiyoskate, tearfully begged Governor General Frontenac and other officials for protection from the Fox. La Motte de Cadillac, commandant at Michilimackinac, reported on this Dakota custom. "It is surprising that people as brave and warlike as these should be able to shed tears at will. One would say that their eyes are like gutters filled by a heavy shower." Tiyoskate became ill in Canada and died in Montreal in 1696. Le Sueur did not return to Chequamegon Bay that fall of 1695.

With the official edict closing all trade in the Great Lakes in April 1697, Le Sueur remained in Canada. The closure of the fur trade was the result of the massive store of furs already in France, and with the overstock; the bottom fell out of the market.

In the spring of 1697, Le Sueur presented Governor Frontenac and Intendant de Champigny with a proposed mining expedition among the Santee Dakota. De Champigny rejected the request believing that the mining was a screen for illegal trade. But Le Sueur pressed the issue. He returned to France in 1698 to acquire royal patronage for the expedition.

After some hesitancy among French officials and protests from de Champigny in Canada, Le Sueur was granted a royal license through the influence of his wife's distant relative and royal court insider, Pierre le Moyne d'Iberville. He was the

founding father of the Louisiana colony and agreed to assist Le Sueur in securing proper funding and manpower needed for travel to the Dakota via the Mississippi River. D'Iberville and Le Sueur sailed from La Rochelle, France in the fall of 1699, arriving at Biloxi in December 1699 or early January 1700.

Why Le Sueur's mining proposal was accepted had everything to do with lobbying the right people who held royal influence. D'Iberville's proposal of a Louisiana colony, and later, Le Sueur's expedition, passed royal approval because of this factor.

Le Sueur's mining proposal was neither the first or last in the history of New France. The French colonial bureaucracy continually emphasized New France's need to diversify its fur-bound economy.

In 1670, a French expedition to Lake Superior was to discover mineral mines, especially copper. Small copper veins dot the south shore of Lake Superior, and lead deposits were known to exist around the confluence of the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers. Mining presented overwhelming problems: lack of manpower, high shipping costs, a lack of mineralogical expertise and proper refining equipment. The overall costs to the French treasury easily outweighed profits.

Le Sueur's use of the Louisiana colony and the Mississippi River would hopefully circumnavigate Great Lakes tribal hostilities and interference from officials in Canada. In the summer 1699 Le Sueur formed "Les Compagnies des Sioux" with d'Iberville, and an associate of d'Iberville, Alexandre L'Huillier, to financially back the venture to the Dakota. Besides mineral exploration, Le Sueur was assigned other duties.

A prospective solution to the inter-tribal fighting was the relocation of various tribes. The Detroit post, founded in 1701, was the prototype for the experiment in relocation. The main objective was to draw regional tribes to a central area so that French officials could immediately settle disputes before blood vengeance spiraled out of control. The resettlement proposal was part of French policy to stabilize the Great Lakes and blunt any English influence within tribal relations, but centralized relocation created nearly as many problems as it was designed to solve. After gathering rival tribes within sight of each other, French commandants realized that it took more than a few yards of cloth and glass beads to ease ancient inter-tribal tensions.

Le Sueur was assigned to convince the Santee Dakota bands to relocate south, near the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. If this move was successful, the French colonial administration believed confrontations would diminish along the Upper Mississippi River, and trade possibilities would flourish. Le Sueur also hoped to convince the nomadic Dakota bands to remain in one specific location and form some minor agricultural settlements. The Dakota occasionally planted and tended corn, beans and other crops, but they were not an agricultural-based people. Andre

Penigaut, a carpenter on Le Sueur's 1700 expedition, wrote, the "Cioux [sic] nation...is always on the move, living only from hunting."

Le Sueur and his hired men arrived on the Blue Earth River on either September 30 or October 1, 1700. The expedition team began immediate work on living quarters for the coming winter.

There are three manuscript sources concerning Le Sueur's stay along the Blue Earth River. Two are edited versions of Le Sueur's journal, and the other is the journal of the mission's carpenter, Andre Penigaut. All contain errors, either through translation or from successive editing, but they illustrate the tenuous relationship between Le Sueur, the Santee, and the western divisions of the Dakota.

According to Sheas 1861 translation, nine Mdewakanton met with Le Sueur in early October 1700. They informed him that he was occupying the lands of the Dakota of the west and it was not their custom to hunt on the grounds of others without being invited. If he [Le Sueur] wished to take pity on them, he must settle on the Mississippi. Le Sueur explained that it was nearly winter and too late to move. He distributed the customary gifts of tobacco, black powder, knives and musket balls and told the Mdewakanton to return to this site soon for a grand council.

Several days later, two Canadians hunting near the fort were robbed of their muskets by a group of Santee Dakota. Le Sueur did not heed this warning to move his fort, but he continued work on Fort L'Huillier.

During his residence at Fort L'Huillier, Le Sueur met with and mourned with the family of Tiyoukate, the Mdewakanton headman Le Sueur had brought to Montreal in 1695. Through November and December, Dakota bands traveled to Fort L'Huillier. Le Sueur consistently reminded them that peace would bring more trade items, but also that they must change the structure of their culture.

"You must abandon the chase...[I will] give you corn to plant a good deal of ground...[you] should reflect that you could not do without the goods of the French...the only means not to be deprived of them is to not make war."

To remain off the war path was one thing, but to transform the entire means of tribal sustenance, upon request, was a nearly impossible challenge for any nation. In November 1700 (or the following spring 1701 according to Penigaut), a Mdewakanton band arrived at Fort L'Huillier with an estimated 400 beaver robes to make up for the musket-theft incident a month before. Each robe was made of nine skins.

In the language of traders these were *les castor gris* or greasy beaver. If the skins had been worn as robes in the previous winters, the tough outer hairs would drop out, leaving only the soft under hairs prized by furriers. *Les castor gris* fetched a

higher market price since the work of plucking the fur was complete. These beaver robes, in addition to bison and deerskins and the blue earth, were loaded in Le Sueur's small sailing rowboat and three additional canoes in May 1701.

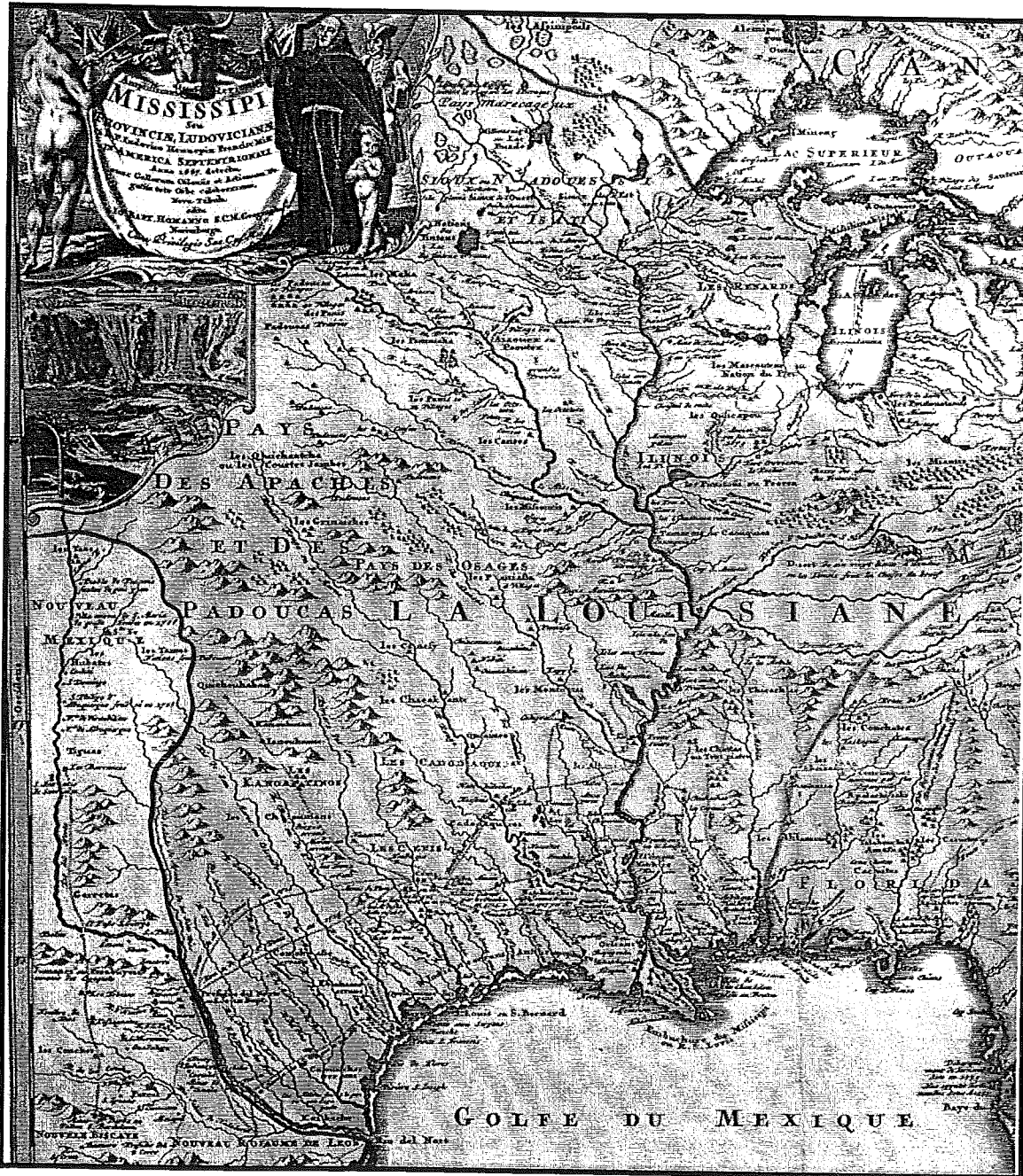
Le Sueur held council with three brothers, all Santee headmen, to extract final promise of peace and told them to assist the small garrison he was leaving behind. Le Sueur arrived at Biloxi in July 1701. He sailed for France in the spring 1702, roughly the same time Fort L'Huillier's garrison was attacked by a Fox or Miami war party. The attack killed three Canadians and fourteen Dakota. Supplies at Fort L'Huillier were running low, and with enemy war parties in the area, the decision was made to abandon the fort.

After Le Sueur's death in 1704, a second journey to the Santee was never undertaken. If French colonial officials felt no one could replace Le Sueur, it is left unmentioned. Within the next decade, the Fox Rebellion (1712-1736) would severely limit any direct French contact with the Santee. Ironically, the Santee considered joining the Fox in their long rebellion against the French. Contact and trade with the Santee was bypassed in the 1730s and 1740s for richer fur grounds and trade opportunities in the Grand Portage/Boundary Waters area, and northwest on the Canadian plains.

What can be surmised from Fort L'Huillier's temporary existence and Le Sueur's work among the Dakota? No armistice was established with neighboring rivals, the mining ventures died with Le Sueur, and the establishment of the fort only exacerbated dissension among the Native nations of the Upper Mississippi River, in fact, heightening tensions between the Santee and the western Dakota bands.

Though Le Sueur failed to complete several duties during his expedition of 1700-02, there were plans to return. The correspondence of Le Sueur and d'Iberville written after Le Sueur's establishment of Fort L'Huillier indicate future ventures in Santee country. D'Iberville's letter to the Ministry of the Marine dated June 20, 1702 stressed the importance of continuing the French contact with Upper Mississippi River tribes and the instability of the region. D'Iberville also emphasized Le Sueur's legitimate diplomatic and mining work among the Santee Dakota, and the great-untapped resources of the region, mainly minerals and the large tribal populations, but furs are also mentioned. According to these records, Le Sueur would return to the Upper Mississippi in 1704 or 1705 to continue to coax the Santee to relocate south and possibly investigate other mining and trade opportunities to finance his ventures.

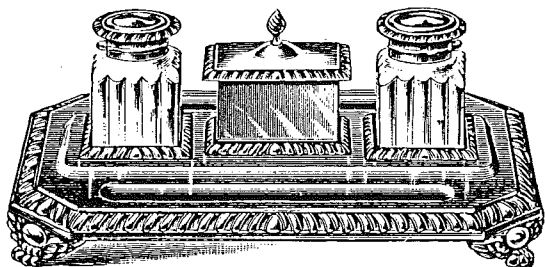
Le Sueur's work in the Upper Mississippi Valley was significant for several reasons. He secured Santee allegiance to France during a tumultuous period. His accumulated geographic knowledge was used by French cartographers to map the interior of North America. His constant speeches for peace to the Dakota and other nations were less than successful, though.



The Mississippi River Valley as it appeared on a French map made during the time of Pierre Le Sueur. Fort L'Huilier is on the map, but is very difficult to see in this copy. It is about an inch and a half from the top, a little lower than the word ISATI.

Le Sueur's livelihood was dependent on a secure, peaceful market for future trade aspirations. Constant warfare between the Santee, Fox and Miami tribes would continue through the 1720s and limited the French presence in the region. Le Sueur's explorations and trade were part of the greater design of French imperial policy during the period of 1695 to 1702.

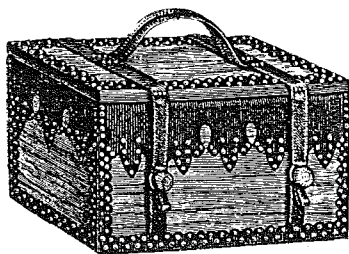
His contact with the Santee emphasized the tenuous relationship between the French and the Natives of the Upper Great Lakes region, and his multiple functions as a diplomat, businessman, and explorer were crucial to securing France's hold on the Great Lakes and Mississippi River during a period of considerable uncertainty. ♦♦



Welcome to Our New Board Members!

At the Annual Meeting, four new people joined the BECHS Board of Trustees. Tyler Crogg is a volunteer in the Research Center. He has assisted in helping answer research requests and is also active on our Exhibits Committee. Jack Jones is a lifelong resident of the area and brings knowledge of architecture and local history to the Board. Theresa McLaughlin has been busy working on her master's degree thesis. The project involves an in-depth study of the 1880 census comparing the nationalities and their distribution throughout the Mankato precinct wards. Donna Webb is another BECHS Volunteer. She has been using her library background to organize, catalog, and index our archival collections.

We are pleased that they have all agreed to give their talents to our Society and welcome them to the BECHS Board of Trustees. We also wish to thank those members who are leaving the Board of Trustees for their dedicated service and we wish them well in the future.



Travel Like Bert Trip #4

TLB#4 is fast approaching!

TLB is heading to

Door County WI

May 8-12, 2000

Call 345-5566 for details.

TLB#5 is being planned for next September.

ARCHIVES AND ARTIFACT DONATIONS

January - March 2000

Cathie Atchley, North Mankato, 4-page letter written in pencil, addressed to Miss Eva J. Wild.

Glenn Bartsch, Minneapolis, 89 assorted postcards.

Doris Bateman, Good Thunder, Brown taffeta dress, cream dressing gown, royal blue satin dress all worn by her mother.

Eugene Braam, North Mankato, advertising items from the Photo Shop, St. Clairs, Spelbrinks, Glasser's, Hayes Lucas, Minneopa Liquor, Riverbend Maytag, & The Century Club.

Ronnie Burton, Mankato, Color postcard of the Inn Towne Motel and dining room.

Ann Christenson, St. Peter, Original drafts of the Good Thunder mural, misc. photos of Good Thunder, downtown and events, as well as the groundswell demonstrations in St. Paul January 21, 1985.

Mary Dooley, Mankato, Minnesota Genealogist & Minnesota History Magazines 1996 - 2000.

Victoria Erickson, Mankato, Family chart of descendants of Albert Van Guilder, and 469 pages of family group sheets.

Clarice Finnegan, Mankato, 1975 Minneapolis Tribune Picture Magazine dedicated to the 1880s settlement.

Mike Frederick, Madison Lake, 1930 Calendar advertising Key City Oil Co., Mankato and an undated calendar given out by Joe Mocol, Mankato grocer.

Rosemary Froen, Lake Crystal, 1887 school certificate from Herman Schmidt

John Graham, North Mankato, 1890 baptismal certificate, 1907 confirmation certificate, from Fred Silkey.

Margy Hengy North Mankato, 3 Blue Earth County atlases, 1929, 1969, 1971, and a box of Maurer Brothers Farm financial records.

Honeymead Products Co., 6 Mankato directories 1989-1993

C. A. Gus Johnson, Mankato MN, VCR Tape of Lake Crystal's 100th Reunion.

Helen Jones, Lake Crystal, 2 1940's little girls' dresses.

KEYC-TV North Mankato, assorted photos featuring Mankato High School, and Mankato State College c 1960's.

Joe Kubicek, Lake Crystal, 1921 Blue Earth County atlas.

Tim Layeux, Edina, 1969 textbook titled Golf, Swimming and Tennis; Einar A. Olson, Professor of Health at Mankato State College, wrote the swimming section.

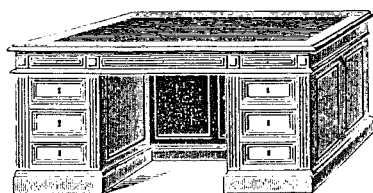
Allen Nelson, old scrapbook with many clippings.

Eloise Olson, North Mankato, business education textbooks

Violet Queens, Lake Crystal, home made christening dress worn by Joanne Disney.

Margaret Ladd Sinn, Waseca, wedding portrait of Mr. & Mrs. Emil Juhnke.

Thank you all
for your help in preserving the
history of Blue Earth County!



From the Executive Director

The Heritage Center has been very busy this winter and the time has sped by quickly. Our exhibits have gone through some big changes. We removed some of them to make room for the new exhibit on Vietnam Veterans.

The Vietnam Veterans of Southern Minnesota (VVSM) spent many evenings and weekends working on installing the exhibit that had been at the Minnesota Historical Society. It has turned out wonderful. Those who have watched it grow have been very impressed with the work done and one person who had also seen it in St. Paul said that he liked the local improvements and that they made the BECHS exhibit better than the original. The VVSM added more local artifacts and information on their activities in Blue Earth County.

This is an important exhibit in the terms that it will allow the time and resources put into exhibits by the Minnesota Historical Society to help improve the local counties' ability to have high quality exhibits without having to spend a tremendous amount of money on it. BECHS is proud to be able to keep this exhibit going for the next two years. Both the VVSM and BECHS hope to find another host for it after that time.

BECHS wants to give many thanks to Tom McLaughlin and the rest of the VVSM for their efforts. The exhibit opened on April 1, 2000, to rave reviews. We look forward to showing this important exhibit in our gallery.

Other news concerning our exhibits is the rotation of artifacts displayed at the Mankato Rainbow Foods. The Exhibits Committee recently changed the exhibits displayed there, and they are already working on the next set of artifacts that we have scheduled to display this summer. If you have not seen the BECHS exhibits at the Heritage Center or Rainbow Foods, please stop in and to see what BECHS has been doing. We look forward to making additional changes in our exhibits so that returning visitors will be able to see more of our artifacts.

James Lundgren
BECHS Executive Director

Wish List

These items are currently needed at the BECHS Heritage Center. Please let us know if you can provide any help.

- A slide projector & carousel is needed for speaking engagements for the BECHS Speaker's Bureau.
- Archival boxes are needed for BECHS Collections.
- Photos of Blue Earth County for our archives.

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A Note from the President

I'd like to extend a big thank you to all of our volunteers who so generously have given of their time and talents to BECHS. Whether you have donated several hours or many days, your time so freely given has made BECHS a much better society. Without the volunteers help - The archives would not contain the countless books, newspaper clippings, obituaries and articles that are available and so invaluable to researchers. The artifacts would remain uncataloged. There would be no committees. There would be no programs. There would be no exhibits or displays changed. There would be no tours through the Hubbard House. In short, without our valued volunteers are society would be very limited in what we offer.

Thank You!

Jane Tarjeson
BECHS President