

The Blue Earth County Historian

Blue Earth County Historical Society Summer 2001

Curling in Blue Earth County *By Matt Helm*

Although curling is one of the lesser-known winter sports played in America, its history is long and rich in Blue Earth County, particularly in Mapleton, the Curling Capital of Southern Minnesota.

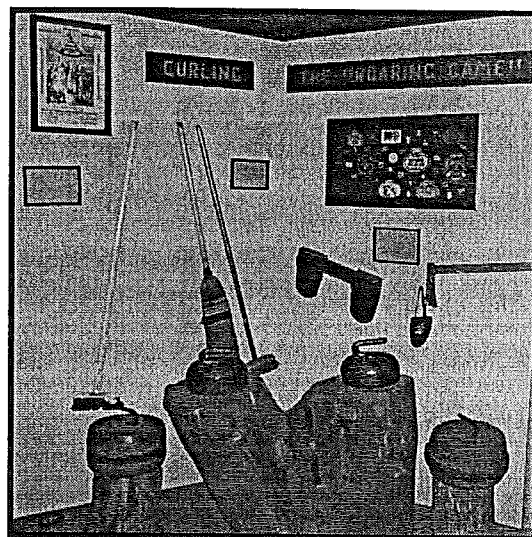
Curling matches or "bonspiels" take place on frozen bodies of water, outdoor rinks and, nowadays, indoor rinks built especially for curling. A curling team (known as a "rink" in curling lingo) consists of four players, each of whom handle two 44 pound stones (also known as "rocks" or "stones") that are slid across 128 feet of ice in hopes of landing closest to the middle of the "house," a multi-circled, bull's-eye-like, in-ice marker near the end of the ice.

There are multiple roles in curling. For instance, the team captain (known as the "skip") stands at the end of the ice and directs whether and how much his or her teammates should sweep after the stone is slid. The purpose of sweeping is to create a more accommodating surface for the stone to slide on. Vigorous sweeping causes the ice to be cleaner and slightly wet, perfect for an under-thrown stone. Curling is sometimes called "shuffleboard on ice," although it can be much more physically demanding and involves greater teamwork and strategy.

Curling is believed to have originated in 16th century Scotland where a curling stone bearing the date of 1511 was discovered. Scottish immigrants first brought the game to Canada and then to New England in the United States circa 1830. Some believe the first curling played west of Chicago in the United States was in 1856 in Mapleton, Minnesota, the town that would eventually come to be known as the Curling Capital of Southern Minnesota.

Since curling was born out of Scotland, it naturally traveled with the relatively large Scottish immigration to Mapleton where the first matches were played on the Maple River. Crude instruments were used, including brooms made with blocks of wood wrapped with steel bands. Sweeping snow

and debris off the surface of the ice was a daunting task, given the extreme temperatures and large surface area of the river. It was common for curlers to drink alcohol to keep warm while playing and then socialize afterward at a curler's house as a sign of good sportsmanship.



A curling exhibit at the Hubbard House

The first outdoor rink was established in 1856 and the Maple River Burns Club (which came to be known as the Heather Curling Club) was founded the next year in commemoration of the birthday of Scottish poet Robert Burns. At the time, the only settlers that played were Scottish, as settlers from countries like Germany kept to themselves. Curling continued to be played on the outdoor rink until the early 1900s when talk surfaced from Mankatoans about starting their own club.

On January 27, 1900, Dr. R. M. Dodds of Mankato spoke with President Ellis of Mapleton's Maple River Curling Club about having bonspiels in Mankato below the Main St. Bridge on the Minnesota River. By this time, interest in curling in Mankato was growing, and Dr. Dodds was spearheading the effort to start a curling club Mankato could call its own.

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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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Join Us!

Please consider joining BECHS. Members receive free admission to the Heritage Museum, free access to the research center, free admission to the R. D. Hubbard House non-event tours, reduced admission for special events, quarterly newsletter, discount on many items in the museum shop, and the ability to help preserve the heritage of Blue Earth County!

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The e-mail addresses will be used to send notices of programs, exhibits and other BECHS news.

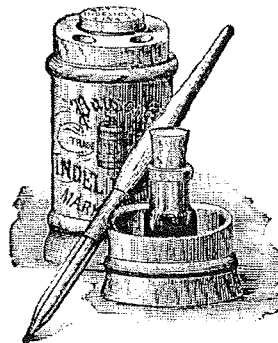
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Student: \$15.00	Individual: \$20.00
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Associate (less than 10 employees)	\$25.00
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Make checks payable to BECHS and return with this form to
415 East Cherry Street, Mankato MN 56001.



From the Executive Director

Change has been the watchword at BECHS this spring. Staff changes have resulted in the shuffling of duties and new faces at the Heritage Center. John Hedstrom is returning to school for his doctorate degree. We will miss him and wish him the best in the future.

Jessica Potter has been hired to fill a new expanded position of Collections Manager. She will oversee both the artifacts and archives aspects of BECHS. She has been in the museum field for almost four years at the Nicollet County Historical Society. Jessica began working in June.

Shelley Harrison has been hired as the Archives Assistant. This new position will be responsible for the daily operation of the Research Center. Shelly will be starting at the end of July.

The Minnesota Historical Society has recently provided matching funds for the purchase of archival boxes to be used to house our hat collection. We will be working on repackaging them in acid free tissue to preserve these hats for generations to come. This is a matching grant, which means that BECHS must match the donated funds with other donated funds or volunteer time. Anyone wishing to donate money or time to this project, please contact the office.

The annual Blue Earth County fair is quickly approaching. We need people to help staff the BECHS booth at the fair. If you can help for a few hours during the weekend of August 2-5 please call Mary at the office to sign up.

James C. Lundgren
Executive Director

Curling continued from page 1.

On September 9, 1903, it was announced that the new organization "The Mankato Caledonian Curling Club" would inaugurate Scotland's (and Mapleton's) favorite winter sport in Mankato the coming winter. The announcement met with much fanfare as interest for curling had been high in the city for sometime.

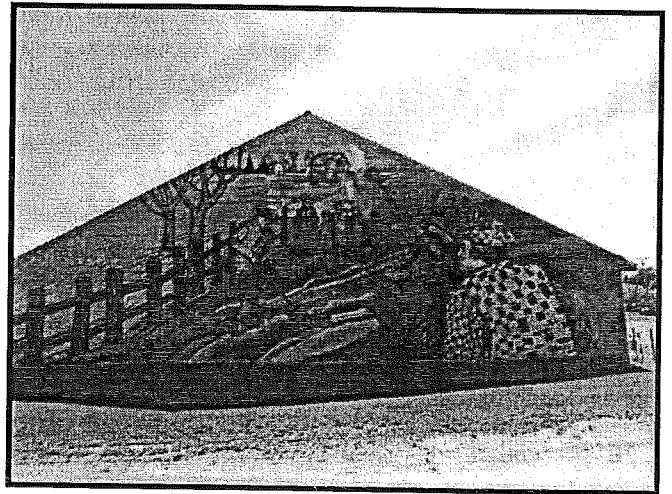
On December 13, 1903, it was announced the Mankato Caledonian Curling Club would commence operations the next week. The Mankato Caledonian Curling Club would be linked with the Royal Caledonian Curling Club, formed in Scotland in 1838 and originally called the Grand Caledonian Curling Club. The Royal Caledonian Curling Club standardized rules and practices of curling for curlers worldwide.

The rink was proposed to be flooded for curling, although skating would be allowed around the edges during game time. The primary purpose of allocating the rink for curling was for Mankato's curlers to have a place to play against curlers from Mapleton and surrounding towns.

The next day, December 14, it was announced there would be 24 members entering into the Mankato Caledonian Curling Club in its inaugural year. An acre would be cornered off across the tracks north of Dr. Dodds' office and surrounded by a five-foot embankment. It was proposed that the rink be flooded after each night of curling so the ice would be especially "keen" for the next bonspiel. Dr. Dodds received 28 curling stanes from Montreal. During this time period, curling clubs were active in Mapleton, Vernon Center, Sterling, Winona and Winnebago City.

In 1905, the Heather Curling Club Building was constructed in Mapleton and eventually became something of a landmark that everyone took pride in. It was beautifully painted with scenes of Scottish settlers and their families curling along a frozen river amidst a serene backdrop of houses and farms off in the distance, just beneath a sky illuminated by a setting sun.

Interest in curling kept growing in Mankato and Mapleton. On February 14, 1912, teams from Mankato, Beauford, Winnebago and Sterling partook in a Mapleton bonspiel for the prestigious Businessman Trophy. Ward's rink from Beauford won the bonspiel and took home the trophy as well as a nice bonus prize: four one-pound boxes of candy. Following the bonspiel, all players were invited to the Ostleboe Restaurant where an oyster supper was served to 40 people. A smoke social followed the banquet.



The Heather Curling Club Building

Bonspiels and post-bonspiel get-togethers like this were typical. The spirit of curling has always been more important than winning or losing. Curlers enjoy winning but not humbling their opponents. True curlers would rather lose than win unfairly and would never distract an opponent while curling or cheer their misfortunēs. Curlers win prizes for their efforts, but it has never been a commercial sport that has encouraged or even allowed gambling.

The year 1915 was significant for Blue Earth County curling. The Mankato Caledonian Curling Club (now known as the Caledonian Curling Club of Mankato) held its annual bonspiel at the Heather Curling Club's rink in Mapleton February 2. Eight rinks participated: three from Mankato, three from "the village," and two from Mapleton. First prize was the handsome Silver Cup and four pairs of Scotch gloves. Second place received four burnt wooden boxes with two pairs of socks. William Morrow's team from Mankato won and many

attended the bonspiel. Afterward, the Mankato curlers entertained the Mapleton curlers with supper at the Schlingerman House.

October 7 featured the opening of the Mankato Caledonian Curling Club's rink at the Mankato Fairgrounds. By this time, the club featured 55 players and had 20 pledges awaiting membership. The new rink cost \$2,500 and was 56 by 150 feet in surface area.

On October 22, 1923, A. P. Krost was elected president of the Mankato Caledonian Curling Club, replacing retiring president C. J. Snow. Club members also discussed efforts being made to procure city water for the curling club at the fairgrounds. The club needed water not only for the rink but also for preventing or extinguishing a fire, were one to arise.

By 1927, William Morrow was a curler of great respect in Blue Earth. On December 8, 1927, he was elected an honorary member of the Heather Curling Club and donated the Silver Cup to the club as a sign of appreciation and good treatment he received while curling with the club throughout the years. Morrow was a pioneer curler who started curling as soon as he was big enough to slide a stone down the rink. Morrow set forth four rules regarding the trophy:

- 1) The trophy will be played for during the curling season of each year between the members of the Heather Curling Club.
- 2) All players vying for the cup had to be in good standing with the club.
- 3) No matches on Sunday.
- 4) Umpires are to be chosen by members of the club. The umpire has the right to determine the hours a match shall be played.

By 1944, the Heather Curling Club started charging a nominal fee of \$3 for membership, which included the right to play in any of the league bonspiels. The club now had 44 members and matches were held every Tuesday and Thursday night.

If anyone in Mapleton has seen and studied the changes undergone in Mapleton curling in the latter half of the 20th century, it is Mary Duncanson. Duncanson began curling in 1955 when she first joined ladies' curling in Mapleton and has curled ever since. Last year, there were about 100 men and 60 women curling in Mapleton.

"Of course, it fluctuates every year," Duncanson said.

Duncanson said curling was an official high school sport throughout the state in the 60s and 70s. Also, from fourth grade onward, students take two weeks each year to curl after school.



John Sharp shows his form on a Mapleton rink

"We do this to make sure everyone has the opportunity to experience curling," Duncanson said, "and hopefully they'll stick with it and keep the tradition alive."

Duncanson said Mapleton curlers have been known to travel to the international Silver Broom tournament when it comes to Canada.

"The next tournament is in North Dakota and I know some people from Mapleton will be attending," she said.

Scottish teams also come to Mapleton every ten years to curl. Duncanson has curled against Scottish teams four times. "They come here and they feel right at home with our small-town atmosphere," she said. Duncanson has noticed some changes over the years in curling, but the good-hearted spirit has not changed a bit.

"We've gotten greater publicity over the years, the ice has improved, equipment has evolved," Duncanson said, "but it has always been a good, clean sport. I've heard that when students from Mapleton go to a basketball tournament out of town they are well behaved. The reason behind that is because of their upbringing with curling where they learn good manners and sportsmanship. It's a sport where you never cheer against anyone. If you can't say something good about a shot or about someone, you don't say anything at all."

Tim Solie, a Mapleton historian, has been curling for 27 years, since he was ten years old. In those 27 years, he, too, has seen curling evolve.

"We've went from using almost saplings to sweep snow out of the way, to wide-brooms you buy at the general store, to brushes that come from Canada or Scotland," Solie said. "The equipment has really changed. Going from outdoor to an indoor rink, the ice has also changed. I don't know if we can appreciate what those guys went through. They spent half the day cleaning off a lake or river and then spent four hours playing. Technology has helped out ... refrigeration. The ice is so much keener than what is used to be. When I was a kid, the ice was less keen. High scoring games were a thing of the past, but now we're starting to see some of those high scores come back."

Solie estimates there are between 20,000 and 25,000 curlers in the United States and between 250,000 and 1 million in Canada.

"In Minnesota, there are about 20 curling rinks," Solie said, "but the problem is there are some areas where people don't have the opportunity to curl because of the lack of a close curling facility."

Solie said curling is popular in the Iron Ranges in Northern Minnesota, although Mapleton really is the Curling Capital of All Minnesota.

"It seems to run in the family," Solie said, "and it has made our winters a lot shorter."

Mary Duncanson summed Mapleton curling up nicely: "It's just a good way to get out with people in the open air and share good times."

And it has been since 1856.

Two of the photos that accompany this article were taken by Matt this summer. BECHS archives does not have many photos relating to curling. If anyone has any photos, old or new, of curling that they would be willing to donate to BECHS please let us know. We would like to add them to our archives.

BECHS Volunteers since the last issue

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Hopman, Edith	Wright, Lorraine
Jansen, Steve	Ziegler, Ken
Jensen, Orv	Zielske, Dan
Jones, Jack	Zimmer, Beth

ARCHIVES AND ARTIFACT DONATIONS
April - June 2001

Rebecca Ball: The Association Hymnal
Glen Bartsch: Thirty postcards of BEC scenes.
Don Buchanan: A "Reedfield Costume CO" feather pen, a watercolor "Seppman's Garage," by Rachel Wigley.
Suzanne Bunkers: Diaries of Girls and Women
Inella Burns: A table.
Benjamin Carey: Two certificates of naturalization.
John Christenson: A Midwest roadmap with holder. Two "Farmfest" films.
June Cummiskey: A pamphlet, "City of Mankato Housing Study," a book, "Community Profile."
Charlotte Culp: "Cram's Unrivaled Family Atlas," 1891.
Dakota Society: c/o Bruce Dowlin: A framed print of the Dakota execution.
Ruth Ann Danger: A car seat, a baby seat.
Leo Daulk: A watch timing device.
Mary Dooley: A paper/report by Roy W. Meyer, "The Red Jacket Trail: An Opportunity Lost."
Mike Frederick: A commemorative plate, "All Saints Catholic Church," a 2000 Vikings training camp postcard, a Minneopa Falls 2000 postcard.
Win Grundmeier: A Southwestern Stages Motorbus Timetable, 1954, a red traveling bag, circa 1950, women's brown leather 1950s gloves, women's black vinyl and cotton 1950s gloves, black and gold coin purse, black leather 1950s Air Force issue boots, 1950s binoculars, photo of Main St. Bridge (concrete) photo of Main St. Bridge (steel), a photo of Cummings Ferry.
Anne Hershik: A black, beaver fur coat.
John Huettl: A Brett's postcard.
Itasca County HS: An interview transcription of "US Forestry Agriculture Service Project," by Clarence Palmby, Health and Good Citizenship, a print, "Summer of '62."
Grace Keir: A 1946-47 Katonian yearbook.
Dorothy Maurer: U.S. Army WW II service cap, U.S. Army WW II 1st Army patch.
MSU's Department of Consumer and Family Science Historic Textiles Collection c/o Grace Keir: A men's long sleeve, muted green and brown shirt, a men's pink tuxedo shirt, a women's plaid pleated black and white skirt, a women's double knit, four-piece rust black and white suit, a white lab coat, a black and white evening gown with jacket, a men's green, blue and white shirt, a men's two-piece jumpsuit, a child's blue velvet dress with lace trim, a women's two-piece off-white suit, a women's

brown knit pants, a men's corduroy, bell-bottom blue denim pants, a men's navy blue swimsuit, men's long, white underwear, a girl's off-white dress with frills, a women's knit rose-colored pants, a men's dark, lavender, bell-bottom jeans with snaps and side zippers, a women's blue swimsuit, a women's stone-washed pair of denim jeans.
Beth Norman: A stone axe head.
Vic Paradis: A book, The Energy to Make Things Better: An Illustrated History of NSP.
Judith Preis: A color, photocopied picture of Ms. Hanna.
Violet Queens: A white baptismal dress.
Tom Ross: The family history of John Amort and Susanna Elwart, the family history of John Minse and Marty Dorothy Franz, the family history of Carl Splett and Caroline Minse.
Frank Ryan: Four newspapers from California.
Julie Schrader: A computer disk containing a digitized photo image of Red Jacket Bridge in 1911.
Georgia Schultz: A postcard of Stahl House Barber Shop, an MSU 125th Annual Alumni Directory, a 1950s ashtray in shape of golden goldfish, one box of slides, a photo of the 4th grade class of Lincoln Grade School, 1941.
Nancy Smoley: A skirt.
Jane Tarjeson: A book, The Winnebago Tribe, two postcards depicting Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel, a pamphlet, "Mankato Garden Club: Project Victory Highway," the family history of Moses Crane, USDA 1975 "General Soil Map of BEC, MN."
Unknown: A rattle.
Daniel Vance: Two books, William 'Bill' Carlson—An Autobiography, Biography of Sal Frederick.
Don Washosky: A beige notebook, "Management Briefing," Hubbard Milling, two posters showing Hubbard Milling Employees on G. M. Palmer's birthday in 1930, a black and white photo of Hubbard Milling sales staff (all identified with addresses), the annual report of Hubbard Milling, CO, 1991, a Hubbard Milling retirement certificate for Elmer Anderson, a booklet titled, "Through the Years, 1853-1928," a photo of Elmer Anderson's retirement from Hubbard Milling, 1968.

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help in preserving the history of
Blue Earth County!

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Schultz, Jo
Smith, Anne & H. Roger
Tarjeson, Jane

Thank You All Very Much!

BECHS Wish List

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

- Volunteers for the fair and Hubbard House
- Used books for the Museum Store
- 3x5 blank index cards for the research center
- People to "Travel Like Bert" this fall
- 3" & 4" black 3-ring binders with label holders for the archives.
- Circulating or box fan for use by Volunteers
- Three-prong extension cord
- Surge protector

Heritage Center To Have Renovation Work

BECHS will be closed for about a week this September to have some renovation work performed on the building. The building contains some asbestos that is starting to deteriorate in certain locations.

The Summit-Heritage Foundation has decided to deal with these issues now before it develops into a larger problem. The renovation work will require the building being closed to allow the workers access to the areas needing attention. The Society will be closed for up to a week starting September 18. The Research Center may close earlier in September if necessary. We apologize for any inconvenience this causes.

Bored? Need to get out of the house?

Help Wanted: Local historical society has immediate opening for volunteers to help with the following committees and events: Programs, B.E.C. Fair, Ghosts from the Past, Hubbard House, Membership. No previous experience needed. Hours are flexible. Please call 345-5566 or inquire at the historical society office if interested.

New and Renewed Members

Barrett, Mary
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Borchert, Phyllis
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Burns, Inella
Bursaw, Iona
Carstensen, Vern & Norma
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Gage, Kelton & Dorothy
Grundmeier, Win & Shirley
Hanson, Kathryn
Herz, Barbara
Hey, Richard & Mary Jo
Hoehn, Pat
Huettl, Richard
Johnson, Gary
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Vosbeck, Elizabeth
Wenner, Gerry & Kris
Williams, Diana
Williams, Vee
Zaragoza, Anthony

**Upcoming BECHS events
Mark your calendar and join us.**

R. D. Hubbard House open
Summer weekends 1 - 4 PM

Blue Earth County Fair August 2-5

Young Historians September TBA

Travel Like Bert (see flyer) September 22-25

Ghosts from the Past October 5-6

History Fest October 12-14

Young Historians November Ornament making

Christmas at Hubbard House December

Events at Other Area Historical Societies

Brown County HS

New Ulm Cemetery Tour August 19

Cox House

Open Wednesday to Sunday through August

Harkin Store

22nd Annual West Newton Day August 5

Nicollet County HS

Program on Frank B. Mayer September 18

Waseca County HS

Exhibit on Waseca's Historic
Architecture September

For questions please contact the specific site listed

Blue Earth County Historical Society
415 East Cherry Street
Mankato MN 56001

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Preserving and sharing Blue Earth County's history for 100 years, 1901-2001