

Calendar of Events

- Sept. 23 **Sunday** SECOND ANNUAL HARVEST FESTIVAL on the Museum grounds. Ice Cream Social, Music, "The Country Store," "When We Were Young," and more.
- Oct. 6-7 SOUTHERN MINNESOTA GENEALOGICAL CONFERENCE, at University of Minnesota Technical College, Waseca
- 9 DEEP VALLEY QUILTERS meetings. 7:00 p.m., Hardee's University Square. Ray Johnson, MSU, will discuss Photographing Quilts.
- Nov. 4 Opening Day Tea for ANNUAL BAZAAR at the Museum from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- 5-9 BAZAAR CONTINUES. Hours 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.
- 13 DEEP VALLEY QUILTERS meeting 7:00 p.m. Hardee's University Square. Ardis Johnson will demonstrate Shadow Quilting. Bring scissors, quilting needle and marking pen.
- 22-25 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY. Museum and Offices Closed.

Wanted at the Museum

1. City Directories for 1982 and 1983
2. Golf Balls c. 1920
3. Advertising Calendars from *Any* year

From the Director's Rolltop . . .

Denise Schmidt

Fall is upon us with the beginning of yet another school year. For the Historical Society this means the busiest season continues with a final flurry of activity until the rush ends in December.

This year's Harvest Festival looks as if it will be just as much fun as last year's. Let us hope that the weather cooperates with sunshine and pleasant temperatures. I am looking forward to the display of antique fire equipment. From what I hear, it should be something to see.

Remember, the Bazaar is also coming up. The Opening Day Tea is on November 4. If you have any hidden talent (handcrafts, special skills, cooking, baking, etc.) keep us in mind. The sign-up forms will be in the October newsletter so you can let us know what you will be bringing.

See you this fall!!!

Denise

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A Special Note of Interest

The Deep Valley Quilters (a "friends" organization of the BECHS) are once again holding regular monthly meetings. Topics vary from month to month but always pertain to quilts and quilting. Membership is open to anyone interested in quilts (you do not even need to know how to quilt!). Dues are \$6.00 per year. For more information contact Marilyn Montgomery, President 388-8584.

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Genealogists Take Note

The Southern Minnesota Genealogical Conference and the Waseca County Historical Society are co-sponsoring the Fourth Annual Southern Minnesota Genealogical Conference at the University of Minnesota Technical College in Waseca on October 6 and 7, 1984. The two day conference will feature topics such as five "Help Sessions," Organizing research gathered, Researching specific ethnic groups, and much more. For more information contact Dean Pettis 625-4120 or 388-7043 or Waseca County Historical Society 835-7700.

**Blue Earth County
Historical Society**
606 South Broad
Mankato, MN 56001

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Blue Earth County Historical Society Newsletter

October 1984

Come One, Come All!!!

Celebrate the arrival of Autumn at the Blue Earth County Historical Society's **Second Annual Harvest Festival** on Sunday, September 23 on the Museum Grounds, on Broad Street, and at St. John's Episcopal Church. The activities begin at 12:00 noon and will end at 5:00 p.m.

Activities include:

- Antique Fire Equipment from area Fire Departments displayed along Broad Street from Warren to Cherry.
- The Country Store featuring Harvest goods and dried flowers ready for fall arrangements.
- Ice Cream Social on the lawn.
- Musical programs throughout the afternoon.
- The final performance of the season of "When We Were Young" by the Homestead Players at **2:00 p.m.** in the basement of St. John's Episcopal Church.
- Demonstrations of crafts on the lawn and in the Museum
- The Museum will be open for visitors.
- **Remember, there is no admission fee!!!**

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CLAMMING ON THE MINNESOTA

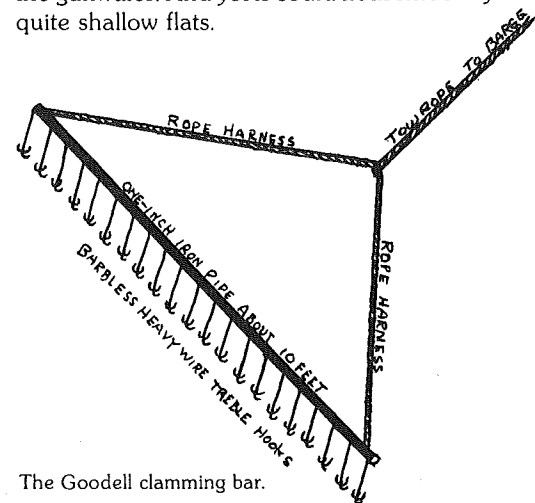
Vernard Lundin

Long forgotten, and actually unknown to all but a few, is the story of a clamming industry on the Minnesota River. The industry, which prospered briefly in Judson at the close of World War I, was small but nevertheless had commercial value.

The stream was unpolluted in the few years we lived in Judson and many species of clams existed in teeming numbers. My brother Lawrence and I spent many an hour following clam trails on a muddy or sandy shoreline, more for the fun of digging down to determine what species made the trail than for collecting clams for food. In our "cave" on an island beneath the iron bridge, we had tried boiling clams, roasting clams and frying clams, but they were always tough and unpalatable. They didn't even taste good in a stew with plenty of onions and other vegetables.

Boyhood heroes were two young men, Lawrence and Wallace Goodell, long past school age but not yet married. They worked at odd jobs, earned a few dollars on the railroad section crew and picked up extra cash in season by trapping muskrats, mink, and raccoon. One summer they were full-time clam fishermen, and they actually caught clams by the carload.

The Goodells spent many hours through the winter and spring building a large, wide and deep flat-bottomed scow for their clamming boat and powered it with a gasoline engine. It could be loaded with several hundred pounds of clams before there was any danger of water pouring over the gunwales. And yet it could float smoothly over quite shallow flats.



The Goodell clamming bar.

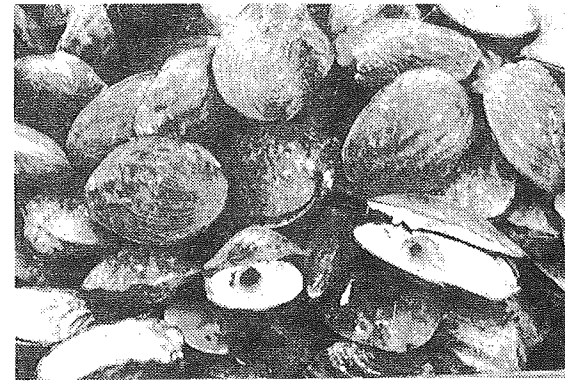
Catching one clam at a time was unthinkable slow, so they fashioned clamming bars with multiple hooks that were dragged over the bottom of the river. The bar was an iron pipe, perhaps ten feet long. Tied to the bar at intervals of four to six inches were leaders six inches or so long, each with a hook. But the hooks weren't actually hooks. They looked like triple hooks on a fishing bait, but they had no points or barbs. They were fashioned from heavy-gauge wire that could be shaped only with pliers when held in a bench vice. Suspended from the ten-foot pipe were about 25 such hooks. The clamming bar with its hooks was lowered or raised from the scow by means of a rope harness.

No sharp points? No barbs? No bait? How could they catch clams that way? In its native habitat the clam rests on the bottom with its shell partially open, extending the "nose" or foot part of its body into the open. By extending and contracting this muscular structure, it pulls itself along the bottom or digs itself deeper. Also the open posture permits the clam to seize items of food that come with the flow of the river. When any foreign object touches the muscle, the clam instinctively pulls back and the shell closes almost instantaneously.

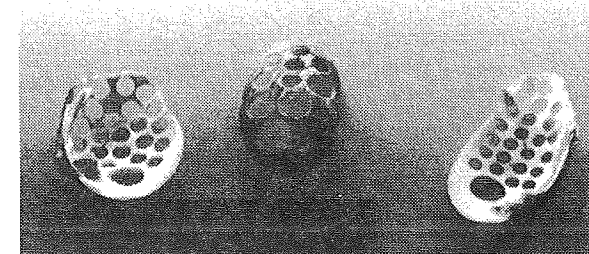
The Goodells found their homemade clamming bar with its multiple hooks worked well. Upon reaching the portion of the river they wished to drag, they turned off the power and permitted the scow to drift slowly over the clam bed. The bar was lowered carefully so the bar itself didn't reach bottom but the wire hooks did. When a hook touched the extended muscle of an open clam, its instinctive reaction resulted in its capture. After a period of drifting and "feeling" with the bar, the clambers pulled it into the boat and a good haul found a clam on nearly every hook. Each was simply slipped off the hook and the process was repeated. When the boat was sufficiently loaded down or when the clambers decided the catch was enough for the day, the gasoline engine chugged away and brought the scow back to its landing place.

Removed from the water, however, clams will die and the decaying bodies can create a horrible stench. The "meat" of the clam has no use except for chicken feed or fertilizer, and so it had no commercial value. Shells, however, were marketable and the major part of the harvest.

But separating the clam from its shell posed a problem. After the creature closes its shell, it will resist opening for hours. It was not feasible to attempt opening each clam with a knife or other instrument, and such efforts usually resulted in wounds as any of us



The soft body of each clam was removed before the shells were shipped from Judson.



Shells were cut with tubular drills to make mother-of-pearl buttons.

youngsters could attest. So the Judson clambers devised their own method. On the river bank they built a pit over which they placed a livestock drinking tank and filled it with river water. A fire was built under the tank, and then heavy work of unloading the scow began. Clams were scooped from the bottom with a corn fork and pitched into the water tank. When sufficiently hot, not necessarily boiling, the water caused the clam to lose muscular strength and the two halves of the shell were spread apart quite easily by hand.

Fresh water clams produce pearls just as oysters do in the sea, but rarely are they large or perfect in shape. As each clam was opened, the clammer in a quick movement probed his pointer finger over the carcass to feel for a pearl formation. If there was none, the carcass was tossed into the river to feed catfish and turtles, and the now empty shell was tossed onto a pile. While the yield of quality pearls was insignificant, pearl formations of various sizes and shapes, called slugs, had enough value to justify the examination of each clam. Such "pearls" were marketable to costume jewelry manufacturers and yielded wages if not fortunes.

At the end of the season the pile of clam shells was huge and had to be hauled from the river bank to empty cars on the railroad siding near the depot. Final destination of the shells was Muscatine, Iowa, where "pearl" buttons were stamped out in a busy factory.

Eager to be a part of this Minnesota River venture, Lawrence and I managed to be at the landing many days when the clambers returned, and we gave what help we could. We learned to open the steamed clams and examine them for pearls or slugs and we could scrounge a bit of deadwood along the river to stoke the fire. In turn, we were invited to ride along on an occasional clamming day and made ourselves useful by slipping the clams off the hooks as the bar was hauled into the scow.

Of course, we had to emulate the clambers and we made our own bar about three feet long, which we attempted to throw into the river from shore. It was impossible to keep the bar from dragging, and it disturbed the clams before the hooks had a chance to do their part. We gave up the attempt as a failure, but we did persist in catching as many clams as we could by hand, wading in the shallow clam beds. We managed to accumulate about a small truckload of shells and a few dozen pearls and slugs which we kept for souvenirs. For our pile of shells, Lawrence and Wallace paid us their estimated value, which may have amounted to a dollar apiece for my brother and me.

We learned a little marine biology through our experiences with this small clamming industry on the Minnesota River, and no one has had to explain to us in later life what is meant by the expression, "clam up."

Source: Vernard Lundin, *As the Twig Is Bent: Growing Up in the Minnesota River Valley*, a manuscript in revision for publication.

NOTE: Vernard Lundin is a former mayor of Mankato and continues to serve the community in a number of civic organizations.