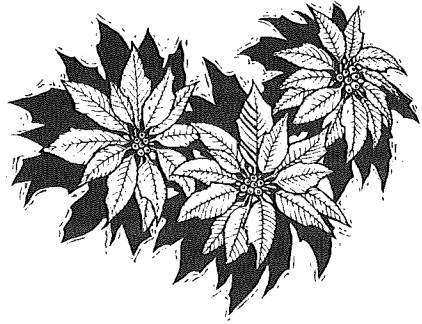


Calendar

- Dec. 9 **Christmas caroling** 7-9 p.m. Meet at the Museum. Bring flashlight.
- Dec. 24-25 **Christmas Holiday.** Museum and offices closed.
- Dec. 31- **New Year's Holiday.**
Jan. 1 Museum and offices closed.



Filling The Gaps

Whenever we do a new exhibit, we are limited in what we can present by the articles and people represented in our museum collection and Archives. We have a fine selection of artifacts which encompasses much of our county's history but, regrettably, it has many gaps and omissions. Some aspects of our county's history and persons who took part in it are not represented. For this reason we are calling on our members and general public for assistance with three of our current projects.

We are tentatively planning three new exhibits for the near future. The first will focus on music and musicians of Blue Earth County. The second will cover framed works of art and their artists. The third, which we are finding most intriguing and challenging, will be on "death and dying". We have come up with several aspects of death which we could consider, including mourning customs and clothing, tombstone symbolism and obituary style as seen in county newspapers through the years. Perhaps members have other ideas for consideration.

We will use the resources and artifacts available to us while preparing these exhibits, but we also are asking for your input and ideas. If you are aware of people, places or events which could be considered or included in any of these projects, we would appreciate hearing from you.

From the Director's Rolltop . . . Denise Hudson

The purpose of the Historical Society is to preserve and collect the history of Blue Earth County. This is done through the gathering of artifacts and information about people, places, and events. The items come to us strictly by donation - - we purchase no items for the collection.

One building which we are now able to document through artifacts is the Burton Hotel. We have acquired a few items which will enable us to show to future generations that there was such a hotel.

Items do not need to be old to be considered worthy of preserving at the Museum. History is **anything** that is past - - even yesterday is history. Our most recent areas of concentration are: current businesses - - business cards and advertising mediums, and the 1930's and 1940's, (we have so few items from that period).

We may be cramped for space but we cannot let history slip through our fingers. We still must preserve yesterday and today for tomorrow!

Denise

* * * * *

Welcome New Student Member

Katie Wiltgen

* * * * *

Welcome to Delilah Keenan who has joined our tour guide staff.

* * * * *

Welcome to Jerry Mellen, a new volunteer who is working on repair work of the collection.

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Rapidan Dam Exhibit In New Location

The Rapidan Dam exhibit has been moved to Good Thunder after having been displayed at Welcome Memorial High School during the month of November. The exhibit can be viewed at the First State Bank during their regular business hours.

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Blue Earth County Historical Society

December 1984

Many, Many Thanks

As we move into the last month of 1984, it is appropriate that we look back and offer thanks to the members and residents of Blue Earth County who have provided us with a wide variety of help on so many projects. Without their generous support the Historical Society could not function; and the history of the County could not be preserved.

We wish to extend warm appreciation to all who supported us through memberships and direct monetary contributions. Such direct gifts form part of the financial backbone of the Historical Society.

The generous donation of artifacts by so many individuals has allowed us to upgrade and expand our knowledge of many facets of our local history. Photographs, clothing, appliances, and personal effects all help us to weave the fabric of our past.

Of course, our volunteers make a contribution to which it is difficult to assess a dollar amount. Suffice it to say that this organization could not function without them. The Harvest Festival and Bazaar were both successful events that took place this fall. We should not forget those who took time to demonstrate their skills, made items to be sold, and acted as hosts and servers.

The small, yet multi-talented staff continues to produce quality exhibits, catalog and carefully store the county's history, plan events, do research and so much more.

We at the Historical Society wish to extend best wishes to all and hope that 1985 is a happy and prosperous new year!

CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

Rural School District #59 was nestled in a virgin oak woods on the shores of peaceful Perch Lake. It was located on a winding upgraded road about five miles southeast of Beauford. From outward appearances it looked similar to scores of other rural schools which dotted the countryside. It was a one-room, white frame structure with a small entry hall. On the roof was a bell tower. The bell was rung to herald the beginning of class or to alert the neighborhood that there was an emergency at the school.

More than twenty youngsters in the first through eighth grades came here to learn. The school was taught by one teacher who arrived at school in her Model A Ford. The year was 1937.

For many people in the district, the school was the center of community activities. One of these special events was the annual Christmas program and party. The teacher and the students were expected to plan and present a program of at least an hour duration. Each student was to have a fair share in the program and appear in several activities. The audience enjoyed watching plays, listening to individual and group recitations, hearing original Christmas stories and poems and participating in singing Christmas carols.

One unusual kind of Christmas entertainment was an activity called the Christmas Chorus. A Christmas story was written in which there were such words as Santa Claus, Christmas, star and bell. One group of children and part of the audience was designated as the "Santa Claus" section, another group was the "Christmas" section, and still others the "Star" and "Bell" sections. A narrator read the story. If the words Santa Claus were said, the "Santa Claus" section rose from their chairs and in a chorus chanted a gusty "Ho! Ho! Ho!" As the story proceeded the "Bell" section rang "Ding! Dong! Ding! Dong!", the "Star" section chorused "Twinkle, twinkle, little star!", and at the word Christmas, the "Christmas" section wished everyone a "Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!" Each section had to stay alert so that they heard their key words and responded in chorus. Each group vied for the honors of being most precise and harmonic. Often this activity was so much fun that it was done over several times.

Each year's program was expected to be new and different. The teacher ordered play and recitation books in early October. The children



began to write Christmas stories and poems as early as November. After Thanksgiving, practice for the program began in earnest.

Members of the community took charge of several Christmas customs. The little pre-schoolers always had a place on the program reserved for them to share their Sunday School recitations. Sometimes they needed the support of Mom or Dad or a brother or sister. But, these little folks saying their pieces added much to the festive evening.

One unique custom was the cutting and decorating of the tree. Two or three days before the program several men went into the woods near Perch Lake to select the most well-formed native Cedar tree. They brought it into the classroom and placed it in a sturdy homemade wooden stand which allowed the trunk of the tree to set in a small pail of water. They also brought a glittery, snow-encrusted, store-bought angel. This was carefully set in the place of importance at the top of the tree.

Once the angel was in place, the children gathered around to deck the tree with the decorations they had made. There were yards of multi-colored paper chains, garlands of strung popcorn, strings of red cranberries, gilted walnut shells along with paper Santas, bells, and stars.

When the decorations were all in place, the men set to work carefully placing each candleholder so no branch or decoration was too close to it and might catch fire when the candles were lit. Several pails of water were set near the base of the tree should a problem arise. The tree was then in readiness for the big night.

The district had its own Santa Claus ensemble. It had been made many years before of a soft red and white fleece and was carefully stored from year to year.

The Santa mask was unusually realistic in the fine hair and whiskers.

Each year Santa was a surprise character. Only the school board members knew who he was. They often imported a Santa from out of the district. Great was the excitement and speculation as everyone tried to guess who would perform this important part of the festivities.

The classroom had to be rearranged to make room for the audience, the students, the tree, and the stage. On opposite sides of the front of the classroom were large steel hooks. A sturdy wire was stretched taut between the hooks. Bed sheets were strung on the wire to form a curtain which was opened and closed between each number of the program. Often this curtain led to disaster. Sometimes a child stepped or pulled on the curtain and down it came. At other times the weight of the sheets caused the wire to snap or separate from the hooks. If this happened, a few minutes were needed to either put up the curtain again or remove it from the stage area.

The evening of the program the people gathered from far and wide. Each family brought their kerosene or gasoline lantern with them. They were hung on large iron hooks on the sidewalls of the room.

The program began with the singing of Joy to the World. Then the little folks spoke their pieces. Interspersed between the other parts of the program was the singing of the well-known Christmas carols. Everyone took part with only a pitchpipe to set the key.

As the last number was completed, the schoolboard members moved over to the tree. They carefully lit each candle. When all were lit, the lights of the kerosene and gasoline lanterns were lowered. Standing around the Christmas tree holding hands, everyone sang all the verses of Silent Night. What an awesome, yet beautiful sight!

When the last candle had been snuffed out, sleigh bells were heard ringing in the school yard. The outside door opened and in burst Santa Claus with a hearty, "Ho! Ho! Ho!". Some of the little folks hurried to the safety of their parents. Santa opened his bag of presents and passed them out one by one as he visited with each and every child.

Each family favored the teacher with a gift. Usually it had been made by them - a pair of hand knit mittens, a set of embroidered dish towels, a crocheted doily, a plate of homemade candy, a slab of bacon . . .

Santa's other bag contained "goodies" for everyone. Each person received a large brown paper bag of peanuts and mixed nuts and a delicious apple or orange. Inside the large bag was a smaller one which contained candy; hard candy, ribbon candy, and chocolate cremes.

When Santa had completed his task, he wished everyone a "Merry, merry Christmas!" and departed amid the ringing of the sleigh bells.

The families bundled up their youngsters, bid each other a happy holiday, took their lantern from the hook, and departed for their respective homes. Another Christmas program at District #59 was over.

Christmas - - 1937

Gail Palmer

* * * * *

Need A Christmas Gift Idea?

We have several suggestions. First, why not give a gift membership to the Blue Earth County Historical Society? Share the history of our county with family and friends. Membership entitles one to a monthly newsletter containing interesting stories about the county, a 10% discount on gift shop merchandise, notice of special events and more.

If not a membership, how about stopping in at the Museum and purchasing a gift from our gift shop. We carry unique and educational merchandise. Books, notecards, Sandon Collector plates are but a few items. Museum hours are 1-5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday.

We have something for that special person.

* * * * *

A Month of Tours

November was a very busy month at the Museum in terms of the number of tours given. During November thirty-three tours were given which brought 702 people into the Museum. The majority of people attending were kindergarteners from District 77 whose visits coincided with their studies of Indians. The visit to the Museum complimented what they learned in class but also provided a "hands on" experience by letting them try their skill at Indian games, corn grinding, and identifying animal skins.

Other groups that visited were third graders. Their tour focused on the history of Mankato and pioneer lifestyles and culminated with butter-making and singing in the front parlor!

Groups came from Springfield, Waldorf-Pemberton, and Mankato State University. We served Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, and interested families. It was a busy but gratifying month. We look forward to Spring when our tour schedule increases again.