

## New Members:

### LIFE MEMBER:

Dr. David K. Wiecking

### COUPLE MEMBERS:

Jim and Judy Mans  
 Martin and Sue Wiltgen  
 Mr. and Mrs. Charles Barnard

### ANNUAL MEMBERS:

Mary Hoffman  
 Carol Eilenfeldt  
 John H. Palmer



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### Memorial

In Memory of: Mrs. Inez E. Thomas Putrah

From: Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Meyer

\* \* \* \* \*

### Special Notice

We have been informed that the Statute of Liberty Fund account has been closed and First Bank can no longer accept donations. Donations will still be accepted at the following address: Statute of Liberty-Ellis Foundation Box 1986, New York, NY 10018.

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### Volunteer Needed

We are looking for a typist who has experience with use of the Commodore 64 computer system with disc drive to index the City Directory with address, occupation, and name. Responsibilities are primarily data entry. Call Ron Affolter, 288-2177.

## AROUND THE COUNTY



"Courageous Enough — A Photo History of Finnish American Women" will be on exhibit in the Mankato State University Centennial Student Union from October 6 through October 26 and at the Carnegie Art Center, Mankato, from October 27 through November 15.

The Blue Earth County Historical Society will present a corollary exhibit, "The America Chest: What Shall We Pack?" along with the Finnish exhibit. It can be viewed in the MSU Centennial Student Union from October 6 through October 26.

On Sunday, November 10, 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m., a panel discussion on the exhibit and the immigrant women's experience in general will take place in the MSU Centennial Student Union conference auditorium. Panelists will discuss the overall exhibit theme of "Women and Ethnicity, a Neglected Dimension of American History".

The public is invited to all programs.

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### With Sincere Appreciation

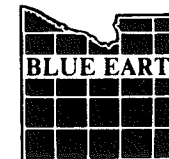
The staff of the Blue Earth County Historical Society wishes to express their most sincere appreciation to the following individuals who gave so willing of their time for the September 8, 1985, SUNDAY ON BROAD STREET festival. It is this kind of *active, supportive involvement* that will make BECHS a *GREAT* community service organization.

Margaret Williams	Toni Zaragoza
Marcia Mason	Mary McDonnell
Sylva Kubicek	Mary Dooley
Joe Kubicek	Anita Stone
Sue and Martin Wiltgen	Ernie Hansen
Dean Pettis	Arnold and Bernice Meyer
Scott Taylor	Chuck Piehl
Ruth Nuessle	Kathy Trauger
Bill and Barb Maher	Jane Geurs
Dave and Joan Besser	Margaret Jahr
Betty Cords	Penny and Robert Herickhoff
Kathryn Hanson	Shirley and Paul Evans
Ron Hicks	Gary Gullo
Richard Erickson	LaVerne Erickson
Jo Lawson	Grace Hewitt
Margaret Schwankl	Eileen Hines
Dollis Hansen	Les Anderson
Elda Weigt	Elmer Goodrich
Deep Valley Quilters	Gail Palmer
Carol Hannick	Jeff Hudson
Jon Christenson and Family	Tom Hagen
Bert Burns	The Homestead Players

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

Address Correction Requested

Non-Profit Org.  
 U.S. Postage  
 PAID  
 Mankato, MN 56001  
 Permit No. 343



BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## October 1985

### Calendar of Events

- Oct. 6 Exhibit opening: "*Courageous Enough - A Photo History of Finnish American Women*" and Program 2:00 p.m., MSU Centennial Student Union
- Oct. 6-26 Exhibit: "*Courageous Enough - A Photo History of Finnish American Women*" continues at MSU Centennial Student Union
- Oct. 6-26 "*The America Chest: What Shall We Pack?*" Blue Earth County Historical Society Exhibit at MSU Centennial Student Union
- Oct. 15 ". . . *we mourn in black.*" Exhibit Opening Blue Earth County Historical Society Tues.-Sun. 1-5 p.m.
- Oct. 19 "*Tombstone Rubbing & Gravestone Art*" Children's Saturday Workshop BECHS Museum 10-11:30 am
- Oct. 27-Nov. 15 "*Courageous Enough - A Photo History of Finnish American Women*" moves to Carnegie Arts Center
- Nov. 10 "*Women and Ethnicity, a Neglected Dimension of American History*" Panel Discussion MSU Centennial Student Union Conference Auditorium

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Editorial Staff: Jan Gullo, Inella Burns, Audrey Hicks, Denise Hudson, Gail Palmer, Louisa Smith



## An Historical Indian Village — Its Heyday

"The butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker." So goes the nursery rhyme. Add to those three, the makers of cigars, bricks, dresses, suits, hats, flour, butter, harnesses, watches, wagons, brooms, boots and shoes, and you would still have only a small portion of the trades and professions that made the village of Good Thunder a truly booming town between 1881-1912.

A booklet published in 1909, *Souvenir of Good Thunder*, gave a brief resume of this village named after Winnebago Chief Good Thunder. It described the village as "one of the best in the state and most beautifully located among the plateaus above the west bank of the Maple River . . . in the center of Blue Earth County." According to the writer, ". . . in 1865 Levi Houk purchased 480 acres of government land at a consideration of \$1000, "a portion of which later became the village townsite.

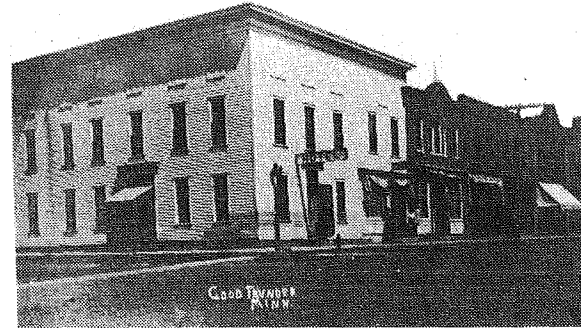
Only sixteen years later, 1881, a city directory listed twenty-five different businesses, professions and occupations. Two men owned hotels, five sold drugs and groceries, one of which was the postmaster. While there was no bank at that time, three men were listed as "money loaners." Among the money-making trades were three wheat buyers. Wheat-buyer R.L. Houk started his business in 1875. A lumber dealer, several carpenters, and various other laborers were listed. To provide care for the sick were three physicians.

An introduction to the directory hinted why Good Thunder would be a fast-growing town. "It is situated on the Central Minnesota Railroad, contains two good hotels; The Graham House, kept by J.G. Graham, compares favorably with first class hotels in the cities." It also "has three churches, Baptist, Lutheran and Catholic, a grade school, and is situated in the midst of the most fertile . . . portion of Blue Earth County."

And grow this town did. Thirty years later a directory for 1910-1911 stated that the population of Good Thunder was 650. While no money loaners "per se" were listed, the State Bank had been established (Capitol, \$10,000). The building is still being used. It now houses the liquor store owned by Vincent Panos. The president of the bank was J.G. Graham. Vice president was R.L. Houk, who also owned the grain elevator located just around the street south of the bank.

Some of the other names in the earlier directory are also in the latter one. Ferdinand Malzahn's saloon must have had a thriving business for it was still going strong, and Adolph Billet was still making harnesses in the building now occupied by the

Treanor Plumbing store. Wiedenheft is another name listed in both directories. Henry Wiedenheft who had learned the shoemaking trade in Germany began a shoe business in Good Thunder in 1872. His two sons, Gustav and Otto, are listed as the proprietors of a general store in the same location, but in an expanded building in 1911. Now Happy Dan's occupies the building.



**Graham Hotel on south corner of Main Street - 1910.**



**Fire Station, facing north on Front Street at corner of Front and Main.**

Although the number of physicians had dropped to one, Dr. Schlesselman, he was also the Blue Earth County physician. By this time, too, there was only one drug store. Oscar Seaquist sold drugs and stationery in the building next to the hotel. The building still stands, but is now vacant.

Perhaps the one trade that helped draw prospective merchants and farmers to the area during those early years was the newspaper business. The *Good Thunder Herald* was established September 1, 1881 by Frank H. Griffin. In the issue for January 5, 1911, as well as in many other issues, the editor included the following information about Good Thunder:

A historical Indian village in Southern Minnesota, blessed with splendid water, beautiful scenery, natural timber, and the most productive land in the world. Having a healthy climate, a prosperous and industrious people and an unequalized wheat market.

In addition to the above description on the editorial page, the General Directory on the front page always gave

a glowing account of the town:

A newspaper, railroad, grade school, six churches, express office, telegraph, telephone system, flouring mill, creamery, bank, three general stores, a lumberyard, two millinery stores, one drug store, two fruit stores, hardware store, photograph studio, meat market, barber shop, a book and stationery store, furniture store, 4 saloons, a hotel, a restaurant, shoe store, livery, two blacksmith shops, two grain elevators, a doctor, a tailor, and room for many more liberal public spirited young men.

The list did not include the Opera House, which provided the setting for plays acted by traveling groups. In fact, the play at the Opera House a few weeks later was *The Two Orphans*. "Prices: .25, .35, and .50."

According to the *Herald* a year later, two business men became proprietors of a motion picture entertainment. E.F. Ulrich, who owned one of the general stores, and Max Siman, Wells Fargo agent, purchased an ". . . expensive Motiograph operated with gas . . . Such entertainment as 'Mutt and Jeff' and illustrated song will occupy about an hour and half of time. All films will have inspection by a board of censorship assuring that nothing shown will be offensive. We should support them."

The daughter of E.F. Ulrich, Ruth Welsh, now living in Mankato recalls how her mother operated the player piano for the films, "by pumping the pedals. Sometimes she would let me try it, but then I might get so interested in the exciting parts of the picture that I'd forget to pump."

A thriving business at that time was the Laird-Norton Lumberyard managed by Edward W. O'Neill. The 1909 *Souvenir of Good Thunder* referred to earlier included several photos of large frame houses in Good Thunder, most of which are still standing. Mayor John Christenson and his family presently live in the one built for the owners of Sohre's General Store.

The present C.C. Bruscke and Son Hardware Store in Good Thunder is unique in the fact that both C.C. and his son, Fred, died long ago. The store, operating under that name, is owned by C.C.'s great-granddaughter, Gretchen and her husband, Randy Bennett. It is in the same location as when it was established in 1897, but in an expanded and recently remodeled building.

The publisher of the *Good Thunder Herald*, F.H. Griffin, was quite an entrepreneur. He also operated a Novelty and Music Store. His ads appeared in most issues of his paper. One on September 2, 1911 advertised violins for \$3.50 and guitars for \$6.00. Later ads featured pianos, and Edison and Victor gramophones. The Herald Office building still stands and is kept up nicely by Phoebe Kienitz, widow of Sid Kienitz, the last local editor of the paper.

This building was in close proximity to the city band stand located smack in the middle of the junction of what is now Main and Houk streets. Villagers gathered there during the summer for weekly concerts by the city band.

Despite the band concerts, entertainment at the opera house, summertime chautauquas, creamery picnics, and

stores that seemed able to provide customers with all their physical needs, merchants worried about losing business to Mankato, to mail order companies, and to door-to-door salesmen.

An ad in the May, 1911 *Herald* asked its readers to "Keep the Bacon at home." On June 11, 1911, an insert pointed out, "It is better to have the long green in the tills than the grass green in the streets." Later in the same month an ad discouraged purchasing through catalogs. "Buy at home where you can see what you are buying."

In January, 1912, merchants made a plea to both those who shopped by mail and those who rode the train to Mankato in the morning to shop and returned in the afternoon . . .

Among the many advantages of trading in our hometown may be mentioned nearness to stores thus preventing waste of time and energy; the saving of railroad fare, expenditures for meals and other items . . . inspection of goods before buying instead of having to trust to a misleading catalogue issued by mail order houses.

There were many other published pleas. One in the May 2, 1912 *Herald* referred to agents as "pestiferous men with their oily flow of speech." Readers were encouraged to ". . . buy your furniture, hardware, fencing, implements, clothing, etc. from reliable dealers whose merchandise is backed by guarantees of big companies."

But the pleas must have gone unheeded. Now, although the streets are blacktopped, green grass covers vacant lots where stores once stood. Some of the buildings burned down, and some were razed. Nevertheless, Good Thunder is still an interesting village and it is still looking for "public spirited young men."

In a later issue of the BECHS newsletter, a more detailed article about the general store will be published.

Respectfully submitted by

Lucilla A. Fitzsimmons

### SOURCES:

Interviews with Karl Bruscke, Helen Wiedenheft, Florence and Vic Sperra, Irma Whitney, Helen Prange, Ruth Welsh, Robert Dalluge, and Charles Barnard. All issues of the *Good Thunder Herald for 1911-1912*; *Souvenir of Good Thunder* published by the *Good Thunder Herald*, *Mankato Free Press*, April 5, 1937, *Shoemaker's Business Directory of the City of Mankato and County of Blue Earth*, 1881; R.L. Polk's *Mankato City Directory* and *Blue Earth County Directory*, 1910-1911.