

## Special Thanks

We would like to thank Mr. Elmer Goodrich for his handywork this past month. We would also like to thank Mr. George Sember of Cargill Flour Milling, Mankato for contributing grain for a recent exhibit, and Crandall's Jewelry for polishing the plaque for our mourning exhibit.

## Microfilm Grant Received

We have received a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society for the purchase of microfilm copies of Blue Earth County newspapers. The provision of the grant is that we raise matching funds in addition to matching with donated services and equipment. Our goal is to raise \$100 for the grant. If we raise **more** money, we may purchase more films. Send donations of any size to the Society, make sure that you note that it is for the microfilm grant.

## In Concert

The Mankato Rotary Club is sponsoring the "New Christie Minstrels" Concert Monday, Nov. 25th, at 8:00 p.m., MSU Centennial Student Union Ballroom. This concert is a club fundraiser for scholarships and drug prevention programs. Tickets are \$6.00 in advance, \$8.00 at the door. Call Gary at 388-7495 for more information.

## VICTORY HIGHWAY (continued)

The paving was also completed in 1952, and with the landscaping well established and growing, Victory Highway was fully ready for travelers to enjoy. Some thirty years later, it remains one of the state's beautiful roadways, with its absence of billboards and its living tribute of trees and shrubs on either side.

Inella Burns

## SOURCES

*Blue Earth County Enterprise*, July 1, 1947; September 4, 1947; October 2, 1947; March 8, 1962. *Mankato Free Press*, September 27, 1944; September 3, 1947; May 20, 1948; August 29, 1948; August 24, 1954; March 8, 1962. Mankato Garden Club records, 1940-1960, Southern Minnesota Historical Center, MSU Library. Interviews: B.J. Carey; Bernita (Mrs. Jerome) Cumisky.

## AROUND THE COUNTY



Late 19th and early 20th century Americans paid respect for their dead and expressed their grief through the ritual of mourning. The ritual prescribed rules of behavior and the styles of dress which were strict and intricate and which isolated the mourner from the rest of society.

Mourning wear indicated degrees of kinship with the dead. The closer the relationship, the longer the duration of mourning.

Definite periods of mourning were passed through from "deep mourning" to "half mourning" with the mourning colors becoming progressively lighter and the social contacts gradually increasing. The issue of mourning practices is the subject for our new exhibit at BECHS. The exhibit entitled, "...we mourn in black.", is now on display during regular museum hours, Tues.-Sun., 1-5 p.m.

If you wish to submit an item for the "Around The County" section of the newsletter, please write or call Jan, 345-4154 before the 10th of the month preceding publication.

\* \* \* \* \*

## \* NEW MEMBERS \*

### Annual Members

Lee Potzler

Mrs. M. W. Vihstadt

Alyce Johnston

## Memorials

In Memory of: Mrs. Doris Clow  
From: Arnold and Bernice Meyer

In Memory of: Mrs. Josephine Breede  
From: Arnold and Bernice Meyer

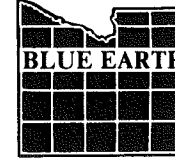
## Welcome

We wish to extend a welcome to Ms. Judy Nightingale who is a Mankato State University student who is interning with us during the fall quarter. Judy is a history major interested in learning about museums and museum management. She will be working on a variety of tasks to gain an overview of the workings of our museum.

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

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BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## November 1985

### Calendar of Events

- Nov. Exhibit: "*...we mourn in black.*" Blue Earth County Historical Society Museum. Tues.-Sun., 1-5 p.m.
- Nov. 1-15 "*Courageous Enough-A Photo History of Finnish-American Women*" Carnegie Arts Center - Mankato
- Nov. 10 "*Women and Ethnicity, a Neglected Dimension of American History*" Panel Discussion MSU Centennial Student Union Auditorium
- Nov. 11 Veterans Day-Museum Closed
- Nov. 16 "*Corny Crafts*" Children's Saturday Workshop BECHS Museum 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- Nov. 28 Happy Thanksgiving-Museum Closed
- Nov. 29 Museum Closed

## Special Needs

We are in need of *Corn Husks* for our Children's Saturday Workshop, Saturday, Nov. 16th. If you are able to provide these materials, please contact Jan Gullo, Mon.-Fri. 9-5 p.m., 345-4154.

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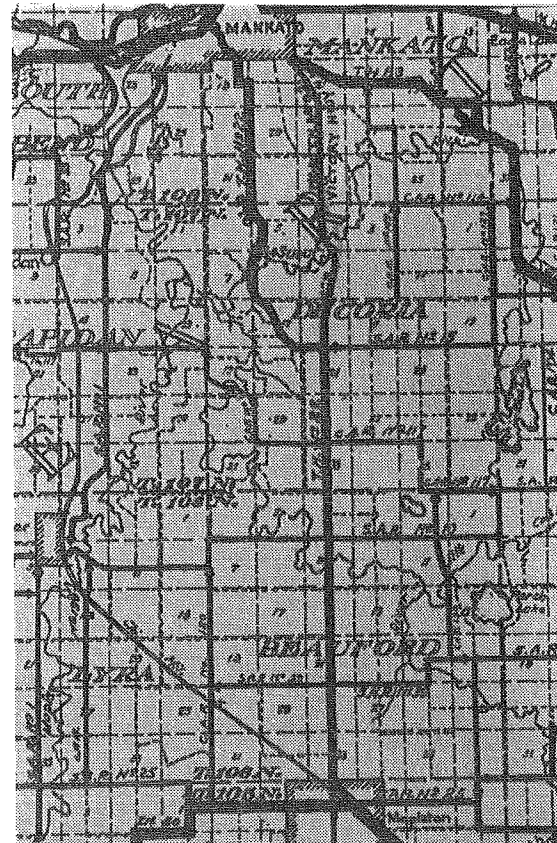
## VICTORY HIGHWAY

In the fall of 1944, German Foreign Minister Von Ribbentrop was declaring World War II a life-or-death fight "until our enemies realize they can never win"; the U. S. Office of War Information was predicting no early victory in Japan; Blue Earth County residents were asked to conserve paper and tin --- "carry your own shopping bag" and "save at least one tin can a day"; and Boy Scouts were having a paper drive dedicated to former area Boy Scouts who had died in the war. Amid all this war awareness was the announcement of a road-building and beautification project called the Victory Highway, which would honor Blue Earth County's patriots in the United States Armed Forces.

The idea for Victory Highway began with the need for a more direct route from Mankato to Mapleton. Originally Highway 22 from Mankato to nine miles north of Mapleton wound around over hills and through ravines. Re-routing that section into a straight road would shorten the distance and make traveling safer.

With the Minnesota Highway Department's decision to build the new road came a beautification plan from the Mankato Garden Club. Mrs. Paul Barney, president of the club, began early in the 1940's to discuss with M. J. Hoffman, commissioner of highways, the possibility of naming the new road Victory Highway and lining it with trees and flowers as a tribute to Blue Earth County's servicemen and women. The garden club's plan was to provide the trees through contributions from county residents. Anyone who wished could buy a tree and designate a member of the family or a friend in the armed forces in whose honor the tree would be planted. The cost of the tree was \$2.50, payable at Mankato banks or the *Blue Earth County Enterprise* in Mapleton, collection points for the project. The goal was 1400 trees of a uniform height of 12 to 15 feet which state highway engineers agreed to plant and maintain.

Plans for the "tree-lined landscaped highway with an overall width of 150 feet" were announced in the September 27, 1944, *Mankato Free Press* along with artist A. Anderson's conception of the road. In July 1947, the contract for building the road was let to Nelson, Mullen and Nelson Inc. of Minneapolis at \$229,383. By fall a 50-man crew and 26 units of mechanical equipment were at work on the road with "huge grading machines slicing the earth up," reports the September 4,



**A 1938 area map with Victory Highway superimposed. (Old Route 22 is now Route 8.)**

1947, *Blue Earth County Enterprise*. "The contractor is scraping the black dirt from the right-of-way in great piles of rich soil that will be scraped back later so that the memorial trees...will have the proper soil to grow. It is likely that the new bridge will be built after the road has been graded to it, and it is also likely to be a type strong enough to hold up the great military machines that will be used in the next war."

While construction crews were still working on the highway, the planting of trees began. Harold Olson, engineer of roadside development for the Minnesota Highway Department at that time, reported that by the end of May 1948, ten percent of the planting was completed. A number of American elms, Black Hills spruce, green ash and poplars had been planted in informal groupings. At this time the garden club had purchased over 1,000 trees. In addition, they bought 5,000 conifer seedlings, (which today are especially thriving on a slope north of the bridge). The highway department agreed to plant the seedlings on the roadside slopes and also to replace any trees that died. A number of farmers along the new road joined in the

project by planting trees on the edge of their property, and 85 percent of them signed an agreement to allow no billboards. Adding further impetus to the project, the Mapleton American Legion and other community organizations began a tree planting program to extend the landscaping from nine-mile corner to Mapleton.

The August 29, 1948, *Mankato Free Press* reported on the progress of the \$63,000 Victory Highway bridge being constructed by the Highway Bridge Company of McGregor, Minnesota. A Mankato group including Editor Franklin Rogers and Frank Franciscus, a reporter, drove to the scene of the bridge to find "a crew of men busily engaged in driving piles for the structure...which when completed will be 180 feet overall in three steel spans. Concrete posts and rails will guard the length of the structure on either side."

The same news account pointed out the historical significance of the Victory Highway bridge site at the junction of the LeSueur River and Winneshiek Creek where the Winnebagoes made their home. Nearby was Chief Winneshiek's village and the scene of hidden treasure. Following the Sioux Indian outbreak of 1862, the Winnebagoes were forced to leave Blue Earth County and go to a Nebraska reservation. Before they left, they decided to hide their annuities, amounting to about \$8000 in gold, in the bank along the creek. Winneshiek, Decoria and other chiefs collected the money and buried it not far from the bridge site. Three trees were chosen and a limb cut from each so that a line from the stubs would intersect exactly over the hiding place. According to history, Chief Yellow Bank and another Winnebago returned some years later to retrieve and take away the treasure.

A part of the Victory Highway project was a recreational area a short distance south of the LeSueur bridge. There three and one-half acres were cleared and landscaped by the state highway department, which also provided picnic tables and benches. Through contributions of interested residents of Blue Earth County, the Mankato Garden Club provided three stone fireplaces, toilet facilities, and woodboxes. In 1958 they placed in the picnic area a large plaque dedicating the Victory Highway to the men and women who served in World Wars I and II and naming as sponsors the Mankato Garden Club and the Mapleton American Legion in cooperation with the Department of Highways.

In the planning and development of Victory Highway, Mrs. Paul Barney played a major role. A native of Mapleton, she later moved to Mankato where she became active in civic affairs and helped organize the Mankato Garden Club. In 1954 the Minnesota State Horticultural Society awarded a bronze medal to Mrs. Barney for her vision and leadership in the Victory



**Mrs. Paul Barney, who organized and coordinated the Victory Highway tree-planting project.**

Highway project. At the time of her death in March 1962, the *Blue Earth County Enterprise* noted that Harriet Gilmore Barney never forgot her hometown of Mapleton. "She dreamed of a beautiful highway from the county seat to her old home, and almost single handed worked for the development of Victory Highway." Franklin Rogers in his "Between Us" column of the *Mankato Free Press* also recognized her accomplishments: "No more deserving campaign should be started at this time than one to honor the memory of Mrs. Paul Barney, who was principally responsible for Route 22 between Mapleton and Mankato being designated as Victory Highway. Mrs. Barney... worked long hours, made numerous trips and undoubtedly spent her own money to bring the project to reality."

Mrs. Barney's daughter, Bernita Cummisky, recalls her mother's enthusiasm for the development of Victory Highway. "She was totally dedicated to the project and had wonderful support from a number of businesses and community organizations besides the Mankato Garden Club. I especially remember the help of Mrs. Leo Landkammer; Blossom Spaulding of the *Blue Earth County Enterprise*; W. B. ("Buzz") Kough, who headed up the collection of funds; and Maurice J. Nelson, who helped select and plan the park site."

Because the Korean War held up the completion of the highway, the planting of trees was not completed until 1952. A plaque containing the names of the area's 1170 honored men and women in the United States Armed Forces was then hung on a wall in the Blue Earth County  
(continued on other side)