

Announcing

The 1985 Sandon Historical Series plate is in stock in the museum shop. The subject on this year's plate is the Main Street Bridge (the one being replaced soon). The plates sell for \$17.50 plus tax of \$1.05 to total \$18.55.

The rest of the plates in the series are still available if you wish to add to your set or start a new one.

Call the museum, 345-4154, to have one set aside for you. They are always popular; it is difficult to keep them in stock.

Remember, gift giving time is very near!!

MERRY CHRISTMAS, cont.

flowery Victorian style: "The bride looked extremely lovely in magnificent wine-colored silk, trimmed with handsome Spanish lace . . . Brilliant folds of auburn hair, tastefully tied with handsome ribbons, hung to her waist." Following the ceremony, guests "repaired to the spacious dining room where ample tables stood literally groaning under their loads of delicious viands. After the bountiful repast, the company indulged in the pleasant whirl of the dance, tripping the light fantastic toe til a late hour." A listing of gifts follows, each with the name of the giver, and the account concludes, "May their lives be long and replete with happiness and as pure as the gentle dews of Heaven."

Society a century ago apparently enjoyed a more formal style and flowery expression than people do today. But if that hypothetical time machine traveler visiting Blue Earth County, c. 1885, put aside the newspaper and joined in the festivities, he should have had a jolly Christmas holiday.

Inella Burns

SOURCES

The Mankato Free Press, December 11, 1885; January 1, 1886, June 27, 1952; *The Review*, Mankato, December 22, 1885; December 29, 1885.

AROUND THE COUNTY



MARK YOUR CALENDARS . . . FOR DECEMBER 3, 1985

MAUREEN OTWELL, an education specialist from the Minnesota Historical Society, will present a program entitled "Remember Me As You Pass By: Late 19th Century Gravestone Art in Minnesota". The program is funded by a grant from the Minnesota Humanities Commission in cooperation with the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The program will begin with a chance to view the exhibit ". . . we mourn in black." at the museum from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. and then hear the presentation in the YWCA living room at 7:30. The program will be followed by discussion and refreshments will be served.

Don't Forget

The society still has outstanding matching balances for the George M. Palmer Foundation grant and for the Minnesota Historical Society microfilm purchase grant. If you would like to make a donation, please send it to the society with a note designating its use.

Memorial

In Memory of: Syl Dorn
From: Mr. and Mrs. Garry Kiffe

Special Thanks

The following people have made contributions to the Blue Earth County Historical Society during the past month:

General Funds: Ramy Foundation of Mankato

Matching Funds for microfilm grant: Julie and Kenneth Schrader

For **Strong** backs and willing **Helping** hands: Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity, Mankato State University.

Betty Cords and Joe Kubicek for corn husks.

New Members

Annual: Paul D. Silliman

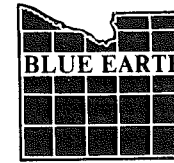
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BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

December 1985

Calendar of Events

- Dec. 3 Special Viewing of Exhibit:
"*. . . we mourn in black.*"
Blue Earth County Historical
Society Museum, 6:30-7:30
p.m.
- Dec. 3 "*Remember Me As You
Pass By*" Program.
Speaker Maureen Otwell
BECHS sponsored at YWCA
(directly behind the museum)
7:30 p.m.
- Dec. 8 "*Christmas Caroling
Party*" 7:00 p.m. to 9:00
p.m. at BECHS
- Dec. 24-25 **MERRY CHRISTMAS**
Museum closed
- Dec. 23-27 Museum offices closed.
Open for public visitation
only, 1:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.
- Jan. 1, 1986 **HAPPY NEW YEAR**
Museum closed

Special Need!!

We are looking for that special someone who enjoys working with wood and refinishing furniture. We have a wonderful addition to our collection, an oak hand cranked pump organ. The piece needs work but will be beautiful when complete. If you are willing to work at this piece at your convenience, let us know. Call the museum staff, 345-4154.

A Christmas Past 1885

If a Blue Earth County resident could enter a time machine and go back to the Christmas Season one hundred years ago, he would find himself returning to a Victorian lifestyle with few of the conveniences he had always taken for granted. But as he read his newspaper in the light of the lamp or gas light, he would find that Christmas was much the same as today in spirit and holiday events. Even the farmer, he might note in a Mapleton item, "ate of roast turkey and other good things, forgetting the low prices for farm produce for the time being."

December in Blue Earth County in 1885 was unusually mild. Lilac buds formed ready to burst and sprouting sprigs of grass began to show. But the week before Christmas, the weather turned cold and sufficient snow fell for holiday sleigh rides. A young man who could sport an elaborate cutter, all carpeted and cushioned, was popular with the women folk. Seats were narrow and a couple had to snuggle close to each other under heavy carriage robes. A less impressive but more common conveyance was the bob-sleigh. On the bob was a large wooden box with straw and blankets for the family's comfort and a spring seat for the driver. Often strings of sleighbells be-decking the horses heralded a sleigh's approach long before it came into sight.

Ice skating was also enjoyed during the 1885 Christmas, according to the New Year's Day *Mankato Free Press*: "It is not often our lakes and rivers are in proper condition on that festive day, so it was taken advantage of this year in good style." For those who preferred to skate indoors, Mankato had two new roller skating rinks. The managers of the City Skating Pavillion arranged to have music at the rink every evening during the holidays and announced skating matinees on Christmas and New Year's afternoons, "at which time the rink will be darkened, the gas lighted, and the Germania Band in attendance."

The social highlights of the 1885 Christmas Season, however, were the holiday dances. On Christmas Eve a Grand Christmas Ball was held at Sprague's Hall in Mapleton. Couples danced to the music of Allen's Orchestra of Wells and were served "an excellent supper at both the Mapleton and Case houses." In Mankato H. Himmelman, promising a better dance than ever before, cordially invited the public to a Christmas Ball at Union Hall. He obviously had the support

of *The Mankato Free Press*, December 11, which claimed "the most delightful time of the holiday festivities will occur at Union Hall on Christmas . . . so says Himmelman, and he knows." The Germania Orchestra played new music and Santa Claus was there with presents for all.



A silk-fringed Christmas card, c. 1880's.

By way of other evening entertainment during the holidays, "An Evening with Dickens" at the Mankato Opera House, sponsored by the Congregational Church ladies, drew an unusually large audience.

But the heart of Christmas and its reasons for being was religious in 1885. Churches held their usual Christmas services with special music and tree festivities, each church striving for the best tree display, but the Sunday School programs appeared more newsworthy. *The Review*, December 29, reported that the Baptist Sunday School, which "annually indulged in the charitable practice of contributing their mite for worthy objects," held a candy-pull at Bentley's Rink on Christmas Day, with proceeds going to the "most needy." The Presbyterian Sabbath School held their festivities on Christmas Eve, bringing presents to donate to the poor on Christmas Day. The most unusual and elaborate Sunday School Christmas celebration, however, was put on by the Eagle Lake Methodist Church. In place of a tree, they had a full-rigged schooner with six young ladies as jolly tars and commanded by Captain Roy Simonds. His 25-foot craft, the *Nancy Phelps*, carried assorted cargo consigned to the children. *The Review* reported "The singing of the crew as they were leaving the port was grand. The sailor song while they were heaving taut on the rigging was finely rendered and listened to with breathless silence by an audience of nearly 400. As they drew near to the head waters of Lake Eagle, was heard in the distance that beautiful song, 'Home Again,' and as the vessel came into the port, the volume of voices

increased. The anchor was dropped, the sheets loosened, and the cargo discharged. The value of this cargo was estimated from \$350 to \$500, and was distributed through the large audience."

Individual gift-giving was also noted in *The Review*, December 29. The Congregation of Synod Norway Church "showed their appreciation of their worthy minister and his wife by presenting them with a \$20 tea set and \$10 in money." The ladies of the Rev. Mr. Ogle's Sunday School class gave him a beautiful silk scarf, and the Congregational Sabbath School happily supplied their superintendent, W.W.P. McConnell, with a gold-headed cane "to add to his commanding presence."



A pre-Christmas newspaper advertisement in *The Review*, December 1, 1885.

This gift giving was strongly promoted in Mankato pre-Christmas newspaper advertising. Cloaks were a big item. The Golden Lion Store fast diminished its stock, having sold 23 garments, sale-priced from \$4.00 to \$80.00 by Christmas week. Not to be outdone, Brett's Empire Store announced its sale as a "Fearful Slaughter of Cloaks" for Christmas giving. A.J. Busch

carried a full-page ad of holiday bargains in imported crockery, glassware, and handsome lamps. Trade flourished. The Saturday before Christmas was reported as a very busy day. "We noticed one wagon containing eleven persons who had come to the city to see the display of pretty goods." Max Krolik's shoe store, having lured customers with free merchandise for every \$3.00 purchase, gave away 300 silk handkerchiefs and over 150 articles of neckware to holiday shoppers. Eagle Lake reported, "Holiday goods have vanished from the counters of our merchants like dew before the sun."



For holiday visits, calling cards were in vogue a century ago.

Among the general news items of interest during the 1885 holidays, one account of too much Christmas celebrating appeared in *The Review*, December 29: "On Christmas afternoon a Swede named Saleen Swenson was found near Franklin school house, suffering from a pistol wound in his right breast." Inquiries at City Hall revealed him to be "pretty thoroughly under the influence of liquor as a result of too much Christmas observance, and that while walking with a companion, he was fooling with a revolver which accidentally discharged. His companion was so scared, he ran away and left him. The man was afterwards arrested, but as both told the same story, he was discharged." The critically wounded man was placed in the care of Dr. McMahon. *The Mankato Free Press* reported the wounded man as one of "a brace of Norwegians" who took on too much holiday "booze."

On a happier note is the account of a wedding that appeared in the New Year's Day *Free Press*: "The workings of cupid have again become manifest, and he has selected as heroine an excellent young lady from our midst, Miss Lottie V. Masters of Garden City was united in blissful bonds of wedlock to Mr. Otto M. Scott of St. Paul on December 23." The account continues in

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