

## Calendar

- Mar. 4-8 **Women's History Week**  
 Mar. 5 **Women's Diaries Program**  
 Mn. Valley Reg. Library  
 12:15-12:45 pm.
- Mar. 5 **Minnesota Women's Films**  
 Mn. Valley Reg. Library  
 7:00-8:00 pm.
- Mar. 4-8 **Great Grandmother's Day Exhibit, MSU Centennial Student Union**
- Mar. 1-31 **Great Grandmother's Day Exhibit at BECHS Museum**  
 Tues.-Sun. 1-5 pm.
- Apr. 11 **Annual Meeting**  
 Willy's Last Chance, Vernon Center, Dinner 6:00 pm, Meeting 7:00 pm.

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## Homestead Players Need You!!!

Homestead Players are still in need of a special volunteer to set up engagement dates for the upcoming season. Duties of this individual will include scheduling dates, times, locations, facilities, and possibly dinner theatre arrangements. The publicity and transportation committees could also use extra helpers. If you are interested in helping out in any of these capacities, please contact Jan at the museum, 345-4154 or Betty Cords at 278-4128.

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## In Appreciation . . .

The editorial staff of the Blue Earth County Historical Society wishes to sincerely express their appreciation to those dedicated people who have so willingly given of their time and expertise for recent articles.

Special thanks to:

Inella Burns  
 Vernard Lundin  
 Gail Palmer  
 Louisa Smith  
 Darell Aptiz



## From the Director's Rolltop . .

Denise Hudson

The date for the Annual Meeting has been set for Tuesday, April 11th. The By-Laws state that the meeting shall be during the month of April with no date or day specified. Several people stated that a dinner meeting was preferred to a different type and that a week night, not a weekend, would be best.

This year's meeting has been scheduled at Willy's Last Chance in Vernon Center. The tentative schedule for the evening is dinner at 6:00 p.m., business meeting at 7:00 p.m., and the program at 7:30 p.m. We are working out the details of the menu but promise to keep the cost reasonable. We also have program ideas but are still finalizing all the details. We have chosen something light and entertaining.

The Annual Meeting is a very important time for the Society each year. It is our opportunity as Board and staff to bring all members and the public up to date on what we have been doing for a year. It is also a time when the membership may formally comment on programs and policy. (Input from the members may come at **any** time during the year.)

More details will be in the next newsletter and we will be sending out the official agenda and program.

Hope to see you all there -- 1984 - 1985 has been a very active year for us!!!

*Denise*

## In Memoriam

Raoul LaFrance  
 The Samuel Walkers, Settlers of Old Hilltop.

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

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# Blue Earth County Historical Society

March 1985

## Special Thanks

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

General Funds: Helen Erickson  
 Florence LaHarm  
 Erwin Jones  
 Georgia F. Schultz  
 Donna Jean Sharp  
 Eleanor Bieble

Matching Funds for the George M. Palmer Grant: Mary Dooley  
 Emma Weicking  
 Scott & Caroline Parker  
 Phyllis J. Roberts  
 Mary Balzerzak  
 Charlotte Farrish Luwe  
 Carolyn Schrewbury

Endowment: Catherine L. Pinney  
 Mr. & Mrs. Garry Kiffe

Homestead Players: Zeno Glass Co.  
 Demaray Electric Supply  
 Don's Hobby  
 Lloyd Lumber

Children's Valentine Party: Hy-Vee  
 Don's Hobby  
 Jamarek Crafts  
 Grandma's V-Store  
 Carlson Craft

We appreciate your help and support!

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

# THE MAPLETON COLONY

## Part I The New York Group

Today it is almost impossible to realize that there was a time when there were no settlers in the Mapleton and Sterling areas of Blue Earth County, Minnesota. It is also hard to understand how people as far east as New York could plan to come to an unsettled country when means of transportation were as limited and slow as they were over 125 years ago.

Never the less in the winter of 1854-55 a school teacher from New York city by the name of A. Murphy advertised in a paper for a meeting to form a colony to locate in the territory of Minnesota to establish their homes. At about the same time a venturesome group of families were ready to depart from Wisconsin for this same locality and for the same purpose.

To keep clear the movement of these two groups, I will deal with them separately. They are the New York group and the Wisconsin group.

The New York group was called The Minnesota Settlement Association, with A. Murphy the president; William Wilde, the secretary; Ezra L. Ferguson, corresponding secretary; and A.A. Wessels, treasurer.

Robert Taylor was delegated to go to southern Minnesota in the winter of 1855-56 to choose the best location for a settlement. Taylor came to Blue Earth County and was helped by L.G.K. Fletcher, who had originally helped survey lands along the Maple River and around Lura Lake, in Sterling and Mapleton Townships. The only settlers in this area at this time were V.A. Highland and his two brothers-in-law, Barnabas W. Simmons and Horace M. DeWolf.

Through its advertising the colony had attracted much attention, and its membership was drawn from the northeastern states, the majority from New York; almost all had English or Scottish surnames.

The Settlement members had bought shares for \$10.00 each. This entitled them to cheap transportation west, an opportunity to claim 160 acres of farmland, and one lot in a town site to be platted in the center of the settlement.

The main body of the colony left from New York City in April of 1856. They had made an agreement with the railroad company to carry

them to Dunleith, Illinois, across the Mississippi River from Dubuque, Iowa. Dunleith was then the nearest point to Minnesota to be reached by railroad.

Some of the colonies, especially from Illinois, Indiana and Iowa, made the trip overland across Iowa, to Minnesota, with the wagon and stock. The majority took a steamboat, "The City Belle", up the Mississippi River to St. Paul, Minnesota, and then another steamboat, "The Reveille", down the Minnesota River to Mankato. A St. Paul paper of the date states that there were 350 adults and 90 children in the party.



The party landed in Mankato on May 5, 1856. Luckily, they were not dependent on the city of Mankato to accommodate them because housing was far too limited for such a large group. They had brought with them several tents, which they pitched along the levee. They waited in Mankato until the high water went down and their cattle had arrived.

After a few days the colonists started for the promised land that Mr. Taylor had secured. They commenced their journey southward on foot and by ox cart, following the old trail site of Ft. LeHuillier. There was a freshet in the LeSueur River and the teams could not ford it. A number of men crossed in canoes and continued their journey on foot, carrying their bedding and provisions on their backs. They passed through Rapidan and Lyra, using abandoned cabins for stopping places. At last they reached their land which was all the fair and fertile region along the Maple River and about Lura Lake. They arrived in the spring of 1856. There were 30 tents, 12'x15', to shelter the entire company until houses could be

built.

Through the aid of L.G.M. Fletcher, they blocked out the land into claims of 160 acres each. Only 65 claims could be found having the desired amount of timber. Three of the head officers were allowed to pick first. The rest of the claims were numbered and divided into lots, but as there were 139 people entitled to a claim, more than half the tickets were blank. As a result there was great dissatisfaction. While many of the heads of families drew blanks, young men without families, whose only purpose was speculation, drew good claims. A general fight followed and there was much claim jumping. Most of the disappointed scattered; some went to the timber country near Mankato, others crossed into Faribault County, while quite a number returned east very disgusted.

The northwest quarter of Section 7 of Mapleton Township and the northeast quarter of Section 12, Sterling, were chosen for the townsite. This had been surveyed and platted in July, 1856 by M.B. Haynes, a young civil engineer and member of the colony. The town was laid out in a 320 acre site with one-fourth acre lots. It was named Mapleton for the Maple River. The plat was signed by Robert Taylor, James Cornell and John Mund. The lots were divided among the members by drawing. Nothing became of the townsite project and the land was seized by two enterprising claim jumpers, Benjah Corp and Hiram Roberts. Another attempt to build the city on the south side of Section 7 in Mapleton Township by James Cornell was also a failure.

The lack of land caused a thinning of the colony, and wet, cold weather of the following seasons drove others away.

The known families that remained in this area from the Settlement Association were: Wm. Wilde, Dr. C.L. Francis, John Johnston, Alexander Greig, John Morris, O.C. Healy, John and George Hart, Joseph Dobie, E. P. Stevens, Gilbert Webster, M.B. Haynes, James Cornell and J.W. Sprague. — Part II in April Newsletter.

Article submitted by  
Audrey Annis  
Mapleton, MN

## SOURCES

Thomas Hughes, *History of Blue Earth County*, 1874; Ronald J. Newell, *Where the Winding Maple Flows*, 1978; Rev. Edward D. Neill, *History of the Minnesota Valley*, 1882; Thomas Hughes papers, Southern Minnesota Historical Center, Mankato State University.

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## Contributions Are Welcome!

We are looking forward to adding a new section to our newsletter in future editions which will be called "Around The County". Let us know about items of interest, events, workshops, and gatherings, "Around The County".

Items should be placed by the 10th of the month preceeding publication. Please **print** or **type** all names and include the six journalism ABC's: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. This will save follow-up calls or scrubs. Please sign your copy and include your phone number for follow-up if necessary. If you have questions regarding subject matter or format, please contact Jan Gullo at the Historical Society, 345-4154.

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## Want-Ads

DESPERATELY NEEDED: Old, Used Sheets to cover stored items at the museum. If you can help us, contact Denise or Jan at the museum, 345-4154.

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## Just A Reminder!

Annual Meeting — April 11, 1985  
6:00 p.m.