



BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

March 1986

Calendar of Events

- March 2-8 **Women's History Week**
Honoring Maud Hart Lovelace
(Watch for separate mailing of event schedule)
- April 19 First Annual **Heritage Dinner**
Honoring Howard Williams and the Williams family
- April 19 Blue Earth County Historical Society Annual Business Meeting

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Special Thanks

The following people and businesses have been generous with their time and equipment during the past month:

Elmer Goodrich: For designing wooden stanchions for "The America Chest".

Rickway Carpet, North Mankato: For empty carpet rolls.

Northern States Power Company and Jerry Kenney: For a used electric typewriter.

Jan Fisher & Connie Williams: For assisting at the Taffy Pull.

LeAnn Laurisch, a new volunteer: For typing membership file cards.

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Farewell . . .

The Society bids farewell to Jan Gullo, Public Services Director. She has decided to pursue other activities in the community. Jan has done wonderful things with the tours, programs, and special events during the last year and will surely be missed.

Announcing!!!

On Saturday, April 19, 1986 at the Mankato Golf Club a new tradition will be inaugurated. The *First Annual Heritage Dinner* will be held. The purpose of the dinner will be to honor a family, and the eldest member of that family, who has made significant contributions to the history of Blue Earth County. This first year, the Board has chosen to honor the Williams Family with Howard Williams as the guest of honor. This event is seen as a new approach to the recognition and celebration of the rich history provided us by our predecessors. Details as to time and cost will be forthcoming.

Annual Meeting

The date of the annual business meeting has been set for Saturday, April 19, 1986 at the Mankato Golf Club. It will be held immediately preceding the social hour of the Heritage Dinner. Everyone is, of course, invited to attend the meeting. Plan to spend the rest of the evening celebrating at the Heritage Dinner.

Welcome to New Annual Members

Gladys Olson, North Mankato
John Ellingson, Spokane, Washington

Memorial

In Memory of: Robert Carlstrom
for Restoration Fund for the R.D.
Hubbard House

From: Ogden and Jane Confer

New Business (Patron) Members

James R. Weir Insurance Agency
208 No. Broad
Mankato

Brett's Department Stores
Downtown Mankato Mall

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

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column expressed it, "Mother Earth did wash her face and then smilingly greeted Halley's comet as she swept by with her long train." But many people wondered if there was a connection between the comet's appearance and the drought.

The superstition surrounding Halley's comet in 1835 was considerably lessened in 1910 by more scientific knowledge, and that knowledge promises to increase even more as present day space probes explore the comet's orbit.

Inella Burns

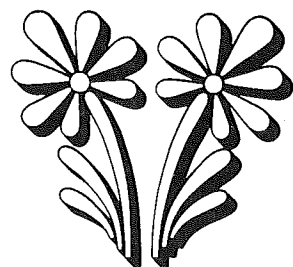
SOURCES

Blue Earth County Enterprise, Mapleton, May 27, 1910; June 3, 1910; June 10, 1910.
The Herald, Good Thunder, May 26, 1910; June 2, 1910.
The Lake Crystal Union, May 25, 1910.
Mankato Free Press, May 20, 1910; May 26, 1910; June 3, 1910.
The Review, Mankato, May 17, 1910; May 24, 1910.
Interview: Armin Sandman

Welcome To New Volunteers

Janet Larson, who has begun indexing the early issues of the Good Thunder *Herald*. Evelyn Weisgram continues to index the most recent issues.)

LeAnn Laurisch, who has begun doing a variety of tasks in her home for the Society.



Halley's Comet - 1910

"Halley's comet has been at its best for the past week, appearing very bright and clear in the west and many have watched for it . . . as probably but few will be able to say seventy-five years hence they have seen it before."

A number of news items, such as the one above from the Good Thunder *Herald* on June 2, 1910, appeared in Blue Earth County newspapers in late May and early June of 1910. The comet named for Edmund Halley, who in 1705 calculated its orbital path and its return to Earth's view every 75 or 76 years, stirred a wide variety of reactions throughout the county.

Not everyone thought the watching worth the while. *The Lake Crystal Union* commented: "We saw the comet for the first time Sunday night in the western sky at 8:30. It is not much of a sight as we supposed it would be." In the *Blue Earth County Enterprise*, Mapleton also expressed disappointment. "After all the comment which has been made by the press and by astronomers, Halley's famous comet was seen last Sunday night and was not much of a sight . . . nothing that would excite the suspicion of anyone that it would knock this old earth off its axis as had been surmised. The comet racket has evidently been overworked." A *Mankato Free Press* reporter from Amboy felt much the same way: "A large number of people in this vicinity have arisen early in the morning and sat up late at night to catch a glimpse of Halley's noted comet, but the majority have come to the conclusion that it is nothing but a fake."

People in Medo were more philosophical after spending their evenings comet watching. Those who saw it felt fortunate, while others with the ultimate in optimism thought they would wait till it came again in 75 years.

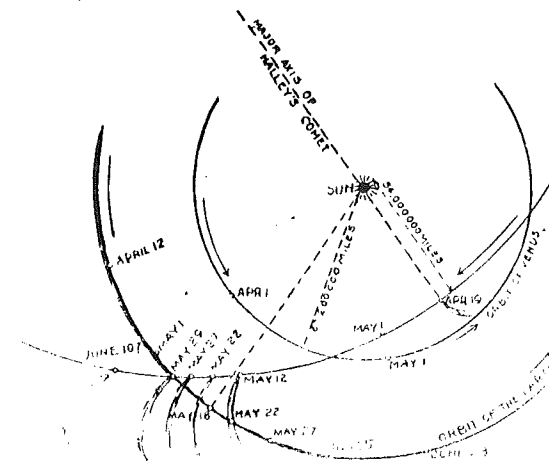
Halley's comet made the society page of the May 26, *Mankato Free Press* in 1910. Miss Louise Thompson entertained a number of friends at a comet party. After a few games and light refreshments, the party went out to search for the comet. Although it did not appear, the guests declared they had had a most enjoyable evening.

A more unusual comet party was held on

the summit of the hill in the old Catholic cemetery where a number of young people of Duke's addition gathered to watch for the comet. After telling stories and playing games in the moonlight, they roasted "weenie-wursts" over the coals and gazed at the sky until midnight. Again, the comet did not appear, but the young people declared they had had the best time of their lives.

One commercial enterprise was reported. Taking advantage of the comet's popularity, a drug store in St. Clair concocted a drink called "Halley's Comet." "Try it," they urged. "Best drink in the world."

Relative Courses of the Sun; Halley's Comet and the Earth



Drawing by A.P. Man, former Mankatoan, *Mankato Free Press*, June 3, 1910.

Some residents were fearful of the comet after reading in *The Review* on May 17 and the *Mankato Free Press* on May 20 that the earth might actually pass through the comet's tail, which according to scientists contained poisonous and asphyxiating hydrocarbon vapors and deadly cyanogen gas. But the scientists were firm in their convictions that "none of us will be aware of the fact that we are literally breathing the tail of Halley's comet" because, as Professor Pickering of Harvard University explained, "the actual amount of toxic vapor is so small

that when the earth is brushed by the tail of Halley's comet, the composition of the atmosphere will not be so affected that a chemist could detect it." The only possible effects of the earth's passing through the comet's tail, scientists believed, might be a show of some disturbance in delicate instruments for recording atmospheric electricity, or if there are solid particles in the tail, the falling of a few meteors.

According to the *Mankato Free Press* on May 26, 1910, both of these possibilities materialized. Professor Zeleny at the University of Minnesota, making observations with the electroscope, noted "an increase in the electrical pulling force that lasted for two minutes," and Mankatoans saw three meteors fall. "After the meteors fell," the account continues to relate, "many people who were in their homes felt a distinct shock. The earth was jarred sufficiently to rattle windows and dishes." Some Mankatoans, among them C.A. Chapman and Judge J.E. Porter, heard "sounds like a boiler bursting," but stepping into the open, saw nothing out of the ordinary. In Pemberton, "people were awakened by a frightful noise early in the morning and were very much frightened, thinking it was the much talked of Halley's comet, but it proved to be only B.W. Graham learning to run his automobile." But with all the phenomena of falling meteors, earth shock, and loud noises, no one would have known, except for the calculations of the astronomers, that "we were sweeping through the tail of the comet at a rate of nearly 2,760 miles a minute."

EARTH STILL INTACT

PASSED THROUGH COMET'S TAIL
WITHOUT A JOLT.

Those Who Gazed Skyward Did Not
See Much That Was Strange; Fall
of a Meteor Caused the Dishes to
Rattle Some; Sample of Atmos-
phere Taken at University Didn't
Contain a Great Deal of Gas.

Headline in the *Mankato Free Press*, May 26, 1910.

Editorial comment made light of any fear of the comet. An editor's note in the *Mankato Free Press* on

May 26 asserted, "We would rather take chances of passing through the comet's tail than crossing Front Street on a busy day, when street cars, autos, and vehicles of all descriptions are racing back and forth regardless of human life." The Good Thunder *Herald* of the same date editorialized: "Superstition dies hard and for that reason there are found, even in this enlightened age, many people who are scared out of their wits by the appearance of Halley's comet. But it is reassuring to find that the comet does not affect stocks and that the real estate market is as lively as ever; all of which indicates confidence that this old world is going to revolve as usual long after the comet passes on its mysterious journey."

Interviews in 1910 with people in their nineties who had seen Halley's comet in 1835 revealed that superstition seemed to be dying. A Garden City news item in *The Lake Crystal Union* on May 25, 1910 noted, "Mr. Warner remembers the excitement occasioned by the visit of Halley's comet 75 years ago. He was 12 years old at the time." (1835) He recalled, "There was far more superstition then, than in 1910."

The *Mankato Free Press* on May 20 carried interviews with Red Wing residents in their nineties who also claimed that there was more superstition before the appearance of Halley's comet in 1835. David Hancock remembered "how everybody thought the world was coming to an end and how they dressed in their ascension robes, going to church to pray and wait for the coming of the last day upon earth." Some of those interviewed said that the season marked by the appearance of the 1835 comet was dry and the ground was parched. That was true also of the 1910 appearance. Occasional references to that drought were made in the 1910 area news. Good Thunder reported that the shortage of rain water for housecleaning had brought about quite a run on the druggists' supply of lotions to treat dry skin caused by harsh washing compounds. Another item referred to pastures that were too dry to provide adequate food for the cattle.

Just before the earth passed through the comet's tail, the long drought was broken by spring rains, and as the Garden City news