

**Volunteers Are Great -
Let's Celebrate!**

The Blue Earth County Historical Society, along with the rest of the community, appreciates and needs its volunteers! The week of April 21 is National Volunteer Recognition Week. Events have been scheduled to recognize the contributions of volunteers on a local level. The celebration will include the following activities:

Wednesday, April 23 Noon - 1:00 p.m.

Bring your lunch and join other BECHS volunteers and volunteers from a variety of other agencies and organizations at Volunteer Park (located next to Pizza Kato). Enjoy music, free beverages, a dedication ceremony, and a colorful balloon send-off. **Afterwards**, walk to the Museum for an informal reception for **OUR** volunteers!

Saturday, April 27 9:00 a.m.-Noon.

Bring your family to Williams Nature Park (located next to Minneopa State Park) to enjoy a Spring walk on the paved trails. A tree will be planted at 10:00 a.m. to symbolize the gifts of giving volunteers have shared with our community. Come and enjoy refreshments and a relaxing morning in the out of doors.

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New In The Museum Shop

Mankato/North Mankato Trivia - The new game to test your knowledge about the area's history and about the area businesses.

Century Farms of Minnesota: One Hundred Years of Changing Lifestyles on the Farm. The first section of this book provides a historical background to Minnesota and agriculture in the state. The second section has biographical information on the families who are century farm owners. (Several from Blue Earth County have been included.) There are many photographs.

More new merchandise will be added this Spring. All proceeds from the Museum Shop are used for the various programs of the Society.

Special Thanks to the following individuals and businesses for their help and generosity during the various programs for Women's History Week:

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| Kathleen Baxter | Shirley Lieske |
| Carlson Craft | Mankato Floral |
| Barbara Carter | Doris Pagel |
| Harpies Bazaar | Kelly Reuter |
| Hy-Vee Food Store | Sharla Scannell Whalen |
| Knit & Stitch | |

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Volunteers

Farewell to one of our volunteers, Pam Youngblom, who left us due to a new job. Pam volunteered up to **16 hours per week** from June of 1984 to February of 1986. We will certainly miss her!!

Welcome to a new volunteer, Kenneth Morse, who came to us through Retired Senior Volunteer Program. RSVP is a federally legislated volunteer program which is administered locally for individuals 60 years or older. Seniors interested in volunteering for the Historical Society should contact Judy Irwin at 345-7787.

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Reminder

Purchase tickets for the Heritage Dinner by April 15th! Return the mailer which was enclosed with the invitation **or** stop at the Museum **or** pick tickets up at Bretts **or** contact any Board member.

It should be a memorable evening in celebrating the history of Blue Earth County. Join with us in our salute to the Williams family.

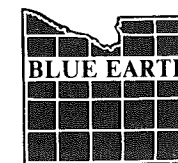


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BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

April 1986

Calendar of Events

- April 19 **Annual Business Meeting**
5:30 p.m. Mankato Golf Club
- April 19 **Heritage Dinner**
honoring Howard Williams and the
Williams Family, at the Mankato
Golf Club
6:00 p.m. Social hour (cash bar)
6:30 p.m. Dinner with program
following
- May 18 International Museum Day
- May 26 Memorial Day, Museum and Offices
Closed

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Annual Business Meeting

WHEN: Saturday, April 19, 1986, 5:30 p.m.
WHERE: Mankato Golf Club
(Immediately preceding the Heritage Dinner.)
All voting members of this association are
invited to attend.

Agenda

- I. Call to Order
- II. Minutes of 1985 Meeting
- III. Annual Financial Report
- IV. Reports of Activities 1985-86
- V. By-Law Amendments
- VI. Election of Trustees and Officers
- VII. Other Business
- VIII. Adjourn

Mankato Street Railway Systems

Only a snapshot, a postcard, an advertising card, a much-used blotter, a converted street car barn, a token or two – is all that remains as evidence that once two street railway systems operated in Mankato. Both systems failed. The first because Mankato proved to be too small to support such a venture and the second because automobiles afforded too much competition.

In November, 1895 two prominent businessmen, William M. Farr and John C. Noe, applied for and received a franchise for a horse-drawn street railway for Mankato. The franchise gave the company the use of Front, Broad, Byron, Plum, Hickory, Cherry, and Clark Streets and the old territorial road to the Blue Earth River bridge.

On June 22, 1886 a corporation was formed with capital of \$50,000 by William M. Farr, John C. Noe, J.A. Willard, Stephen Lamm, George Piper, George Clark, and J.R. Jones. During the spring of 1886 construction began. The first line was laid on Front Street from Vine Street to Sibley Park and thence from Woodland Avenue to the Blue Earth River bridge. On July 23, 1886 the Mankato Street Railway was officially opened for travel with 966 passengers carried the first day, 1033 on the second day, and 1455 on the third. Had Mankato residents continued to patronize the street car at this rate, the first street railway would have been a profitable enterprise. In hopes of making the service available to more Mankato residents and thereby increasing patronage, an extension was added in 1887. This line was laid up Liberty Street to Broad, up Broad to Center, up Center to Bradley, down Bradley to Byron, and up Byron to Lewis. This extension proved to be the most unprofitable part of the line and in 1890 service was discontinued and the track taken up.

Four horse cars were operated from 6 a.m. until 10 p.m. The car barn was located near the slough on south Front Street. Among the drivers E.J. Sheldon, George E. Blake and C. Fitzgerald were residents of Mankato and James Wolverton of Garden City was foreman of the car barn. The company owned its own graders to clear the tracks of snow in winter. The line

was a losing enterprise from the beginning. Only on such days as fairs or circuses did it ever pay expenses. The men who had put their money into it were confident that Mankato would grow rapidly and the outskirts of town would build up the need for the street car system. However, as the years went by and the losses mounted, the men became discouraged. By September, 1895 it was evident that there was little use to continue this unprofitable service.

On October 1, 1895 the Mankato Street Railway surrendered its franchise. The members of the company lost between \$75,000 and \$80,000 on the project. This meant a loss of about \$12,000 per member. All the company's obligations were met and settled by stockholders in full. Only a few books and other articles of little value remained to show for their fortunes invested. Mankato had proven to be too small a town to support such a railway.

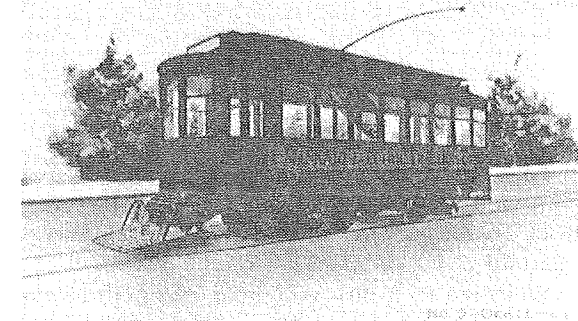
Mankato was without a street-car system for the next thirteen years. In 1906 the Mankato Electric Traction company was formed. During that year subscriptions for sale of prepared stock were taken. In 1907, construction began and the railway began operation in 1908.



Street Car Day, Mankato, Minnesota

Two lines of track were laid. One began at North Broad Street near Tourtellotte Park, ran south on Broad Street to Vine Street, crossed over to Front Street, ran south on Front Street to Park Lane and then on to Sibley Park. The second line began at the corner of Front and Main Streets, ran east on Main Street to Fifth Street, ran south on Fifth Street past the Blue Earth County Court House and the Mankato Teachers College building to Warren Street, then west to Fourth Street, south to Clark Street, then to Center Street, then to Byron Street, finally to

Pleasant Street where it came to an end at the corner of Pleasant and Willard Streets. In 1913 the line was extended from this corner to Front Street. However, in 1919 this extension was taken up and the line extended from the corner of Pleasant and Willard Streets to Baker Avenue and on to Moreland Avenue near the Milwaukee Railroad tracks. The laying of the tracks cost between \$15,000 and \$17,000 a mile which was considered a relatively small investment.



A "Booster", one of the new electric street cars in Mankato.

The owners were W.L. Hixon, president; E.D. Ewing, vice president; and W.D. Willard, secretary-treasurer. H.E. Hance, who was instrumental in organizing the company, was manager.

In 1907 plans were made to build street car barns on a lot located on Broad Street near Fowler and Pay's offices and kilns. It was a triangular shaped tract of land especially adapted to the use of the railway company.

Fred Kron negotiated the purchase of the property paying the former owner, Jacob Denn, a sum of \$1,200 for a lot with the dimensions of 132 by 173 feet. The work on the barns began in 1908 and one of the buildings was used as a college to train conductors and motormen. One of the street car barns remains at 1103 North Broad Street and has been converted into the present Our Savior's Lutheran Church.

The company owned five motor cars and seven or eight trailers. During the summer three or four of these open cars might be hitched to one motor car. These open cars proved to be more bother than they were worth and they were taken off the lines in 1914.

The motor cars were about thirty feet long and ran in both directions with motors in both ends. They had two wheels at each end, had a single-wire trolley, and could seat thirty passengers comfortably. The

cars could really "pack 'em in" and sometimes as many as one hundred twenty passengers were on board. The days when a circus or a fair was in town the system did an overwhelming business. On one such circus day the fares collected amounted to eleven hundred passengers!

Until 1915 each motor car was operated by both a motorman and a conductor. For the sake of economy after 1915 only a motorman operated the cars.

In 1912 the original owners sold most of the common stock to Walter Cummings of Chicago who took control of the company. In 1913, J.O. Schulz of Iowa City bought up the common stock and took control. In 1914 Adolph Mueller was hired as general manager and local superintendent.

Beginning in 1922, the company steadily operated at a loss. They stopped operating on March 1, 1930. Automobiles had become popular and the competition had become too great. On May 2, 1930, the city of Mankato revoked the franchise and the second street railway ceased to exist.

- Gail Palmer

SOURCES

Newspapers:

Mankato Free Press, May 8, 1908, April 5, 1937, June 27, 1952, August 30, 1985.

The Review, Mankato, August 27, 1907, May 5, 1908

Books:

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by Thomas Hughes, published by the *Mankato Free Press*, 1909 pp. 196-213.

Standards Atlas of Blue Earth County
by George Ogle and Company, 1914, pp. 11-25