

Ghosts From The Past

The Blue Earth County Historical Society is hosting a unique Halloween experience on Sunday, October 25, beginning at dusk.

"Ghosts from the Past" will take place at Williams Nature Center, outside of Mankato, near Minneopa State Park. Small groups of people will be led on a guided tour through the woods and will be surprised by characters out of the past, scattered along the path. In order to keep the historic vignettes a surprise we aren't telling who the characters are but be assured they definitely will be exciting people who visited or inhabited the Minnesota River Valley. Advance Reservations are required, admission is \$3.00 for adults and \$2.00 for children under 12. This program is handicapped accessible. Expect an exciting evening full of fun and adventure. Please call the Blue Earth County Historical Society at 507-345-4154 for ticket information. See you on the 25th.



Dried Flowers

We have a few bouquets of dried flower arrangements left over from the Country Store at "Autumn in the Garden." Stop by and pick either arranged bouquets or loose flowers such as baby breath to make your holiday gifts.

Newsletter Articles

The narrative located in the center of the newsletter is written by both members and nonmembers of the Historical Society. The remainder of the newsletter is written and edited by the Historical Society staff. If you are interested in submitting an article for publication, here are a few guidelines. The Historical Society prefers articles of a general nature, not focused on an individual family or business, with ties to Blue Earth County. Although most of our articles are cultural historical we welcome writings in geography, biology, music, geology, art, business, theater and other areas related to Blue Earth County. Articles should be three double spaced typed pages with up to two photographs. The Historical Society reserves the right to edit articles when necessary. For further information please contact Susan at 507-345-4154.

Curation Notes

We are proud to announce two upcoming events taking place in October. "An Uncertain Future", the photographic exhibit of Dakota women imprisoned at Fort Snelling following the Dakota Conflict will be going on the road again. The display organized by Archivist Audrey Burmeister-Hicks just returned from a showing at Lake Shetek and is now going to be on display at the Minnesota Valley Regional Library auditorium in Mankato through the month of October. If you haven't had a chance to see this marvelous exhibit, be sure to stop by the library and see it for yourself.

Secondly, two of our historic quilts will be on display at the Fall Home Show, October 8-11 at the St. Paul Civic Center. This show is called the "Challenge of the Upper Midwest Quilt Exhibit" and will include quilts from Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin and other nearby states.

Thank You

Thanks to the following friends, businesses and members who donated their time and energy to insure the success of the "Autumn in the Garden" festival.

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Mrs. Edward Epple | Carlienne A. Frisch |
| Ethel Madelen | Michael Scullin |
| Eleanor Kudrle | Penny Herickhoff |
| Anita Stone | Doug & Kris Higginbotham |
| Mr. & Mrs. John Norman | Audrey Burmeister-Hicks |
| Mr. & Mrs. Charles Barnard | Jim Mans |
| Arlene & Ken Brown | Walley Hayenga |
| Jan Brown | Marty Wiltgen |
| Frank & Judy Kraft | Eldon Marks |
| Mr. & Mrs. David Besser | Nancy Croce |
| Gladys Olson | Richard & Susan Chambers |
| Lorraine Wolverton | Floyd Roberts |
| Salley Baringer | Marge Meredith |
| Iris Nigg | Missy Owens |
| Jean Jaax | Alma Severson |
| Dean & Peggy Pettis | Gail Palmer |
| Joe Kubicek | Mike & Colleen Smith |
| Cindy Jacques | Barbara Maher |
| Charles Wall | Alice Hollingsworth |
| Margaret Schwankl | Mary Lofy |
| Maureena Cords | Mary Ann Monk |
| Betty Cords | Elizabeth Lorenz |
| Matt McCoy | Mr. & Mrs. Elmer Goodrich |
| Clara M. Aubin | Ruth Peterson |
| Mary Van voorhis | Marian Rodgers |
| Mike Ballard | Susan Monk-Kjos |
| Thomas Maegher Miller | Barbara J. Lamson |
| Dr. William Lass | John Karels |

Businesses:

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| HyVee Food Store | Valley Quilters |
| Cub Food Store | Misch's Shoe Repair |
| YWCA | Hamburger Heaven |
| Energy Concepts | KEYC TV |
| Mankato Parks Dept. | KMSU Radio |
| Mankato Suzuki | Twilight Garden Club |
| Southern Minnesota Poets | |

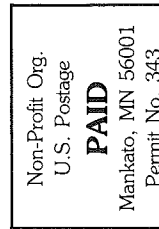
Thanks to all of you who attended and helped make this such a special day.

New Members

Welcome to the following new members:
Mr. Curtis Speck, Good Thunder, MN
Mr. Jim Dillman, Long Lake, MN
Norma Hansen, Mankato, MN
Alma Severson, Mankato, MN

Memorials

This past month we received memorials from the following people:
Dr. and Mrs. Don Meredith in memory of Dr. Robert Engstrom
Dr. and Mrs. Don Meredith in memory of Wilbur (Bill) Myron



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BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

October 1987

Calendar of Events

- Oct. 12 **Columbus Day**
- Oct. 14 **8th Annual Career Day at MSU**, Susan and Audrey will attend.
- Oct. 15 **MSU Park and Recreation Interpretive Class** will meet at the Society for a tour and presentation by Susan.
- Oct. 17 **"YOUNG HISTORIANS"** will meet at the Society at 10 am and learn about Natural Preservation of Foods. Call 507-345-4154 for information. Admission is free!
- Oct. 25 **"GHOSTS FROM THE PAST"** will take place at dusk at Williams Nature Center. Advance Reservations needed, call 507-345-4154.
- Oct. 31 **Halloween**

Notes from the Director

The "AUTUMN IN THE GARDEN" festival on Sunday, September 13 was a huge success thanks to the hundreds of people who made the day so special. The weather was beautiful and helped to let people enjoy the good food, entertainment and homemade items from the Country Store. As usual, we're working on lots of projects for the future. Our next Young Historians workshop meets on October 17, 10 am at the Historical Society. "GHOSTS FROM THE PAST" will take place on October 25 and offer a truly unique Halloween program. Betty Haley has begun work as our new receptionist. Betty, her husband and two daughters just moved here from Montevideo. We're happy to have her on our staff. Be sure to stop by and welcome her to the County as well as to the Historical Society. Finally, last month's newsletter contained a list of Historical Society staff but left off the name of a very special employee. Marian Rodgers is working on the Senior Employment Program through the Minnesota Valley Action Council as our Registrar for collections management. Marian has been at the Society since last January and plays an important part in completing all of the behind the scenes work on artifacts that makes our Historical Society so valuable.

P.S. The 1987 collectors plates made by Donna Sandon have arrived and are for sale in the museum gift shop which is open Tuesday - Sunday from 1-5 p.m.

The General Store: A Popular Place for Pioneers and for Speculators in Good Thunder

Part I

As communities were being settled in the Midwest, speculating men saw the need for providing those supplies which the pioneers could neither produce nor make. Perhaps something about the name of Good Thunder beckoned some of these speculators. Between 1871 and 1907, twenty-two men, some singly, some of partners, tried their hand in the general store business, a unique institution in a fast-growing village.

John G. Graham was the first to come. Early in June, 1871, according to Thomas Hughes in his *History of Blue Earth County*, John G. Graham "... moved his stock of general merchandise to Good Thunder from Garden City where he had been in business." He had built a one and a half story structure on the north side of Main Street at the corner of what is now Front and Main in Good Thunder. The upper level provided living quarters for the owner of the store.

A report in *The Good Thunder Herald* of January 1, 1896 conflicts with the historian as to the opening date. In an article entitled, "The Pioneer Merchant of Good Thunder," the report states that:

Mr. Graham opened his store on December 3, 1870 "... his first sales being ... a broom and a bar of soap ... His large emporium contains goods of every description, groceries, dry goods, boots and shoes, in fact anything that is usually found in a general store, and through square dealing and honest goods he has prospered and well earned a retirement from his active life."

This statement about retiring made in 1896 is interesting because his store is listed in the *Directory of Mankato and Blue Earth County* - both Shoemaker's and Polk Company's, up through 1904-1905. And according to the *Good Thunder Herald*, August 8, 1904, Mr. Graham sold "... his stock of business to M.E. Leverich of Mankato ... He has already taken possession of the goods in the present building."

Later in the same paper for October 10, 1904, is the announcement, "J.G. Graham has again made arrangements toward the disposal of his stock ... including the buildings, fixtures and hotel equipment, the purchaser being Mr. White of Amboy ... Whatever the problem was, Mr. Graham had not disposed of his store by April 17, 1905. In the "Herald" for that date is an announcement by Julius Kapoun and Company:

We wish to announce ... that we have just finished taking invoice after having closed a deal whereby we have come into the possession of the stock formerly

owned by C.J. Macbeth, generally known as the Graham Store. We have come to stay and wish to retain all the old customers.



John G. Graham, c. 1900.

But not any of the three men, Kapoun, Macbeth, nor Graham are listed as proprietor of a general store in Good Thunder in the *Directory of Business* for 1906. Perhaps speculators saw no need for another general store in Good Thunder. According to Rev. E.D. Neil, in his *History of Minnesota Valley*, published in 1882, "The village now contains four general stores."

In addition to Graham's, was a general store belonging to Fred Mann. A native of Wisconsin, in 1875, "Mr. Mann embarked in the mercantile business in Good Thunder and now has a prosperous trade," according to Neil. Shoemaker's *Business Directory of the City of Mankato and County of Blue Earth*, 1881, lists this general store under the title "Just and Mann." Mr. Mann must have taken a partner for his venture.

The third general store was opened by A.E. Ludke. According to Neil, Mr. Ludke, originally from Wisconsin, came in 1878 where he had been in business, "to Good Thunder and continued his business."

The fourth store, was that belonging to B.S. Hawes, who, the author states, "after farming in Beauford two years ... came to Good Thunder to set up his mercantile business."

These last two men, Ludke and Hawes, are listed in the *Business Directory* for 1881, but neither is listed in ensuing directories as proprietors of general stores.

During this time speculators in this business came and went, but one had the longest history of all: Wiedenheft. It seems as if it is only a decade ago that the sign "Wiedenheft's" was removed from the front of the brick building on the south side of Front Street.

Henry C. Wiedenheft, born in 1873 in Germany, came to Good Thunder in 1871, the same year Graham did, and established a boot and shoe business. According to the January 1, 1896, *Good Thunder Herald*:

Henry is an industrious, hard-working man ... Several years later (1883) he built an addition to his store and put in a full line of dry goods and groceries and is carrying on a large business assisted by his sons and daughters. Though not as pretentious as some of our other citizens, he enjoys the respect and confidence of the community and is getting a good trade.



Entrance to Wiedenheft Bros. Store, c. 1910. Left to right, unidentified salesman, Anna Wiedenheft, Gustave Wiedenheft.

Two of Henry's sons, Gustave and Otto, assumed management of the business in 1907. Helen Wiedenheft, daughter of Gustave, lives in Good Thunder. She clerked in the general store at one time and has vivid memories of how the merchandise was displayed and sold. She says, for example, they did not display lingerie items in bins or on racks, as they do now in some stores. "Bras, slips, panties, and corsets were all in individual boxes on the shelves." Other items on shelves in the clothing department were bolts of fabrics, and lace trimmings. They sold patterns, too. "I remember that," Helen says, "because we used the unsold ones in the out-house." Other clothing items included dresses, coats, hats, overalls, shoes, and hosiery.

In the grocery department, most items were sold by the bulk. Clerks sold vinegar by dispensing it from a barrel through a spigot into crockery jugs provided by customers. Clerks scooped sugar out of the bin behind the counter and sold it by the pound. With a wooden paddle, they ladled peanut butter out of a tub and weighed it into little waxed cardboard

"boats" for customers. Because there was no such thing as homogenized peanut butter at that time, the peanut oil would rise to the top of the tub. She recalls trying to stir it back into the batch. Sooner or later, though, Mr. Wiedenheft poured the oil into jars and shipped it to Chicago. "Whatever was done with it there," Helen says, "I don't know."

Helen recalls the large bunch of bananas that always hung near the front of the store. Clerks would take a sharp, hooked knife to cut them off for the customers. "Sometimes," she added, "we would find one of those big black spiders hiding in the bunch."

Cookies were not packaged now as they are in the supermarkets. Displayed in tiers of foot square cardboard cartons, and protected with lift-up glassene covers, cookies were sold by the pound, too.

As other general store owners did, Wiedenheft's "candled" eggs brought in by farmers to trade for merchandise. PIK (payments in kind) was a widely accepted practice in the general store. Sometimes farmers brought in a crock or two of home-made butter to trade for merchandise. At such time a clerk or owner of the store would put a sign in the window, "Mrs. _____ brought in fresh butter today," to alert the customers. Villagers were always eager to buy fresh, home-made butter.

Helen recalls that they even sold kerosene by the bulk. It was stored in a little building in back of the store. Customers needed kerosene for their lamps and stoves. In fact, everything that was needed to feed and clothe, to cook and sew for a family could be found in a general store.

Robert Wiedenheft, son of Otto, after working with his uncles for some time, took over the business in 1946. Later he was joined by his brother-in-law, Leonard Heuchert. With the sudden death of Robert in 1964 came the beginning of the end of his long standing general store.

Lucille A. FitzSimmons

SOURCES

Helen Wiedenheft, Good Thunder:
Thomas Hughes, *History of Blue Earth County*,
Good Thunder Herald, January 1, 1896, August 18, 1904,
October 10, 1904, April 17, 1905.
Rev. E.D. Neil, *History of Minnesota Valley Including the Explorers and Pioneers*.
Shoemaker, *Business Directory of Mankato and the County of Blue Earth*, 1881-1888.
R.L. Polk and Company, *Mankato City and Blue Earth County Directory*, 1892-1914.
Assistance by Alma Severson of Mankato is appreciated.