

Tour of Homes Thank You

We gratefully acknowledge the following members, friends, businesses and home owners who gave so freely of their time and talents to insure the success of the tour of homes.

Mr. & Mrs. Barry Koskovich	Daniel Burton
Mr. & Mrs. Mike Smith	Lucille A. Fitzsimmons
Mr. & Mrs. Art Petrie	Ken Gertjeansen
Mr. & Mrs. Don Wetzel	Jerry & Dillah Keenan
Mr. & Mrs. Larry Lageson	Nancy Croce
Mr. Jim Murray	Barbara Maher
Colleen Smith, Committee Chairperson	Patricia Lamson Jon Buscho
Verna Henry	Dave Lamson
Heidi Miller	Mr. & Mrs. W.D. Wessman
Gail Palmer	Brent Backstrom
Susan Monk-Kjos	Shelly Pestka
Barbara Lamson	Ora Ohlenkamp
Kris Higginbotham	Kevin & Kathy Wright
Anita Stone	Mr. & Mrs. Arnold Meyer
Lynda Ostrom	Marge Meredith
Mr. & Mrs. Ernest Hanson	Julie Schrader
Mr. & Mrs. Joe Kubicek	Jean Carlstrom
LaVonne Smasal	Mary Ann Monk
Hal Natvig	Penny Herickhoff
Muriel Penne	Bruce Johnson-Shine Way
Betty Cords	Darold's Flooring
Herbert & Leona Hanel	Deike Trux
Marvin & Garnet Nelson	Bretts Department Store
June Lees	Randall's Foods
Lorraine M. Wright	Energy Concepts
Jerry Solberg	Becky's Floral
Evelyn Schmanski	Save-Mor Antiques and Jewelry
Antonia Zaragoza	Iris Nigg
Dick & Susan Chambers	
Berniel Weight	
Phyllis Mullin	

Thanks also to the over 400 people who attended this exciting event and learned more about the rich history of Blue Earth County.

Tour Guides Needed

School children and other large groups who tour the Hubbard House and Carriage House do so with the aid of a tour guide, or guides. In order to accommodate all of the tour requests we are looking for guides. If you are interested in becoming a guide or have been one in the past, please call Shelly or Susan at 345-4154. We will hold a training session in September and will help you feel at ease in your role as a guide. Past guides at the Society have found it a rewarding experience. We look forward to an exciting fall tour season.

General Store

Wanted—craft items, anything that can be sold at our Fall Festival's general store on Sunday, September 13. Please start thinking ahead.

Curation Notes

Most people spend their summer months traveling, camping or relaxing at a lake. Fortunately for us however, one woman has chosen to devote the better part of her summer to aiding the Historical Society. Alma Severson, Mankato, is an avid genealogist who discovered that we have an abundance of Blue Earth County newspapers in our Archives, but not all of those are indexed for easy use. Since Alma's family roots lie in Good Thunder and the information she is seeking is contained in the Good Thunder *Herald*, she offered to spend her summer indexing that newspaper. By August, when Alma returns to her work of organizing local bowling teams, she will have provided a useful index to the activities and people of bustling turn-of-the-century Good Thunder. We thank Alma for giving the Society her time and talents on this project.

Membership

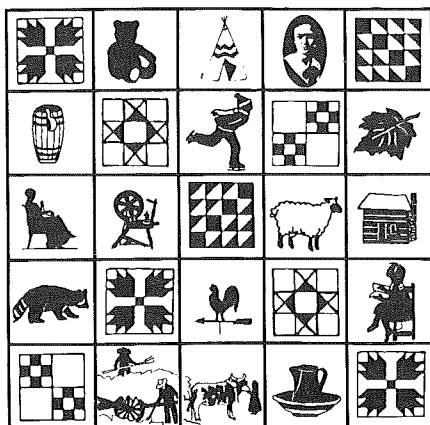
Welcome to the following new members

Mrs. Jael W. Ferguson	Annual
Larry & Barbara Schnoor	Couple
Michael & Cherryl Eigen	Couple
Ronald L. Affolter	Annual
Mary Ellen How	Annual

Thanks to the following members for donations to the Young Historians Program:

Mr. & Mrs. Ray Erlandson in honor of Mr. & Mrs. Ed McLean's Golden Wedding Anniversary.

Mr. & Mrs. Ed McLean on the occasion of their Golden Wedding Anniversary.



Blue Earth County
Historical Society
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Mankato, MN 56001
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BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

August 1987

Calendar of Events

July 30- August 2 August 7	Blue Earth County Fair
	Young Historians Program —"Plant uses, wild edibles, natural dyes", Williams Nature Center, lead by Jane Votca, Interpretive Naturalist at Hennepin County Park Reserve. Please call 345-4154 for reservations. Admission is free.

Notes from the Director

July was quite an exciting month at the Historical Society. First of all, we had a great float in the Bend of the River Days Parade. This was followed by a spectacular turnout at the First Annual Tour of Historic Homes. We sold nearly 400 tickets to persons from all over Minnesota and Iowa. Look forward to this event again next year.

The front and back porches of the Hubbard House have been fixed up and are awaiting a fresh coat of paint. The efforts of city employees and the Twilight garden club has resulted in the beautiful gardens outside of the Carriage House. If you haven't seen the color, be sure to stop by and bring your camera. A young Historians Archeology workshop was held on Tuesday, July 21 at Daly Park in Mapleton. Lots of children enjoyed an afternoon of being "Detectives of the Past." The next Young Historians program is scheduled for August 7 at Williams Nature Center where we will be tasting plants that grow wild in our area. Finally, I'd like to welcome Barb Maher of Mankato as Acting President of the Historical Society Board of Trustees. President, Chuck Piehl resigned from the board to accept a new and more time consuming position at MSU. Thanks to Chuck for his years of service to the Society. Barb had been Vice President of the Board and will serve as President through April 1988.

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Grasshopper Plague, 1873-1877

In the early 1870's, Minnesota was trying to recover from the Civil War and the Dakota War. Then came another blow. In the summer of 1873, hordes of Rocky Mountain locusts arrived on a wind from the southwest. They ate everything, although they especially enjoyed wheat. The following spring, the locusts' eggs hatched and there were more grasshoppers than ever. Farm families lost everything. People tried to help their neighbors, but not everyone was taken care of.

Farmers fought the insects with ditches, wet ashes, fires, canvas "hoppers," nets and pieces of steel smeared with tar. From 1873 through 1875, farmers made individual attempts to destroy the pests. They lighted smudge pots to keep them in flight; they deliberately set prairie fires to kill the insects. Some settlers captured grasshoppers in buckets or by hand or shovel. Many women tried to save their gardens by covering it with blankets or rags, only to see the garden, the blankets and the rags chewed up. Others burned straw or walked through the fields swinging ropes or shaking the plants to keep the insects from alighting. Chickens ate the insects, but it colored their eggs, giving them a bad flavor.

With the beginning of spring 1875, millions of locusts were swarming over the countryside. On June 3, 1875, the Blue Earth county commissioners met and passed a resolution offering 10 cents a quart for all grasshoppers caught and brought to designated places in each township to be destroyed. Farmers rigged sheets on light frameworks and pushed or pulled them by horses over their land, catching bushels of insects. Some of them as much as \$20 a day.

In three days, more than 4,000 bushels were caught and the county had paid \$14,000 in bounties. On June 7, the commissioners held a meeting and cut the bounty in half, but the farmers were still swarming the measuring places. On June 11, the commissioners cut the bounty to 60 cents a bushel. The next day, after having paid \$31,255.66 for 15,766 bushels and 18

quarts of grasshoppers, the commissioners withdrew the bounty entirely. It was estimated that each bushel contained an average of 130,000 insects.

In Mankato, the place receiving the locusts is where the Blue Earth County Courthouse now stands. A large vat of water was kept boiling, into which the locusts were dumped. Then they were thrown into a large trench and covered with dirt.

But still they kept coming and multiplying. Desperate by now, farmers dug trenches and filled them with tar, covered infected fields with a thin coating of dry straw, sprinkled brine over their fields and bought machines called hopperdozers. It was during the years 1876 through 1877 that amateur inventors worked up various methods for grasshopper killing machines called "hopperdozers." A hopperdozer required only a piece of sheet metal smeared with coal tar (or molasses, which was less effective, but cheaper and more readily available). Two people or one person with a horse could drag this device through a field. The forward motion forced the insects into a pan where they got caught in the tar. At the end of each row the pan was emptied into a fire.

None of these efforts helped much in lessening the



Cartoon depicting grasshopper invasion. In: *Roots, Agriculture* 1976 edition.

damages. The grasshoppers increased, the hopperdozing reportedly "thinned out" the grasshopper population in some places. The grasshoppers did their damage faster than they could be killed. People compared the sound of locusts eating to the roar of a prairie fire and the noise of a wild ocean in a storm. When they grew wings in the summer and took to the air, it was sometimes difficult to see the sun. The locusts traveled in such swarms that they could strip a countryside in a matter of hours. A St. Paul and Sioux Railroad company train, on July 18, 1876, was stopped by the locusts near Hersey in Nobles county. The wheels and rails had become so smeared by the locusts' bodies that the wheels slipped and had to be cleaned before the train could move on.

In February, 1876, the state legislature passed a bill appropriating \$15,627.83 to reimburse Blue Earth County for the bounties paid in 1875. Bills were also passed to help farmers pay for their seed wheat.

The plague, however, continued through another summer. All during the season farmers held conventions and meetings to discuss ways of fighting the locusts. In the spring of 1877, the locusts appeared to be as thick as ever. Finally, desperately, the people asked the governor to set aside a day of prayer. Governor John S. Pillsbury proclaimed April 26, 1877 as a day of fasting and prayer for deliverance from the locust scourge and comfort for the suffering. All business was suspended as though it was Sunday. Catholics and Protestants alike gathered in their churches. The Catholic church in Mankato extended the service for three days. Almost immediately, it seemed, the grasshoppers began to have trouble. Disease and rain began to dwindle their numbers. On June 10 there was a heavy frost. Finally, as soon as they had grown wings, they started to fly away. By August, 1877, nearly all of the locusts were gone.

Many people insisted that the governor's day of praying and fasting banished the grasshoppers. Some

say a storm dispersed the locusts and others say the locusts set out for a new supply of food.

References used:

Mankato Free Press, June 27, 1952
History of Blue Earth County, by Thomas Hughes
History of Minnesota, by William Watts Folwell
Harvest of Grief, by Annette Atkins
Bring Warm Clothes, by Peg Meier

The following article will be included in the new Blue Earth County Heritage book. The compilation of the county history book is now in progress. The purpose of this new book is to preserve the history of our county and the heritage of all families who live or have lived in Blue Earth County. Anyone interested in becoming involved in the project, providing information or old photographs, submitting family histories, etc. should contact Julie Schrader, 205 Ledlie Lane, Mankato, MN 56001 or call 507-625-8056.

Julie Schrader