

Congratulations



BECHS extends best wishes to former executive director, Susan Monk-Kjos and husband John on the birth of baby Andrew Martin Kjos. We are happy to report that mother and son are doing fine, and look forward to seeing Andrew at Young Historians in about eight years!

Volunteers

Welcome to our new volunteers, Winston Grunde-meier and Edith Hopman, indexing newspapers; Lois & Lawrence Barott, Teddy Ollerich, and Elmer Goodrich, Volunteer serving as Exhibit Gallery Aides; and Ryan Ihrke, performing artifact data entry.

Volunteer Opportunities

Program Director Jane Kolars is seeking volunteers for both upcoming Open House events. At the Holiday Open House she needs hosts, refreshment servers, and strudel sellers. For the January Open House, guides, greeters, and historical characters are being sought. Please call Jane Kolars at (507)345-5566 if you are interested in helping.

Membership News

-Mary Brown

New Members

Welcome to the following new members:

Ginger McCollum, St. Clair
Norb Harrington, Mankato
Fyrne Haugen, Mankato
Dorothy Schutt, Mankato
Katherine Frost, Mankato
Richard & Marion Lutes, Mankato
Linda L. Nussbaumer, Lake Crystal
Kristi Montandon, Mankato

Please Note: If we received your memorial, membership, or donation after the 15th of the month when our newsletter goes to press, your name will appear in next month's newsletter.

Remember BECHS for your Holiday Gift needs.

**HUBBARD HOUSE &
HERITAGE CENTER GIFT SHOPS**
open Tuesday thru Sunday, 1 - 5pm.

Historical books, Betsy-Tacy books,
Sandon collector's plates,
hand-crafted jewelry, quilts & novelties,
county maps, posters,
& many other gift items.

BECHS GIFT MEMBERSHIPS,
a perfect gift for friends & family of all ages.

Memberships begin at \$15 for students,
\$20 for individuals, & \$30 for families.

**GIFT ADMISSION TO THE
NEW HERITAGE CENTER MUSEUM,
THE HUBBARD HOUSE, OR BOTH**
Excellent stocking stuffers, or
an inexpensive way to express appreciation
to paper carriers, friends &
business associates.

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

Blue Earth County Historical Society
415 Cherry Street
Mankato, Minnesota 56001
(507)345-5566

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

December 1990

Calendar of Events

- Dec. 2 *Holiday Open House -- Hubbard House, 2 - 5pm.*
Dec. 24, 25 *Offices Closed beginning at noon on Christmas Eve.*
Dec. 31 *Offices Closed beginning at noon.*

BECHS Notes

Audrey Burmeister-Hicks

Seasons Greetings, Friends of BECHS!

Christmas came early to researchers who use the BECHS Archives/Map Room. Through the continued, generous support of the Mary Schultz Gray Estate and the Minnesota Historical Society we recently received microfilm copies of the *Mankato Free Press* for the years 1919-1945. We remind members that the Archives is now open Tuesday-Saturday. If one of your out-of-town holiday guests is interested in family history research, bring them to the Archives while you and the rest of your guests enjoy the new museum gallery.

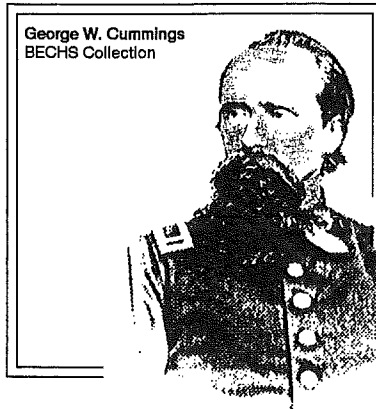
In 1990 BECHS achieved the long standing goal of providing the people of Blue Earth County with a showcase of their county's history. The Society also continued to provide the public with many opportunities to learn about their history through educational programs and projects. These achievements required the vision, creativity, and labor of many, many people. **On Sat., Dec. 8, at 6:00 p.m. BECHS will host a potluck holiday dinner at the Heritage Center for these very giving people. BECHS board, staff, program volunteers, archives volunteers and their spouses are invited and encouraged to come.** Roast turkey and a drink will be provided; we ask that you bring a salad, side dish, or dessert and your silverware and plates.

As another year passes into history, all of us at BECHS wish you and your family a happy holiday and a blessed new year!

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George W. Cummings, Man of Many Talents (& a Few Pranks)

Researching Blue Earth County Civil War veterans has lead me to some interesting characters, among them, George W. Cummings. He was born in 1832 in Pomfret, Vermont and immigrated to Blue Earth County in 1853, establishing a claim in Section 12, Garden City Township. Cummings was elected sheriff in 1853. From 1856 through 1858, he served as Clerk of District Court, Deputy Register of Deeds and as Deputy Clerk of the County Board. During these early years, Cummings earned at least part of his living as a druggist. He met and married Lucinda Hanna, daughter of James and Nancy Hanna.



At this time, communication from town to town on the frontier was via mail or word of mouth. News of the day was brought in by teamsters, immigrants or river boat captains. There was no telegraph or railroad. Current news of far-off events often took a week or more to reach Mankato.

On the night of October 16, 1859, John Brown and eighteen followers crossed from Maryland into Virginia and seized the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry. Local militia and citizens fought back the next day and recaptured most of the buildings, driving Brown and his men into a thick walled engine house. Colonel Robert E. Lee arrived that night in command of a contingent of marines. The morning of the 18th saw the marines assault the engine house, capturing Brown and his followers.

Subsequently, investigators found a suitcase full of letters from Brown's supporters which indicated wide spread activities in the North for the anti-slavery cause. Throughout the North, sympathizers openly spoke of Brown as a good man, who had perhaps gone a little too far. Virginia's Governor Henry Wise was enraged and speedily put Brown on trial for murder, treason, and insurrection. John Brown was found guilty on November

2, 1859 and sentenced to be hung on December 2, 1859.

On Saturday, December 3, 1859, George Cummings concocted a letter, with Ferd C. Roosevelt's help. They purported that the letter was from Mankatoan Basil Moreland, who was absent on a business trip to La Crosse, Wisconsin. Cummings dated the letter November 30, 1859 and gave its origin as La Crosse. The letter stated that dispatches had just been received telling of the rescue of John Brown by a crowd of 5,000 people and that Brown had been sent north via the underground railroad. The misguided missive further said that Virginia's Governor Henry Wise had been mortally wounded. Cummings added a message that two hours later another dispatch arrived stating that fighting had broken out in Charleston and that a crowd was attempting to free prisoners of the Harpers Ferry Raid.

This letter was handed to Isaac Marks, a prominent Mankato citizen, who just happened to be the landlord to John C. Wise, editor of the *Mankato Record* newspaper. Immediately, Editor Wise set to work printing an Extra edition of the *Record* covering the substance of the "Moreland" letter. Cummings and co-conspirator, Roosevelt, were in the print shop during this time in secret glee witnessing their prank in near full bloom. After the Extra was fully distributed around town, holding many citizens spellbound and stopping every activity, the truth leaked out.

Editor Wise was very angry at being the center of the hoax and extremely embarrassed. Cummings and Roosevelt claimed that they created the hoax to catch the editor of the *Mankato Independent*, but it backfired. Cummings made appropriate written and verbal apologies. Apparently Editor Wise was still seething from his injury when Cummings had a letter published on December 10, 1859, referring to the editor as applying the last bandage to his "mortal wounds." Cummings' efforts did soothe the injured feelings of the editor. On at least two later occasions, Editor Wise made short comments in his paper thanking Cummings for dropping off fresh pigeons or wild ducks. The community had their laugh and took the matter in stride. Time passed and the dark clouds of national conflict filled the horizon, with actual declarations of war in April 1861.

George W. Cummings was a man of action and soon found a unique niche recruiting volunteers for the First Company of Minnesota Sharp Shooters, which he joined as sergeant on October 5, 1861. Once the troops

THE MANKATO RECORD.

MANKATO, MINNESOTA, DEC. 5, 1859.

LOCAL MATTERS.

A HOAX.—On Saturday morning last, two of our *enterprising* citizens—Geo. W. Cummings and Ferd. C. Roosevelt—perpetrated upon this office what they may have intended for an innocent joke, but which proved to be of very serious import. A letter, purporting to be from Mr. Moreland, at La Crosse, and dated the 30th, representing that a dispatch had just been received that Brown had been rescued, and Gov. Wise mortally wounded, was prepared by them, and handed to a prominent citizen with the view of having it made public. It was brought to our office, and having the utmost confidence in the reliability of anything written by Mr. Moreland, and not for a moment supposing that Mr. Roosevelt would use Mr. M.'s name for such a purpose, in his absence together with certain things contained in the letter, we did not question its genuineness. Immediately we embodied the substance of the letter in an extra, which was hastily printed and circulated throughout the town.

moved to Washington, D.C., George commenced a long series of letters to the *Mankato Record*, leaving a permanent account of his impressions and soldierly hardships. On January 5, 1863 George transferred to the U.S. Army Medical Corps to avoid trouble after criticizing his officers in the letters he'd had published back in Mankato. Hospital Steward Cummings served at Mount Pleasant Hospital in Washington, D.C. putting his druggist training to good use. He also attended Georgetown Medical College and graduated in 1865 as a Doctor of Medicine.

Within the course of twelve years, George Cummings had worn the hats of homesteader, sheriff, county clerk, husband, druggist, prankster, soldier, columnist, hospital steward, medical doctor and even real estate developer (Cummings Addition to Mankato).

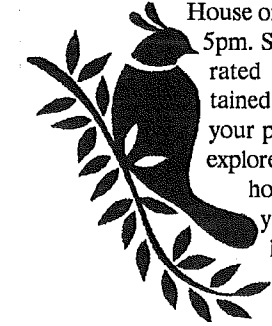
Roger A. Norland

Program Update

Jane Kolars

Holiday Open House

Plan to attend the Holiday Open House at the Hubbard House on Sunday, December 2nd, 2 - 5pm. See the Hubbard House decorated in holiday finery, be entertained by area choral groups, get your picture taken with Santa, and explore the gift shop for that perfect holiday gift item. Starting this year, BECHS will be offering home-baked strudel for sale. All proceeds will go to BECHS.



Non-Profit Organization Day

A big thank you to all who helped at the BECHS booth during **Non-Profit Organization Day** at the Mankato Mall, November 17. We sold Heritage Caramel Apples, BECHS memberships, and craft items. Thanks to Larry Harbo of Welsh Heritage Farms for donating the apples and to all who stopped by the booth for a treat.

Heritage Center Open House

Special plans are being made now to feature our new Museum at an **Open House for all Blue Earth County teachers, BECHS volunteers, and BECHS new members for 1990.** This event will take place on Tuesday, January 15, 3:30 - 5:30pm, at the Heritage Center.



For the Love of Betsy!

Mark Saturday, February 16, on your calendars and join us at the Hubbard House for an afternoon of Betsy-Tacy activities. **For the Love of Betsy** will include vignettes, entertainment and craft working. If you have any ideas for crafts or would like to help out at this event, please call Jane Kolars at the Heritage Center.