

Proclaiming a Day of Thanks

*Thanksgiving crowded Christmas when Alexander Ramsey, governor of the Territory of Minnesota, proclaimed, at the behest of a group of clergymen, Minnesota's first official day of thanks for December 26, 1850. The holiday was observed the day after Christmas for fourteen years until 1864 when President Lincoln set the last Thursday of November as the national Thanksgiving. The first territorial thanks day was marked by ringing bells at sunrise and sunset of the twenty-sixth. Special morning services were held in the churches. In the evening a "magnificent ball" was held in St. Paul at Mazowka Hall which a short time before had been equipped with "transparencies, paintings, pictures, and chandeliers in a style of superb elegance."
Our first Thanksgiving found a sparsely settled territory including all of what is now the State of Minnesota plus the Dakotas as far west as the Missouri River. The nine counties of the territory counted only a few more than 6,000 people. St. Paul was a frontier village with about 225 dwellings, while St. Anthony boasted only 115.*

The Beginning of Scope

By Bert Burns

The Blue Earth County Historical Museum has moved into its second century with an accelerated program of maintenance and repair. It has a new roof, a sturdily reworked wall, an up-coming paint job, porch and trim refurbishing on the outside and numerous newly plastered and papered rooms on the inside while a new furnace and gutters contribute vital mechanical stability. After decades of casual care, such largesse brings a spark of hope to the Grand Dame of South Broad Street and a feeling of expectation begins to permeate the premises.

Is it possible that the mansion may before long become the showplace it once was? Could the rich clutter of un-related displays be arranged in another spot? Might the wide rooms again be light and bright with the decor of earlier times? Can the Carriage House stand strong and trim, hosting a fleet of rejuvenated carriages, autos and sleighs?

What dream is this?

No dream. Rather, the beginning of hope.

It is hope sparked by the enhanced physical care given the mansion and by the steady flow of thousands of patrons during open hours and of late, kindled by the obvious pleasure of hundreds of people who have eaten ice cream on the lawn, listened to Sunday afternoon concerts under the great elms, tootled on the horns of vintage autos and marveled at the crafts and skills displayed in the mansion and the basement of the good neighbor across the street.

The hope is two-fold. In part, it anticipates a positive response from those hundreds and thousands, that they may have discovered their quiet dip into nostalgia represents an enrichment of their personal lives and a fuller community life through participation in a growing community resource.

As with many resources, full value comes only with use and development. At that point lies one of the major responsibilities of the Society.

The use is abundantly demonstrated by the 13,000 patrons who visit the premises throughout the year and by the acknowledged pleasure of the hundreds who enjoyed the recent Museum Sundays. The development must in great part come from those same patrons but in a new role--that of Society members. THEY ARE NEEDED AS DOERS JUST AS THEY ARE WELCOMED AS VIEWERS.

At that point lies the second and biggest part of the newly kindled hope--that the Society can expand its membership not alone as a service to the region but to bring their support to an enhanced use and development of the mansion and grounds.

This autumn and early winter, we begin an intensive membership drive. From it must come tangible support by which we may broaden the base of the organization to a degree that the Blue Earth County Historical Society becomes a viable and functioning regional, as well as community resource.

The editors are grateful to the many people who have made the second edition of this Newsletter possible. In particular, our thanks go to Mr. Southwick of the Mankato Area Vocational Technical Institute for his suggestions on so many practical matters connected with the printing of this issue. Ken Berg and George Weckman of the Free Press as well as Vern Bjerke of Mankato High School made possible the photocopying of microfilm material used on the front page, and for their time and effort, we are most indebted.

If you wish to contribute to the Newsletter or to make any suggestions, please write to the Editor at 233 Lincoln Avenue, Mankato, Minnesota 56001.

REPORTS

MUSEUM ACTIVITIES

By Pat Schwan

ACTION COMMITTEE

By Betty Cords

Our membership drive will be starting soon--save your pennies! Memberships are: Annual, \$5.00; Life, \$25.00; Patron, \$100 or more. We need your support. With Christmas creeping up, why not buy these as gifts for those hard to buy for?

Also, we now have available Cassette tape recordings of our music box at \$2.00 each--great stocking stuffers! Just call or stop in at the Museum.

Next fall our Society will be hosting the district meeting. We'll be setting up committees soon and would appreciate your help. If you're interested, call Pat Schwan at the Museum or Betty Lou Cords at 726-2744 around dinner time.

Our annual dinner meeting will be held Wednesday evening, January 10, 1973. At this time we will be taking a vote to see whether members of the Society would prefer the dinner meeting moved to April instead of January from now on.

As you know, we have a three-fold plan of renovation: 1) Renovate the Carriage House; 2) A separate Indian Culture Center; 3) Refurbish the Hubbard House as a home of that period. Jack Hodapp is head of the task force group that will set up committees to raise the money necessary to accomplish this. We need all the volunteers we can get. If you are interested, contact Jack at 388-5020.

The Museum is in need of the Polk's city directories, Mankato, and Blue Earth County for the following years: 1889, 1890, 1891, 1892, 1893, 1894, 1898, 1899, 1940, 1943, 1944, 1946, 1947, 1949, 1951, 1952, 1954, 1956, 1959, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971 and 1972. These directories are used by the staff for research in genealogy and for locations of buildings, etc.

Melva Meyers, a senior from Janesville, is working at the Museum fall quarter as a history intern. She is under a new program offered by the History Department set up for Museum-related interests training.

During Farmfest, we gave tours to delegates of eleven countries. An encouraging point in visitors to the Museum. More people from Blue Earth County are finding our Museum. We wish all towns in our County would realize it as their Museum, not just "that building in Mankato." We are here to serve all the population.

SOCIETY OFFICERS	
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A Look at the Past

In an attempt to find out more about local and county history, we thought it appropriate to begin the search by interviewing Dr. Anna Wiecking who is a life-time resident and long-time historian of Mankato. We called upon her in mid-September and spent a most enjoyable afternoon while Miss Wiecking reminisced about her childhood and about Mankato at that time.

Miss Wiecking's father came to America from a small town near Osnabruck, Germany. She spoke no English until she entered school - an interesting fact in that it demonstrates the close grouping of the various ethnic segments of the community at that time. Her first home was in the Shaubut building which stood at the corner of Main and Front Streets, but is no longer standing, and which also housed Mankato's Normal School for some time.

When asked about Mankato today and the direction the city is taking with urban renewal, she said she would like to see the present public library expanded where it now stands, and feels there are not enough parks for children and other people to enjoy. In particular, she wants to see the Museum park area saved.

Those who have read Sinclair Lewis' Main Street might be interested to know that part of it was written one summer, in either 1918 or 1919, while the author vacationed in Mankato. Lewis rented a house from Captain Baatty who was married to the grandmother of Katherine How (of the Free Press). The house still stands on Broad Street.

We are so glad that Dr. Wiecking's booklets on local history, As We Once Were, and Blue Earth County History from 1700-1900, are still available. Your editor thinks they would make excellent Christmas gifts (stocking stuffers for good children).

We are sure you would enjoy talking with Anna Wiecking. If you are half as lucky as we were, you will find her charming and will find she is full of information.