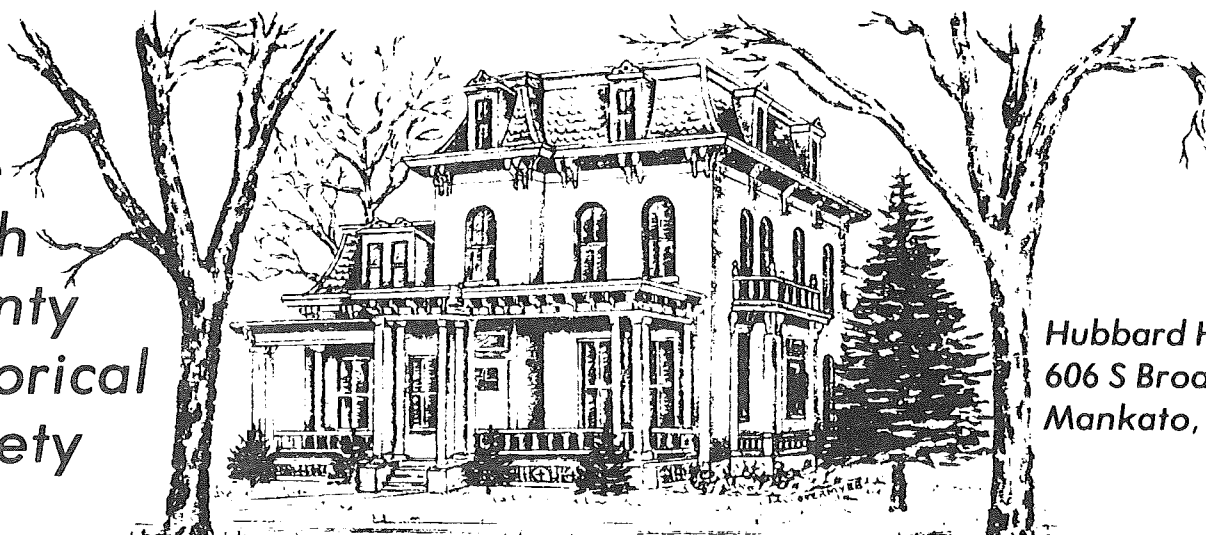


# Blue Earth County Historical Society



Hubbard House  
606 S Broad St.  
Mankato, Minn.

Volume 9, Number 3

## NEWS LETTER

October, 1980

### COMING EVENTS

NOVEMBER 5 - WEDNESDAY

TRAVERSE DES SIOUX GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY MEETING

Time: 7:00 pm

Place: Minnesota Valley Regional Library, Mankato

Program: Preservation of Newspaper Clippings, and

Using the Minitex Interlibrary Loan System.

Open to the Public. For more information, phone 388-7043

MUSEUM SHOP HOLIDAY BAZAAR - BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NOVEMBER 9 - SUNDAY

OPENING DAY TEA & ADVANCE SALE for MEMBERS & FRIENDS

Time: 2 to 4 pm +++++ Place: The Hubbard House

Music ++++ Refreshments ++++ Conversation

Open to the Public ++++ Restored Doris Car on Display

NOVEMBER 10 - MONDAY  
through

MUSEUM SHOP BAZAAR CONTINUES

Monday - Friday Hours, 10 am to 5 pm.

NOVEMBER 16 - SUNDAY

Saturday & Sunday Hours, 1 pm to 5 pm.

Place: The Hubbard House - 606 South Broad Street, Mankato

### NEW IN THE MUSEUM SHOP !

#### COUNTY CALENDAR.

Handsome appointment calendar  
with 13 drawings of county scenes  
by Lucille Sunderman.

An ideal gift! Price \$4.95

#### THE LINCOLN PARK ELM.

Commemorative Photograph by  
Peter Hornby. Autographed color  
photo, 12" x 16", ready for framing.  
Price \$7.50

#### SANDON HISTORICAL PLATE for 1980:

The Blue Earth County Courthouse  
Price \$12.50

## THEATER IN MANKATO

### A SKETCHY HISTORY IN TWO PARTS

by  
Jeanne Kress

A friend who takes an interest in my work at the Museum made the suggestion which led me to investigate the story of Mankato's theater. He gave me a lead to first-hand informants on the subject, Mr. Frank Manning, (who now lives in Saratoga, Florida), and his brother Clifford (Mankato), who as teen-agers worked as stagehands at the Mankato Theatre around the years 1912 - 1915. Our archives, I discovered, contain a wealth of source material, particularly two collections of original programs and photo brochures. One came some thirty years ago from Ferdinand Hoerr, whose father was among the founders of the Mankato Theatre. The other was given about two years ago by John Vogt, (now of Gladstone, Michigan), who also had worked as a stagehand during his high-school years, 1921 to 1924. Our newspaper collection was my third resource. Taken together, these materials and the Mannings' recollections furnish a vivid picture of a

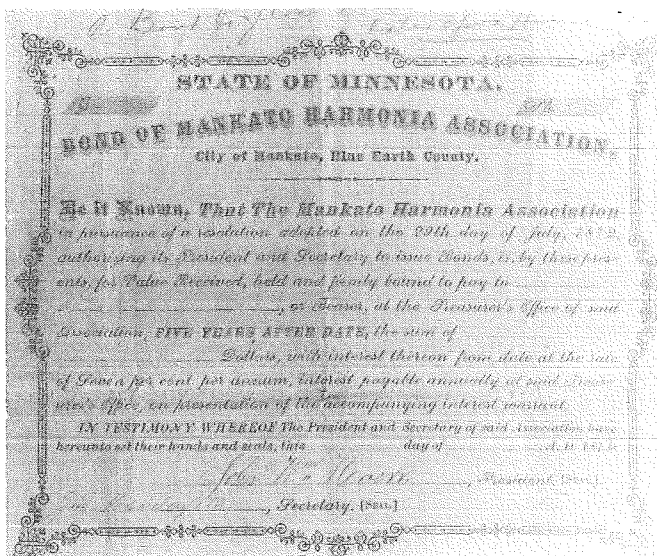
major feature in the life of Mankato over a timespan of more than half a century.

Mankato owed its Opera House-Theatre and its status as a regular stop on the theatrical circuits to the enthusiasm for culture of some of its German citizens. William and Jacob Bierbauer purchased the site in 1870 and transferred it to the Mankato Harmonia Association, a German singing society whose chief promoters were German businessmen and a German professor of music. This association laid the cornerstone of Harmonia Hall in June of 1872. Professor Neumaier's efforts to create a Mankato Academy of Music, backed by a stock company, collapsed in 1876. The same German businessmen who had been interested in the enterprise from the beginning then formed a new stock company. They were the Bierbauer brothers, William and Jacob, and Joseph Manderfeld, who were joined by J. G. Griebel (boots and shoes); Gottlieb Schmidt (Schmidt Saddlery); and G. Lulsdorff (tin and hardware). The seventh known stockholder was H. DuBuisson, married to one of Dr. Alvin G. Dornberg's daughters, and thus brother-in-law to both the Bierbauers. According to Thomas Hughes, they leased the building in 1878 to the Chambers Brothers (about whom no further information seems available.) They remodelled the hall as a playhouse and called it the Mankato Opera House, the name which lasted until 1893.

The fortunes of the Mankato Opera House fluctuated considerably during its early years. Satisfactory programming seems to have been a problem, amusingly reflected in a newspaper account of a performance of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" December 26, 1881. Dramatizations of Mrs. Stowe's story were a phenomenon of the 1870's and 1880's so numerous that they were referred to disparagingly as 'Tom shows'. In 1879, fifty such productions were on the road; and in the 1880's almost 500 were in operation. 'Local Brevities' describes the appearance of one such production in Mankato:

"The Boston Ideal Company played "Uncle Tom's Cabin" on the night of the 26th to a very large house. The day being observed as Christmas, the liberal advertising and the negroes, donkey, bloodhounds, all combined to attract a large crowd.

(Continued on Page 3)



#### BOND (BLANK) 1872

Issued by the Mankato Harmonia Association  
Signed by John Wm Hoerr & Jos. Manderfeld  
(Collection of Theater Memorabilia of  
Ferdinand Hoerr, in the Society Archives)

The hall was filled, even beyond the over-attendance at the Kellogg concert. Never before have we witnessed ...such a crowding assemblage." Some people who had reserved seats gave up and went home; the ushers were confused; and one-third of the audience had to stand, there being no room for them. "The drama was a new version ... bearing little resemblance to Mrs. Stowe's ... Apparently a cross between the Northern and Southern versions, and in sentiment and plot, (it) had little to recommend it. The characters of Topsy, Mark, Cute and Little Eva were well-sustained, but many of the best scenes were marred by want of numbers, the company being entirely too small, and some of the actors being obliged to take two or more parts. Altogether the entertainment was not up to public expectations." (Mankato Review, Jan. 3, 1882.)

Despite this particular example, productions of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" continued to be booked in Mankato. The season of 1894-95 offered "Davis' Uncle Tom's Cabin" and another unidentified version appeared during the season of 1919-1920. There were doubtless others, of which no record survives.

It is difficult to judge how consistently the theater was able to present professional productions brought in from outside, during its first decade. It was also used to a considerable extent for performances by local musical and theatrical groups.

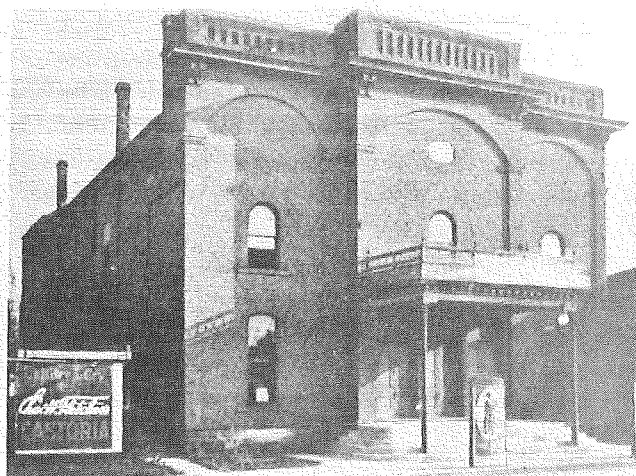
On the eve of one such cultural event disaster struck! A group of "ladies and gentlemen ... representatives of Mankato's best musical talent," headed by Miss Arietta Wagner (a music teacher), held a rehearsal in the building the evening of January 6, 1882, for a Grand Musicales scheduled for performance later in the week. After the rehearsal, a fire broke out that night, which destroyed all but the exterior walls of the Opera House. (Mankato Review, Jan. 3 and Jan. 24, 1882.)

After much effort by the business community and the news media, the owners (whose insurance barely covered their loss), obtained further financial backing,

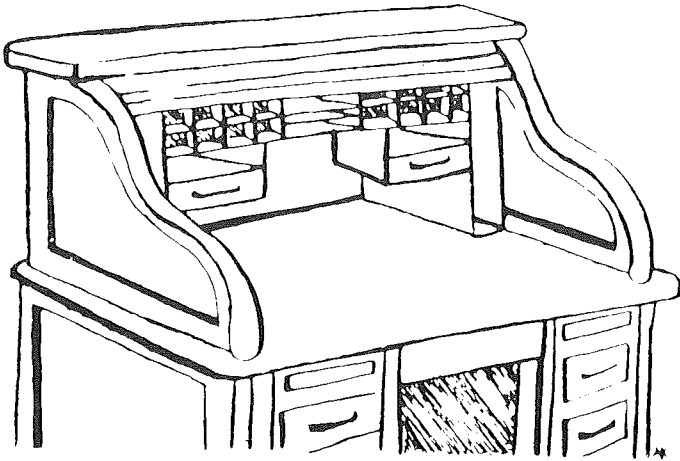
and rebuilding was undertaken in 1883. Though not entirely completed until June of the following year, the re-built theater seems to have been used for performances by the end of 1883. A printed program dated December 15, 1883, for a performance of "Dr. Bird's prize Romantic drama, 'Spartacus the Gladiator'," survives in the Hoerr Collection. (This production may have been a road-show version of a New York production of 1880.) And the Mankato Review of Jan. 29, 1884 notes a performance by 'local talent' to mark the re-opening of the theater.

(To Be Continued)

THE MANKATO THEATRE  
209 South Second Street



Surviving photographs of the Opera House - Theatre show the building as rebuilt after the fire of 1882. No photographs of the interior, re-modelled a second time in 1893, are known to exist. The actual date of this photograph is likewise unknown, but numerous copies of it existed. This one is from a print presumably loaned by Anna Wiecking for reproduction in one of Schuldt Printing Company's calendars. The same photograph was copied in the Mankato Commercial Club brochure of 1912, "Mankato - City With A Future".



No sooner had we gone to press last issue than we received notice that our federal grant was "on" again, though for a lesser amount of money. The Mankato City Council approved bids from Hobco, Inc., of Minneapolis, to repair and restore exterior woodwork on the Hubbard House and to repair the front porch. Hobco is an experienced restoration firm, and plans to complete the work this fall before cold weather sets in.

The County Parkette marker at the Irwin Williams farm in Judson, commemorating an area rich in the history of the Welsh churches of Blue Earth County, has now been completed and set up. This was a project long in the planning and execution stages. Even longer ago, the idea for a memorial at the site of the Sioux hanging was talked about. We have a bulging file of proposals, counter-proposals and plans for this marker, which was finally dedicated on July 10 of this year. It gives a factual account of the events leading up to the hanging. It is located on the grounds of the Minnesota Valley Regional Library. The bureaucratic wheels eventually turn, but oh, so slowly! Both markers were long overdue.

Word has been received that all the Blue Earth County sites nominated to the National Register, following a Minnesota Historical Society survey, were accepted and are now on the Register. Citizens of Blue Earth County have good reason to be proud of these sites.

Many thanks to all those who have contributed to our Endowment Fund, whose earnings will go towards Society operations. We still need many more donations to build up a fund large enough to make a major contribution to our expenses. Donations are tax-deductible, of course. Categories are as follows:

Friend of the Society --- up to \$199.

Supporter of the Society - \$200 - \$499.

Endowment Patron ----- \$500 and up.

Names of donors will be published each April and announced at the Annual Meeting.

Mankato State University's reception for new faculty members was held at the Hubbard House, Carriage House and Palmer Centennial Gardens the evening of September 10. Both the City of Mankato Park Department and Marge Meredith outdid themselves getting the lawns, shrubs and flower beds in shape for this event. The weatherman cooperated beautifully, and we have received "rave notices" from those who attended and from the University officials. Their donation covered the wages of employees on duty during the evening.

Jeanne Kress spoke to the Blue Earth County Extension Homemakers on the occasion of their initial fall rally September 15, in Mapleton. Her topic was "Our County's Heritage."

Donna Sandon's 1980 historical plate - The Blue Earth County Courthouse - is now on sale in the Museum Shop. This is a handsome plate and a fine addition to the Sandon series.

We have received a good response from our members, telling us what they are going to bring for the Bazaar or making a financial donation. If you have tucked your questionnaire away, please get it to us in the mail soon. This helps us to plan our sale space, which, as you know, is extremely limited.

And please do attend the Opening Day Tea, Sunday afternoon, November 9, from 2 to 4 pm. Bring your friends! An exciting addition to the festivities will be the display in the Carriage House of the Society's antique Doris car (or more accurately, "horseless buggy"), built in the late 1890's. Fred Cords and others

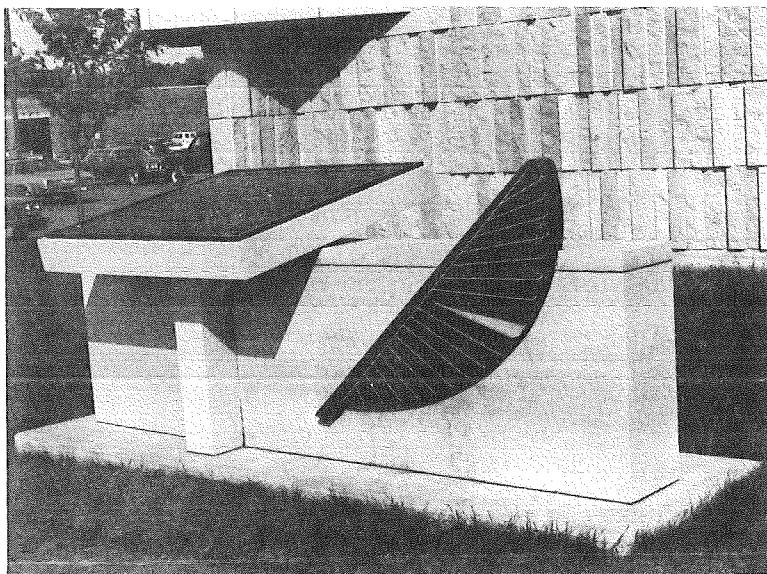
(Continued on Page 5)

of the Minnesota Automotive Company have worked very hard to restore this vehicle, and we are proud to show it to you. Lack of permanent display space unfortunately means that after that Sunday it will go back into storage. We need our new Museum !!

Your director was elected to a two-year term on the board of the Southern Minnesota Historical Assembly at the annual meeting held at the Waseca County Historical Society September 20. The Assembly encompasses 17 counties and one community historical society, and extends from Winona and Houston on the east to Brown County on the west.

Two Board members have announced their resignations. We surely appreciate all the work that Audrey Annis has done for the Society. Her unexpired term has been filled by Fern Rosenquist, also of Mapleton. Barry Van Sickle has also resigned, as he will be moving from the area. Kelly Reuter of Amboy will fill his unexpired term.

All of us who work at the Hubbard House appreciate so much the gift of a carpet for the Parlor, from Bert and Inella Burns. The old one was so badly worn that it was disgraceful. Our gift carpet is a lovely rich red, and improves the appearance of the room ever so much!



MEMORIAL MARKER  
REGIONAL LIBRARY, PIKE & MAIN STREETS

We are sorry that there will be no fall bus tour. Timing and personal factors just would not permit. A beautiful tour is planned for next spring. We'll keep you posted.

We were saddened at the death of Wallace Harris, a fine old gentleman who had lived in the Cambria area for many years. He had helped us many times with information about Cambria and the Welsh. Most recently he assisted us in providing former Congressman Ancher Nelsen with background information for a July 4th address in Cambria. Wallace was the author of two books: "The Fourth of July Celebrations in Cambria" and a genealogy of the Harris family.

A special treat for me was attendance at the afternoon session of the Minnesota - Iowa annual Gymanfa Ganu. Those Welsh surely can sing! The First Presbyterian Church in Mankato was filled to the doors with hymn singers. If you couldn't attend, the two sessions were recorded and will be broadcast on WCAL at 9:30 am, on Thanksgiving Day.

October 5th was a busy Sunday. The Sibley County Historical Society observed their 40th anniversary with an Open House in Henderson; the Cambria Presbyterian Church celebrated their 125th anniversary with special church services, dinner together and an afternoon ceremony. They have published a booklet on the history of the six Welsh churches which combined to become the Cambria Presbyterian Church. It is on sale for \$4.00.

A third event of this Sunday was the YWCA Walking Tour of historic houses in the Mankato downtown area now used commercially or as public buildings. Of course the Hubbard House was on the itinerary!

See you at the Bazaar and Tea!

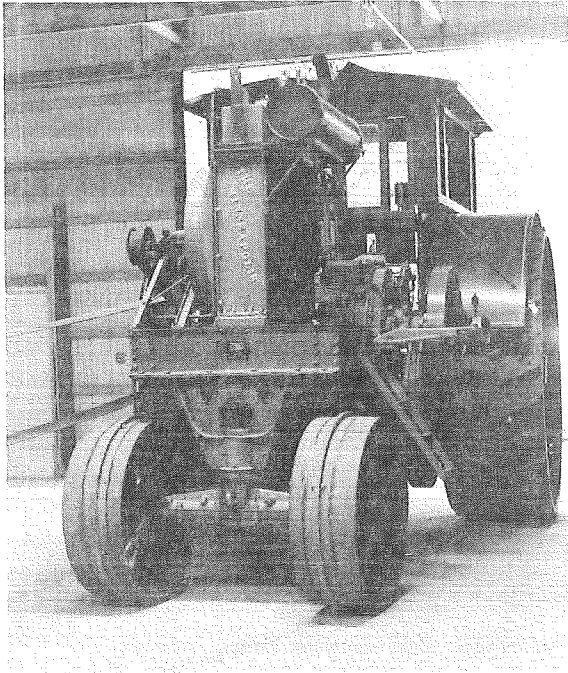
Marcia T. Schuster



## BLUE EARTH COUNTY'S AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE

### TRACTOR

MINNEAPOLIS THRESHING MACHINE CO.



This machine, the largest in Hiniker's collection, was built in 1922, the original design being from 1912.

Horsepower: 35 on drawbar, 70 on belt.

Fuel: Kerosene.

Weight: Twelve tons.

The 121st Blue Earth County Fair at Garden City was the occasion for the formal opening of a new permanent Agricultural Heritage Building on the Fair grounds. For a number of years members of the County Agricultural Society and the Historical Society have considered the possibility (and the desirability) of a building to house and display the large antique farm implements which they own, but have not been able to care for properly, for lack of suitable space. The Board of County Commissioners has been favorable to the idea, and over the past year, the prospect of including the large and fine collection of machinery belonging to John Hiniker and John Klaseus in a permanent display further influenced the Commissioners to grant funds for this project of the two societies. The building was erected and some 16 tractors from Mr. Hiniker's collection moved to it just in time for the Fair. Also, machines belonging to the Historical Society and up to now stored by courtesy of various members, were brought to the new building, where they can remain, along with others belonging to the Agricultural Society. They will be kept there to form a permanent display illustrating the history of agriculture in Blue Earth County.

A formal opening ceremony took place Friday, August 8, at which Mr. Hiniker cut the ribbon and the Commissioners officially turned the building over to the representatives of the two societies.

### CUTTING THE RIBBON

August 8, 1980

Left to Right: Commissioners Lester Anderson and Robert Hodapp; John Klaseus; John Hiniker; William Gardner, President of the Blue Earth County Agricultural Society; Commissioner David Stevens; Marcia T. Schuster, Historical Society Museum Director; and Ernest Hansen, President of the Board, Blue Earth County Historical Society.



## HISTORICAL SOCIETY FAIR EXHIBIT

Taking advantage of this fine new facility, Board member Dean Pettis organized displays to acquaint the fair-going public with the work of the Historical Society and also the Traverse des Sioux Genealogical Society (of which he is chairman). In this he was greatly assisted by Board members Mary Dooley and Ernie Hansen. The displays included an automatic slide showing of the Blue Earth County National Register sites (machine courtesy of Mary Dooley and the Mankato State University Geography Department); a large wall map of the county in 1879 (again provided by Mary Dooley); and other wall displays prepared with the aid of Tim Sullivan, of Wick-Kagermeier-Skaar Architects, Mankato.

Others who aided with the project by loaning equipment and manning the display area throughout the week were other mem-

bers of the Historical Society, the Genealogical Society and the Lake Crystal Historical Society: Mr. and Mrs. Earl Miner, Mrs. John E. Norman, Mrs. Ellis Norman, Mrs. Lloyd Hollingsworth and Nancy R. Reinhardt, all of Lake Crystal; Mrs. Peder Kvamme, North Mankato; Audrey Annis, Board member from Mapleton; Mrs. Ernest Hansen, Garden City; and John Burton, Mankato. In addition to assisting, Lyle Hohenstein of Vernon Center contributed the flowers which graced the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The exhibit received considerable attention, and, Dean feels, was a worthwhile effort. The guest book was signed by 1,449 people. Of this number, 290 gave a Mankato address; 808 gave addresses in the rest of the county; and 233 were from other places in Minnesota. There were 45 visitors from 14 states other than Minnesota, and four from three foreign countries. Sixty-nine signers gave no address, and many people visited and observed the display, but did not sign the book.



### THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S THANKS FOR MEMORIALS RECEIVED TO:

RUTH PALMER CONFER  
GEORGE LAURISCH  
MRS. SAM WALTON

### WELCOME !!! NEW ANNUAL MEMBERS:

PHIL and NOEL KENDALL  
MARGARET R. PRESKA

### NEWSLETTER of the BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Published four times a year by the Blue  
Earth County Historical Society, at  
606 South Broad Street, Mankato, MN 56001  
Editor Jeanne D. Kress  
Free to members of the Historical Society  
Annual subscription (4 issues) - \$ 3.00

ATTENTION !!  
SOCIETY MEMBERS!

ANNUAL  
MUSEUM SHOP BAZAAR

and

OPENING DAY TEA

SEE  
COMING EVENTS  
and  
DIRECTOR'S ROLLTOP

NEWSLETTER  
BLUE EARTH COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
606 South Broad  
Mankato, MN 56001



Address Correction  
Requested

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U. S. POSTAGE PAID  
Mankato, MN. 56001  
PERMIT NO. 343

JEANNE D. KRESS  
ROUTE 6, BOX 440  
MANKATO  
A

MN 56001

#### NEW HANDBOOK OF BLUE EARTH COUNTY

The Board of Commissioners of Blue Earth County has just published a 45-page handbook describing the organization of county government, the functions and duties of county officials and the services provided by the various departments. It includes maps showing the election districts, a summary of county finances and a directory of county offices.

Ms. Betty Barta, Information and Education Co-ordinator for Human Services, was in charge of editing and publication. The brief historical introduction was prepared in consultation with the staff of the Historical Society.

In view of the great expansion of county services and facilities which has taken place in the past few years, the publication of this well-organized and comprehensive handbook is in itself a valuable service to the citizens of Blue Earth County.

The handbook is available at the County Auditor's office, at City Hall and at the Chamber of Commerce. Copies are also available here at the Museum.

#### CENTURY FARMS IN BLUE EARTH COUNTY

The Minnesota State Fair Board and The Farmer magazine recognized a number of farms in Blue Earth County as "Century Farms" this year. This designation goes to farms which are at least 50 acres in size and have been in continuous family ownership for at least 100 years. Farms belonging to the following persons were recognized in Blue Earth County:

Lillian (Mrs. Edward) Boehland, Mankato, (1866); Bowen, Deopere, Lloyd Farm, Lake Crystal (1877); Paul Evans, Lake Crystal, (1867); Herbert Kraus, Garden City (1864); Oliver Luhning, Amboy (1873); Harlan Marble, Good Thunder (1865); Delmar Preston, Janesville (1866); Edgar Rabenhorst, Mapleton (1878); Arnold Schuster, Minnesota Lake (1880); Roger Williams, Mankato (1856).

#### CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF AMBOY

Amboy, Minnesota - A Heritage Rooted in Rural America, by Kelly Dethloff Reuter, (1979), is now in print.

Mrs. Reuter has graciously given us a copy for the Museum Archives.

Her book is available at:

"The Villager" in Amboy - price \$12.95, or by mail order to her, Box 31, Amboy, MN, 56010 - price \$14.00, postage and handling included.