

Blue Earth County Historical Society



Hubbard House
606 S Broad St.
Mankato, Minn.

Volume 9, Number 2

NEWS LETTER

July, 1980

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ENDOWMENT FUND TO BE ESTABLISHED

An Announcement from the Board of Trustees
of the Blue Earth County Historical Society:

At a recent meeting the Board of Trustees of the Society decided to establish a permanent Endowment Fund. Income from the fund will be used to finance Society activities.

Donations (tax-deductible) in any amount are requested.

Gift-giving categories are:

Friend of the Society - - Up to \$199

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

Endowment Patron - - - - \$500 and Up

Contributions may be made to:

ENDOWMENT FUND

Blue Earth County Historical Society

606 S. Broad Street, Mankato, MN 56001

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THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S THANKS FOR CONTRIBUTIONS and MEMORIALS RECEIVED

Memorials to:

Barbara Graham
Mrs. Jared How
Frank Monroe
Mrs. Agnes Nichols

Contributions from:

Le Ray Township
Mapleton Township

Special Donation for the Newsletter from:

Dr. and Mrs. Dean C. Wykoff

IN MEMORIAM

Ruth Palmer Confer (1888 - 1980)

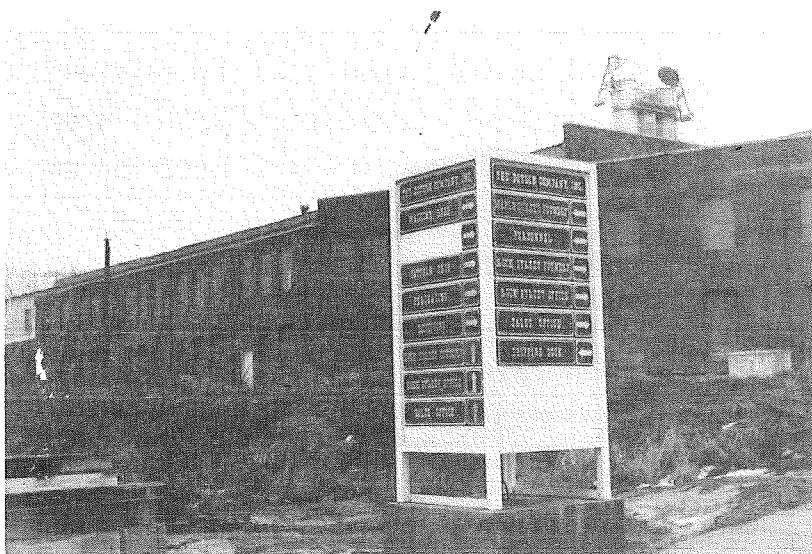
The Board and members of the Historical Society offer their condolences to the Confer family on the death of Ruth Palmer Confer. Mrs. Confer, a long-time friend and benefactor of the Society, took particular interest in recent years in the Society's restoration projects.

The Confer family has requested that memorials to Mrs. Confer be made to the Hubbard House Restoration Fund.

THE STORY OF A MANKATO INDUSTRY ++++ PART II

The history of the present-day Dotson Company, which spans almost one hundred years, can be divided into three parts, if the successive names of the enterprise are used to mark the stages of its development. The first period belongs to the Mayer Brothers, Louis and Lorenz, "Founders and Machinists", who began in 1891 with a small foundry behind their father's blacksmith shop on North Front Street and built a business which by the first decade of the 20th century was one of the largest enterprises in Mankato, both in terms of volume of business and number of men employed. The story of their most important machines, Louis Mayer's famous "Little Giant" power hammer and his gasoline-powered tractor, (also a "Little Giant"), was sketched in our Newsletter of April, 1980.

THE DOTSON COMPANY PLANT - 1980



This view shows the side of the original building at 126 West Rock Street, dating from 1902, of which the front part (out of view to the right) continues to be used as the main office of the Dotson Company, with the same address as in the Mayers' time. The long portion, seen here, will house the non-ferrous metals foundry now located on Third Avenue. In Mayers' time it was the machine shop.

The Mayer Brothers' era came to an end in 1915. They had borrowed heavily in developing the tractor and then attempting to mass-produce it. Financial failure brought loss of ownership. The enterprise was taken over by their creditors, principally the First National Bank of Mankato. The name "Little Giant" became the identification for a re-organized company, whose officers were George M. Palmer and William D. Willard (respectively president and vice-president of First National), and John Nyquist, owner of an established retail clothing business, who also seems to have had extensive investments in various Mankato enterprises.

They selected as general manager one O. M. Hatcher, apparently an outsider, who was hired to salvage the investments of the new owners.

Hatcher managed the company until 1923. During these years, the American economy underwent drastic fluctuations, and the Little Giant Company had its share of the problems of the time. The stimulus given to industrial production by World War I brought increased demand for the Little Giant power hammer, but in the post-war years this apparently was insufficient to counterbalance the financial problems which Hatcher had inherited from the Mayer Brothers. He attempted to increase production of the Little Giant tractor, (by all accounts an excellent machine for its time), but was not able to finance the necessary plant expansion. He left the company in 1923, and was succeeded by another "outsider", Leonard J. Fazendin, brought from Ontario, Canada by George Palmer.

The name of the business remained the same, as did the owners and officers, but the arrival of Leonard Fazendin marked the beginning of a new stage of its development. Finding the company "hopelessly insolvent," (Draft History, p. 14), he undertook to improve its finances by cutting its operations to the bone. He discarded the ambitious projects of the Mayers'

last years, which Hatcher had attempted to keep going. The Little Giant tractor was the first casualty of this program of retrenchment.

Fazendin then concentrated on making the foundry the principal aspect of the company's operations. In abandoning the earlier efforts to develop and produce complete machines, he foreshadowed the trend of future developments in American industry - specialization in the production of components for the assemblers of finished products. Beginning in the late 1920's Fazendin kept the Little Giant Company in business by making and selling plumbing supplies through the subsidiary Fuller Company.

The owners of the parent company left its affairs to Fazendin as manager. George Palmer, the president and principal stockholder, was the one officer who seems to have taken some interest in it. In 1936 Palmer's arrangements for retirement from an active role in business affairs (he was 80 years old) included selling his interest in the Little Giant Company to

THE MANAGEMENT & OFFICE STAFF, 1946



LEFT to RIGHT: Leonard Fazendin, Gerald A. Dotson, Sylvia Piddie, George Hodapp, Louise Rindelaub, Elaine Landgren and Lyle Ulman. This picture provides a link with the Mayer Brothers' time, in the person of George Hodapp, and with the development of the company down to the present: Mr. Ulman, the present office manager, recalls that he started work in 1941 as Employee No. 30. Today the company roster numbers 276 employees.

THE MAPLE STREET FOUNDRY



This view, looking in the opposite direction (westward) from Dotson's sign, shows the new building in which the iron foundry is located. The black mass in the foreground is a pile of coke, just dumped from the semi-trailer at the extreme left. In the center of the picture are the cupolas, with their air pollution control equipment, which was installed in 1972. Dotson was the first foundry in the state to be certified for meeting air pollution control standards.

Fazendin and Charles R. Butler of Minneapolis (then owner of the Mankato Free Press), who bought the assets of the company for \$10,000.

This combination lasted only a short time. Butler sold his interest to Fazendin, who thus became owner as well as president of Little Giant, Inc. During the bleak years of the Great Depression the enterprise was (in the words of its future owner, Gerald Dotson) reduced to "a primary machine repair shop with a plumbing supply business." (Draft History, p. 15). In these years Fazendin's chief aide was George J. Hodapp, secretary and sales manager, who had been with Little Giant since the days of the Mayer Brothers. Ole Dedrickson, a long-time production employee, said that in the 1930's the company consisted of three men: Fazendin, Hodapp and himself. (Draft History, p. 16).

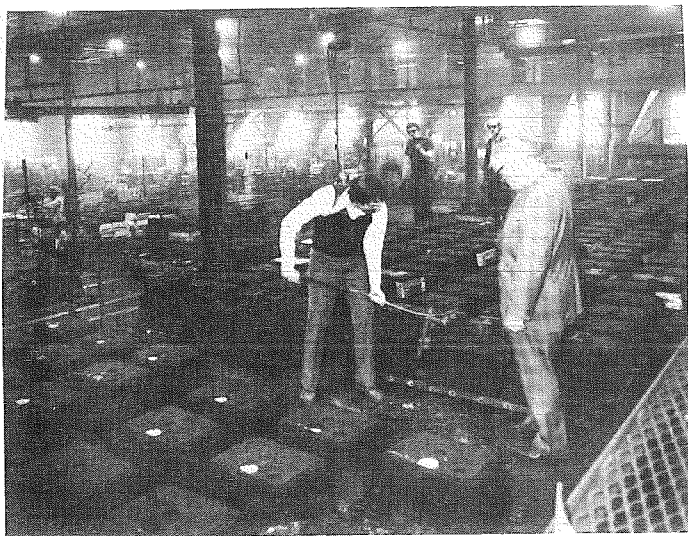
(Continued on Page Four)

STORY OF AN INDUSTRY - PART II (Cont'd.)

Fazendin's tenacity enabled him to maintain a solid though limited production base, which could be expanded in response to the tremendous upsurge in the American economy brought by World War II. The Little Giant power hammer became a standard item in government war contracts; and demand for components of military equipment led to the leasing of additional foundry facilities, those of the old Mankato Manufacturing Company and of the Satre Company of Faribault.

The war years also saw the addition of a new name, which marked the continuation of the enterprise as a family business. In 1943 Leonard Fazendin's son-in-law, Gerald A. Dotson, came to Mankato to become a partner in the ownership of the business. He shortly took over the management of the foundry portion of the Little Giant company, which was incorporated as the Dotson Company. The machine shop kept the name Little Giant. This partnership lasted until Fazendin's death in 1955. By this time the Dotson Company's growth and reputation in the foundry industry outweighed the machine shop operation, and the name Little Giant became a parenthesis.

INSPECTING MOLDS IN THE MAPLE STREET
IRON FOUNDRY



Dennis Dotson (left) joined the company as vice-president in 1973 and became president in 1976, when his father, Gerald A. Dotson, retired. (Mr. Dotson died in 1978.)

During twenty years (1953 - 1973), Gerald Dotson concentrated on the development of the foundry enterprise. His primary interest was to produce high-quality castings for an increasing number and variety of customers. In pursuit of this objective Dotson continually investigated improvements in metallurgy and production technology and expanded and modified his plant in order to utilize them.

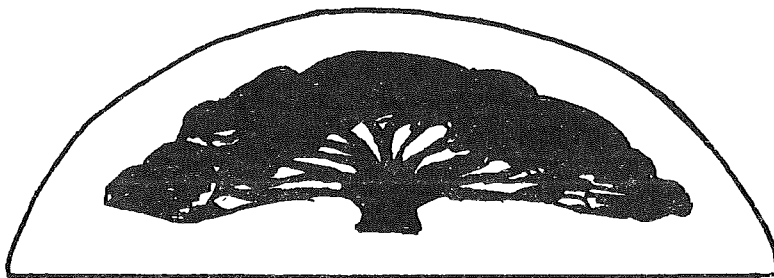
To supply improved parts for agricultural machines (30% of the company's business) a ductile iron foundry was built in 1967. This expansion had been preceded in 1960 by the establishment of a separate foundry for non-ferrous metals (aluminum and bronze), in response to the interest of a long-time local customer, Kato Engineering. A pattern-making department and a laboratory for quality control of metallurgical processes accompanied these changes.

In the words of his son Dennis (now president of the company), Gerald Dotson's emphasis on meeting (and even anticipating) customers' needs, combined with his great interest in technological improvements, built the enterprise "from a small 'shovel' foundry, pouring only gray iron, to one of the largest, most modern foundries in the area. Today, after making the patterns, we can supply our customers with fully machined castings in any one of five metals." His further statement reflects the distinctly American concept of an industrial enterprise as a constantly expanding and improving service to customers: "We will continue expanding - our goal is to be known as the major supplier of quality castings in the Midwest." (Dotson People News, February, 1980.)

The history of this Mankato company provides a vivid illustration of the dynamics of the American economy in all its fascinating complexity.

Jeanne Kress

(I am obliged to Mr. Dennis Dotson, Ms. Jean Bye and Mr. Lyle Ulman for the use of a draft history of the three companies, newsletters & photographs, as well as information obtained through conversations. Any misinterpretations or errors are my responsibility. - Jeanne Kress.)



GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH AT THE BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM

Blue Earth County people who are interested in tracing their roots can frequently find information in our Museum archives. Of course we do not have official records of births, marriages and deaths. For these one goes to the County Courthouse. Records of property transfers are also there. This kind of information provides the trunk and branches of the family tree. But for putting leaves on the branches, the materials we have may be helpful.

The starting point for investigation is our collection of obituaries published in Mankato newspapers, mainly the Mankato Free Press. It is not complete, because in earlier years the collection depended on the varying interest and attention given by successive curators to keeping this kind of information. There are large gaps, but the obituary files contain notices from the late 1800's down to the present. In the past ten years a consistent effort has been made to keep all obituaries from the Free Press and also from the other county newspapers. Clipping the Free Press is part of the Museum archivist's job. We are indebted to Eunice Owens for checking the county papers. Another volunteer, Evelyn Weisgram, spends many hours indexing the clippings.

Other indexed materials are our collection of biographical clippings, which includes notices of 25th (and later) wedding anniversaries, birthdays (80th year and higher), and notices of election or appointment to positions in Blue Earth County governments, businesses, schools and churches. Other items in this category are recognition of social service and professional achievements of individuals in the county, and activities of local social and service organizations and their members.

Our collection of newspapers, principally the Mankato Review, the Free Press and the Blue Earth County Enterprise

(Mapleton) - 61 bound volumes - is a mine of material for the years between the 1880's and the 1920's. There is an extensive name and subject index of this collection.

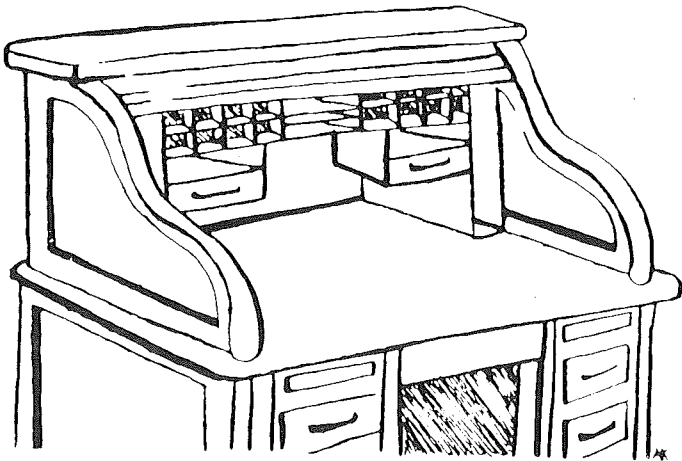
Special sources of information on earlier residents are Thomas Hughes' notes of information he collected for his History of Blue Earth County, which goes by the title Old Settlers' Stories, and the biographical sketches which he composed every year from 1912 to 1934 about members deceased during the year, which were read at the annual meetings of the Old Settlers' Association. These are indexed.

The business directories of Mankato and Blue Earth County are a means of tracing histories of individuals and families - where they lived and for how many years, by whom they were employed, or what businesses they owned or operated. The Museum's collection lacks only one volume (1890) of the entire series of Shoemaker's and Polk's directories of Mankato and Blue Earth County from 1872 to 1977.

Atlases are another source of information on family history, particularly useful in tracing the ownership of farms. Older atlases list the owners of particular parcels by township and section, and show the location of buildings - useful when one is trying to identify old houses.

Another kind of information on which we can make a start is service in Minnesota units of the Union Army in the Civil War. For this we refer to the semi-official state history, Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, which lists servicemen by regiment (or special unit) and company, gives length of service, rank, and where mustered in and out of service. Using this history is quicker than writing to the National Archives, though not as definitive from the genealogist's point of view.

(Continued on Page Seven)



Summer is here and tourist season is upon us. If the high price of gasoline is keeping people from travelling, there is little evidence here. Since the first of June we have had visitors from California, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Colorado, Missouri, Iowa, Louisiana, South Dakota, Kansas, Texas, New York, Oklahoma, Washington, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Alabama, New Jersey, Michigan, Alaska and Virginia; from all parts of Minnesota, of course; and from England.

A fine souvenir remembrance of Blue Earth County will soon be available in the Museum Shop - the County Calendar. It is an engagement calendar, usable in any year, with lots of space to write appointments and notes. It is illustrated with Lucille Sunderman drawings of Mankato and county scenes. Her fine drawing of the Hubbard House appears on the cover. The probable sale price is \$4.95. Consider this for gifts to former residents, for the "person who has everything", or buy one for your own use. (This is a major money-raising project for the Society.)

One of the nicest anonymous letters we have ever received came in our mailbox the other day. To quote: "Hi! I was walking past your place last night and discovered three baby bunnies, cuter than heck, apparently living in the entranceway to your basement on Warren Street. I don't know exactly where, 'cause I didn't want to disturb them. Don't suppose there's much you can do to protect them, but thought you might like to know anyway"

Garden Clubs from southern Minnesota met in Mankato recently and toured several

gardens, including our own Palmer Centennial Place. The Mankato Park Department personnel outdid themselves, sprucing up the grounds. Society members Marge Meredith and Anita Owens, with assistance from fellow members of the Twilight Garden Club and the Mankato Rose Society, devote hours of hard work each month to planting and maintaining our flower beds. We all appreciate and enjoy very much the efforts of these people.

As of this writing, our June rummage sale cleared \$471.04, which included cash donations from eight persons and donations of sale items from 19 persons. This is below last year's proceeds. Thanks to all who contributed time, money and goods!

Our fall Museum Shop Bazaar is planned for November 9-16. Start working on your handcraft items now, so you will be ready by November. We will be sending you full details later on.

One sad note - federal grant funds for starting restoration on the exterior woodwork of the Hubbard House were eliminated with President Carter's budget cuts. Historic preservation programs were nearly devastated, whereas other federal programs were cut as little as 10%. We wrote to the President, the Secretary of the Interior, our two Senators and our Congressman, protesting the uneven budget cutting. Our project (along with 29 others in Minnesota) remains in limbo until they decide whether or not we are entitled to funding.

The Historic St. Paul bus trip was most enjoyable. The company was good; the sites visited were most interesting; the tour director jovial; and a good time was had by all! Plan to join us for our fall tour.

Our special thanks to the Dotson Company for the gift of the bronze markers to be mounted on the Hubbard House and the Carriage House. They are handsome indeed! The Robert Carlstrom Construction Company has promised to mount them for us, which we hope can be done soon.

Thanks also to the Mankato Garden Club for the gift of the four planted urns on our front steps, and to Mrs. Bloom and Mrs. LeDuc, who did the planting. The flowers are so bright and cheerful!

(Continued on Page Seven)

DIRECTOR'S ROLLTOP (Cont'd.)

Congratulations to Denise Otto and Jody Erickson, who were married in the Outdoor Room on June 28.

May 1981 will find us celebrating the 65th anniversary of the incorporation of the Historical Society. Did you know that we are the fifth oldest county society in the state? Plans now are to have a special Open House, along with some anniversary exhibits.

Marcia T. Schuster

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A CORDIAL WELCOME TO:

NEW LIFE MEMBERS:

Margaret C. Buck
Scott Parker

NEW ANNUAL MEMBERS:

Michael Flaherty
Audrey Hicks
Lorie Johnson
Ruth C. Martinson
Phyllis M. Mullin
Mrs. Florence Peterson
Fern Rosenquist

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NEW IN THE MUSEUM SHOP

TWO ADDITIONAL VOLUMES in the BETSY-TACY SERIES:

Heaven to Betsy (1945)
Betsy in Spite of Herself (1946)

Reprints of the original editions, with illustrations by Vera Neville. Price \$2.95 each.

COLORING BOOKS published by the MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY:

Dakota Indians Coloring Book
Ojibway Indians Coloring Book

Drawings by Chet Kozlak. Descriptive captions in English and Indian languages, prepared by Indian people. Price \$1.75 each.

GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH (Cont'd.)

Sometimes we can furnish photographs of people's ancestors! We have a partial index of our photograph collection; and the numerous photographs of individuals and groups printed in some of our old atlases are also indexed.

We do not have copying facilities at the Museum, but we can supply xerox copies of most materials in the collections. We also can supply typed copy of items from the bound newspapers and from manuscripts, which are too fragile to be xeroxed. Copies of photographs also can be ordered.

Hours for research at the Museum are 1 - 5 pm, Tuesday through Friday. Because of our limited staff, the Archives are not open on Saturday, Sunday and Monday.

Though we are not specialists in genealogy, we are always ready to assist anyone researching family history. We enjoy the search, and any success in finding information for you is one of the pleasures of working at the Museum.

Jeanne Kress
Staff Archivist

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The PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH of CAMBRIA will celebrate the 125th anniversary of its founding in October. Special observances are set for the first Sunday of the month, October 6, 1980.

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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!

ENDOWMENT FUND
DRIVE!

SEE PAGE ONE

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



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RECENT ACCESSIONS + + JANUARY to JUNE 1980

1. Clothing: Young Children's Summer Garments and Woman's Swimsuit. 1930's. Donor Unknown.
2. Clothing (Infants' Garments) and Hand-made Accessories; Lacework; Crochet and Tatting; Hairwork Ornaments. Photographs and Tintypes of the Lucas Troendle Family and the family of Dr. C. J. Beise and Louise Troendle Beise. Gift of Mrs. Edward L. Todd, Reno, NV.
3. Spray of Forget-Me-Nots (artificial). Decoration used at the memorial service for Maud Hart Lovelace at St. John's Episcopal Church, Mankato, MN, on March 17, 1980. Received from Marion Schaefer Anderson.
4. Baby Garments which belonged to Robert and John Alan Berquist; Wedding Outfit and other Dresses of Jennie Fletcher Berquist (Mrs. John Alan Berquist). Gift of Mr. Robert Berquist, West Branch, IA.
5. Artifacts and Memorabilia of the Troendle and Beise Families. Gift of Mrs. Edward L. Todd, Reno, NV.
6. Clothing: Two Wedding Dresses (1881 & 1917), Shoes, Gloves and Infants' Garments. Gift of Mrs. Douglas Sharp, Mankato.
7. Parlor Ornament, c. 1900 and Montgomery Ward Catalogues, 1915 & 1918. Gift of Mr. Thomas Mathews.
8. Photographs found in the house of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Geisler, 627 West Second Street, Mankato.
9. Mankato City Directories: 1973, 1975 and 1977. Gift of Mr. Arnold Meyer, Mankato.
10. Kitchen Utensils; Toy; Lace and Crochet Findings. Gift of Emma Wiecking, Mankato.
11. Forget-Me-Not Pin. Ceramic, hand-painted c. 1910 by Mrs. Evan Hughes (Amy, sister-in-law of Thomas Hughes) for a member of her Sunday-school class. Gift of Georgia Enfield Schultz and Chandos Enfield.
12. Hunting Costumes, early 1900's. Gift of Mrs. Linley Barnes, Mankato.
13. Wedding Dress worn by Bertha Swan at her marriage to Dr. Frederick Brandenburg Dec. 12, 1887; Shawl, Parasol and Gloves of Mary Kenworthy Swan. Gift of Mrs. William F. Drake, Gladwynne, PA.
14. Photographs relating to the William Wittmers Family and Mankato Scenes and Events. Gift of Mrs. William Wittmers, Mankato.
15. Materials relating to the Piano Harp invented and manufactured by James R. Mackenzie, first patent 1875. Gift of Dr. Emory J. McKenzie, Ottawa, Kansas.
16. Campfire Girls' Gowns, Beads, etc., from period of May Fletcher's leadership of the Mankato Council of Campfire Girls. Gift of Mrs. Florence Storm, Mankato.