

Blue Earth County Historical Society



Hubbard House
606 S Broad St.
Mankato, Minn.

Volume 9, Number 1

NEWS LETTER

April, 1980

COMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

- APRIL 16 (WED.) ANNUAL DINNER AND BUSINESS MEETING of the
BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
PLACE: Mr. Rene's Banquet Hall - 119 S. Front Street, Mankato.
TIME: Dinner - 6:30 pm ++++ Program - 8:00 pm.
SPEAKER: Dennis A. Gimmestad, State Historic Preservation Office,
Minnesota Historical Society
SUBJECT: National Register Sites in Blue Earth County
DINNER: \$7.75 per person. Please Make Reservation. (Form Enclosed)
NOTE: Both Dinner and Program are Open to the Public.
- APRIL 29 (TUES.) MANKATO STATE UNIVERSITY FACULTY RESEARCH LECTURE by
SUSAN LASSMAN-SMITH, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR of SPEECH & THEATER ARTS
SUBJECT: COSTUMES IN EARLY BLUE EARTH COUNTY, 1860-1900
PLACE: Performing Arts Center Theater
TIME: 4:00 pm.
- MAY 17 (SAT.) BUS TOUR: HISTORIC ST. PAUL
ITINERARY: See Director's Rolltop, Page 8.
SCHEDULE: Leave Mankato 8:00 am; Return 5:30 pm.
COST: \$13.00 per person. Includes bus fare, catered brown bag
lunch and Ramsey House admission fee.
- MAY 26 - 31 BROWN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY 50th ANNIVERSARY OPEN HOUSE
PLACE: BROWN COUNTY MUSEUM - 27 N. Broadway, New Ulm, MN.
TIME: Regular Museum Hours: 1 - 5 pm, Monday - Saturday.
- JUNE 7 (SAT.) SECOND ANNUAL BENEFIT RUMMAGE SALE
PLACE: Hubbard Carriage House (rear) - 604 S. Broad St., Mankato.
TIME: 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. SEE: Director's Rolltop, Page 5.
- JUNE 28 - JULY 7 WHISTLE STOPS TRAVELING RAILROAD EXHIBIT and PROGRAM of the
WASECA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
PLACE: Minnesota Valley Regional Library - 100 E. Main Street,
TIME of SPECIAL PROGRAM: To be Announced. Mankato.

THE STORY OF A MANKATO INDUSTRY ++ PART I

Searching for information about "unknowns" in the Museum collection - specifically tools invented by local people - I became aware of how many things, from hand corn planters to flour-milling equipment, were invented and manufactured in Mankato over the past 100 years. The item which intrigued me most was the Little Giant trip hammer. When I asked the Dotson Company (successors to the original manufacturers) for information, I was overwhelmed by their generous response in supplying me with material. Realizing how little I (and probably most other people) know about the history of our industries, I attempted to follow through the story of this particular enterprise, which has been an important part of our economy for so long, and which gives a vivid picture of the dynamics of private enterprise during the past century. This is only the first half of the story; the rest will follow in the next number of the Newsletter.

THE MAYER BROTHERS



LOUIS, LORENZ and CONRAD

The three very young men in this photograph by the Mankato photographer August Blissenbach were the sons of Laurence (Lorenz) Mayer, a German blacksmith who came to Mankato in 1871. There is no record of the date and no indication of names on the picture.

It is tempting to suppose that the photograph might have been taken in 1891, when the brothers "started a little machine shop on Vine Street and Front." (Semi-Centennial History of Mankato, 1902.) The man on the right may be Louis, the eldest, born in Germany in 1867. The man in the center would then be the second brother, Lorenz, born in 1874, with Conrad, the youngest in appearance and age, at the left. Louis would have been twenty-four years old at the time, and Lorenz seventeen or eighteen. The date of Conrad's birth was not included in the information available to me.

THE MAYER BROTHERS FOUNDRY
About 1905

This photograph shows the establishment at the time of the Mayers' greatest prosperity. The long two-story building at the left was built in 1902, at 126 West Rock Street. The small front section contained the office and the vault, and also the drafting room. The rear two-thirds of the building was the machine shop. The building in the center, originally the City Mill of W.H. Rockey, was bought by the Mayers in 1901 and rebuilt to be their foundry. Also in 1902 they built a new structure to house the boiler works. (Upper right corner.)



STORY OF AN INDUSTRY (Cont'd.)

A certain continuity can be traced through several periods of different ownership. The Mayer Brothers, Louis and Lorenz, "Founders and Machinists", in business from 1894 to 1915/16, experimented in producing many complete machines - tractors, ditchers, road graders, potato pickers and more, as well as the Little Giant power hammer. Financial failure forced them out and led to the formation of the Little Giant Company, with major creditors George M. Palmer, W. H. Willard and John Nyquist as company officers. A long period of retrenchment followed, with first O. M. Hatcher and then (1923 on) Leonard J. Fazendin as general managers.

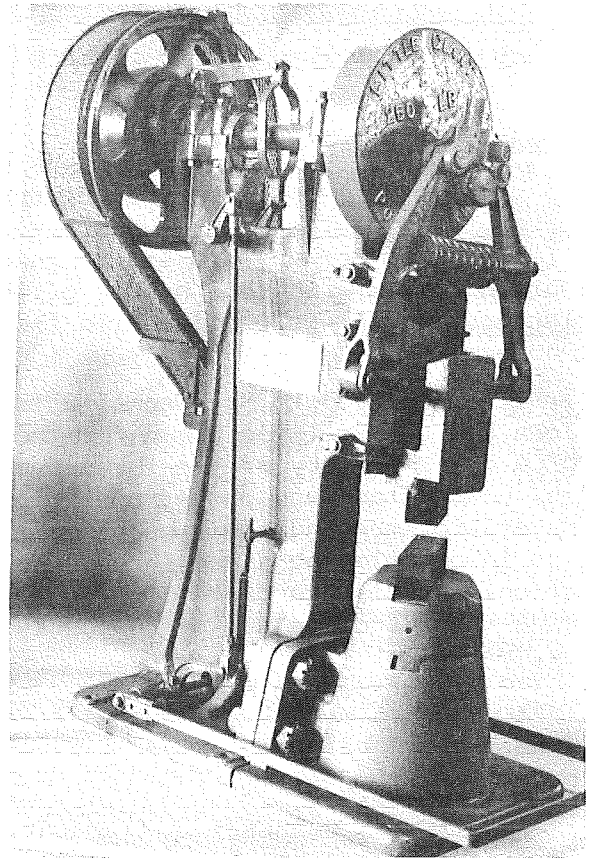
(Continued on Page 4)



A "LITTLE GIANT"
Of the Mayer Brothers' Period

THE LITTLE GIANT TRIP HAMMER

Louis Mayer invented and began manufacturing this famous power hammer in 1895. It became the Mayer Brothers' most successful product. Its reputation made it the one Mayer invention which was retained throughout the years after the brothers lost control of the business in 1915. The greatest demand for it came in the time of the two world wars. For a while during the first war, it was being produced at a volume of over 100 machines per month. When Leonard Fazendin became manager of the Little Giant Company, an improved model of the hammer was widely advertised and continued to be a mainstay of the company's business. Again during World War II, demand for it greatly increased, as it was adaptable to the manufacture of all sorts of components needed for war equipment. For three quarters of a century it was the standard for this type of machine tool. Government contracts in wartime specified "Little Giant or equal." Today the Dotson Company still makes Little Giant power hammers, but they are basically a custom item. I was told that about eight are on order at present.



A LATER MODEL:
THE "LITTLE GIANT" OF WORLD WAR II TIMES

It closely resembles a drawing of the improved hammer produced in the 1920's, when Leonard Fazendin was in charge of the Little Giant Company. (Free Press, 1928). (Both photographs Courtesy of the Dotson Company).



Note From the Editor:

It proved impossible, for reasons of space, to cover the further history of the Little Giant Company and its successor, the Dotson Company, in this number of the Newsletter. It will be continued in the next number.

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 and photographs of the Mayer brothers and their machines, as well as information obtained through conversation. Any misinterpretations or errors in using these sources are my responsibility.

Jeanne Kress

WELCOME !!!!!

New Annual Members:

Linda Abbott - Dent, Minn.
Jeanette M. Hanson - Arcadia, Cal.
Arthur R. Small - Danvers, Mass.

New Patron Members:

Mr. & Mrs. Irwin Williams - Mankato
(Former Annual Members)

Louis Mayer began designing this machine in 1911, and the company was producing it for sale by 1914. It had a thirty horsepower four-cylinder engine; gears (three forward speeds, two reverse); dual ignition; a battery and auto steering which enabled the driver to handle it with one hand. It was powerful enough to draw six fourteen-inch stubble bottom gang plows at a time, but being all steel, light enough to use only two-thirds of the gas and a fourth of the oil required by other tractors of the time.

The Mayers' unsuccessful efforts to mass-produce the tractor were a major cause of the financial difficulties which ended with their losing control of the business to their creditors (chiefly the First National Bank of Mankato) in 1915. The first manager of the re-organized Little Giant Company, O. M. Hatcher, attempted to increase production of the tractor, but was not able to finance the necessary plant expansion. Little Giant could not compete with companies such as Ford, which were equipped for mass production. Therefore the Little Giant tractor continued to be basically a custom-order item. Leonard Fazendin discontinued making it when he became manager of the company in 1923.

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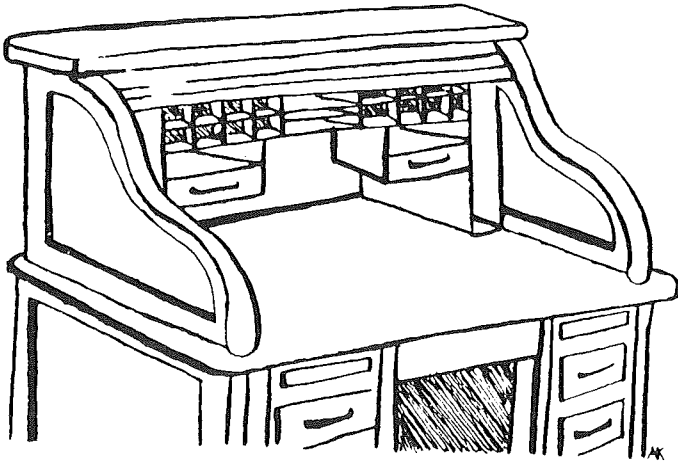
IN THE MUSEUM SHOP
NEW "MINNESOTA ORIGINALS"
by

LUCILLE SUNDERMAN

OLD TIME SPORTS - 4 scenes
BETSY-TACY PLACES - 4 scenes

Eight Notes with Envelopes - \$2.50

We also have the first four volumes of the Betsy-Tacy series (paperback) at \$1.95 a volume.



Spring has come to Deep Valley! This was Maud Hart Lovelace's name for Mankato in her famous Betsy-Tacy stories. We've been especially aware of her presence, in all the preparations for the unveiling of the Betsy-Tacy mural in the Lovelace Wing at the Minnesota Valley Regional Library, and the impressive dedication ceremony itself. This was a very memorable event, only to be followed shortly by word of the author's death in California and the memorial service here in Mankato. She leaves a rich legacy for all of us.

We were especially pleased that her daughter, Mrs. Merian Kirchner, found time to visit the Museum when she was here for the dedication. She wanted some of the Betsy-Tacy notepaper - a new item in the Minnesota Originals line, by Lucille Sunderman, which we now carry in the Museum Shop.

We are looking forward with great pleasure to our annual dinner and meeting April 16, when we will see and hear about the sites nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. Several Society Board members attended the session of the State Review Board which met to pass on these applications. We were all very proud of the wealth of historic sites in Blue Earth County. It is truly impressive to see all these structures in a group. Dennis Gimmetad of the Minnesota Historical Society made a fine presentation to the committee; and it is this presentation, amplified somewhat, that he will give at our annual meeting. Be sure to send in your reservations.

Janice Krueger Brown, former intern, tour guide and weekend receptionist at the Museum, has been hired by the Waseca County Historical Society. Congratulations, Janice! One project she is working on is their Whistle Stops Travelling railroad exhibit, which will be shown at our Regional Library from June 28 to July 7. This will depict our state's railroad heritage. One feature will be "Conversations with Railroaders," who will share their experiences with exhibit visitors. Watch the Free Press for further information.

The Museum's second annual rummage sale is scheduled for June 7. Save your antiques, rummage and good miscellany (NO CLOTHING!) for us. You will be notified later when to bring your contributions to the Museum. This is one of our money-raising events to augment the annual budget.

Grant money has been received from the Minnesota Historical Society to go towards restoration of the exterior woodwork of the Hubbard House. Since we are a National Register site, there will be federal funds to supplement this. We expect that the work will be completed this summer.

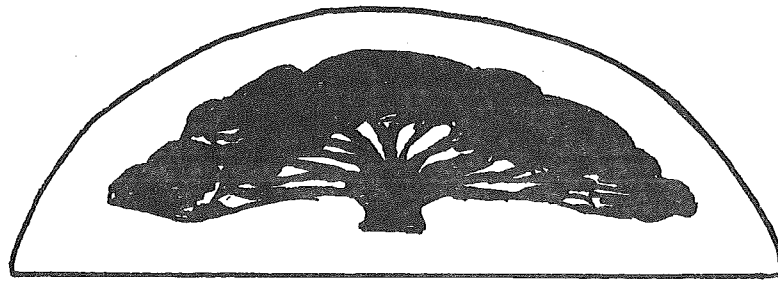
We were very sorry to learn of the resignation of Dave Sears, Mankato's Superintendent of Parks and Forestry. (We are a "park" under the City of Mankato system.) Dave was a fine gentleman to work with, and we were sorry to see him go.

The Blue Earth County Commissioners will build an Agricultural Heritage Building at the County Fairgrounds in Garden City this summer. This will house the Society's large agricultural equipment, now in storage, and the Fair's antique farm machinery. We are looking forward to getting our equipment out of storage and on public display again.

The County Commissioners, an architect and a committee from the Society Board are exploring the possibilities of erecting a new museum for the Society. We will keep you posted about any developments.

I had the privilege of representing the Society and the Traverse des Sioux

(Continued on Page 8)



FAMILY TREE

Members of the Historical Society and other readers too will be interested to know that two of our Board members are among the leading spirits of the local genealogical group. Dean Pettis and Mary Dooley graciously furnished your editor with information about their activities and the possibilities for people in the area to engage in genealogical research in connection with their group.

GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH IN SALT LAKE CITY

By Dr. Mary Dooley

If you've worked on your family tree for any length of time, someone has probably suggested that you go to Salt Lake City to use the library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. First reactions are usually "But my family never lived in Utah," or "I don't have any Mormons in my family." You should go there anyway.

The Mormon church maintains the largest genealogical library in the world, and they make it available to non-Mormons free of charge. Why have they collected all this material? To fulfill one of the responsibilities of their religion. Mormons believe that one must be baptized in the Mormon church to go to heaven. They also believe in baptism of the dead. So, in order to bring together in heaven their relatives who are deceased, they collect evidence of the family relationship. That information is presented at the temple and a baptism is performed, plus other ceremonies "sealing" the members of the family together. The deceased individuals who are baptized then are eligible to enter the Mormon heaven if they wish to do so. Seven and a half million family group sheets submitted by Mormons for these ceremonies are on file at the library. You might find that some unsuspected Mormon cousin has done research on your common ancestors.

The Mormons have committed large sums of money to gather source material. Standard family genealogies are purchased, as well as local histories and published vital records. In addition to printed source materials, they have accumulated

and made available in the library over a million reels of microfilm. The church has a large number of microfilming crews working in many different countries, copying vital records, wills, land records, church records - anything that might be used to trace family connections. Most of their activity so far has been in the eastern United States and in western Europe, although records from other parts of the world have been filmed also. The master reels are stored in a series of vaults in the nearby mountains; they are presumed to be safe from natural disaster or from bombing.

Gradually information from the microfilm is being processed into the computer. About once a year information is printed on a set of microfiche cards which greatly assist in locating sources of information which will be of most help to the searcher. The microfiche cards are available for use at Salt Lake City and at many branch libraries sponsored by local Mormon churches, two of which are in the Twin Cities and one in Rochester. Reels of microfilm can be borrowed through inter-library loan for use at the branch libraries, though there is a charge for this service.

Last year and this, Mankato State University has sponsored a week-long tour to the Salt Lake City library. People who go must register for credit at Mankato State and participate in some class work; however, much of the time is spent in researching individual family trees. If you are interested in being notified of such tours in the future, please write Dr. Mary Dooley, Department of Geography, Mankato State University, Mankato, MN, 56001.

TRAVERSE DES SIOUX GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

By Dean Milton Pettis

A small but dedicated group of family historians, otherwise known as genealogists, has been meeting on a regular monthly basis, sharing bits of information and experiences that are helpful to each other in tracking our ancestors. We benefit from individually acquired facts, pass along helpful hints on research in certain areas, and sometimes, with a broader base of knowledge, solve frustrating problems.

Our meetings are held the first Wednesday of the month, alternating at the homes of our members. In this manner books, maps and research materials can be shared for mutual benefit. The informality of our gatherings and our enthusiasm have prevented the stuffy meeting syndrome. At this point we require NO dues - refreshing in this age of inflation and rising living costs! We do not discriminate; and we have members of all ages, both men and women, beginners and more advanced researchers. Ancestral connections in Blue Earth County are not required.

Our unofficial name (not yet voted on by our members) is Traverse des Sioux Genealogical Society. That name is appropriate for this area, as the treaty of 1852 opened up 24,000,000 acres to settlement for our white ancestors.

We have been asked to become more visible to the public. In order to do so, we hope to sponsor a class on beginning genealogy for the budding family tree climbers of this area.

Pep talk here! Each person has a unique ancestral background; and finding out about our heritage is our constant hope and goal as we retrace the paths our forefathers took through time. Genealogy is more than simply finding out about long-deceased ancestors. It is a combination of history, social studies and geography. The more research that is done to uncover the past and bring it to light, the more meaningful and colorful the lives of our ancestors become.

We welcome anyone who is interested to attend our meetings. Our members are willing to share with others and help them get started on an interesting and educational pastime. No special skills are required to become a family tree climber - just a desire to know more about your roots.

Group Contact People are:

Donna (Mrs. Daro E.) Larson
207 W. 6th St., Mankato. 345-6778

or

Dean Milton Pettis
320 Fulton St., Mankato. 388-7043

As we grow in numbers, we plan to work on projects which will be useful to other genealogists. We hope to publish a newsletter for members and other historical and genealogical societies, so that our group will be better able to communicate and share and grow.

Dean Pettis

NEWSLETTER of the BLUE EARTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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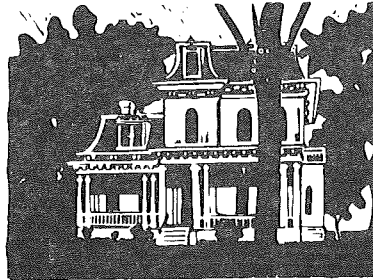
ATTENTION
SOCIETY MEMBERS :

ANNUAL MEETING

APRIL 16

INFORMATION
and
RESERVATION FORM
ENCLOSED

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



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Address Correction
Requested

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S ROLLTOP (Cont'd.)

Genealogy Group at the Farm Women's Forum March 18 - a regional meeting attended by 400 farm women. A most interesting day, especially the workshop on Rural Women's History. We wanted to make these women more aware of the opportunities offered by area historical societies.

Our spring bus tour will take us to Historic St. Paul on May 17. Bert Burns will lead the group again, and an interesting time is guaranteed. Notices will be sent later. You will be seeing the Minnesota Historical Society and its special farm life exhibit; historic Summit Avenue; the Alexander Ramsey House; Irvine Park; the Landmark Center (formerly the Federal Court Building); and the mushroom caves along the St. Paul river front. Mark your calendars for May 17.

A reminder: When you are making your will, a legacy to the Society will enable you to make a lasting contribution to the community.

Our thanks to those who have renewed their annual memberships. In order to save on postage, membership cards and receipts will not be mailed unless requested. It is your continued support which helps keep us operating. If you have not yet sent in your renewal, please do so.

See you all at the Annual Meeting, April 16!

Marcia T. Schuster

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S THANKS
for

CONTRIBUTIONS RECENTLY RECEIVED

MEMORIALS TO: Dr. O. H. JONES

BURTON KINNEY

JOHN SALFER

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM:

CAMBRIA TOWNSHIP

LIME TOWNSHIP

JUDSON TOWNSHIP

CITY OF MADISON LAKE

SPECIAL GIFT FROM:

BRAD THEISSEN