

SIBLEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter ~ December 2020

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From the President:

A Message from Jeff Ducharme,
Sibley County Historical Society President

I wish to express my gratitude to all of our generous members, donors, volunteers and to our very dedicated SCHS Board. It is with my thanks to all of you for striving to preserve the history of Sibley County. Consequently, we are able to boast our vast collection of objects, which is enhanced by our genealogy department. These important tools help us link stories to heritage, past and present.

During this unique pandemic time we are all experiencing a moment for reflection. "The SCHS began in 1940 and August L. Poehler was the first President. In the year 1948 the Poehler house became home to the SCHS which opened its doors to the public Memorial Day 1949. This beautiful house was built in 1884 the same year "Susan B. Anthony addresses U.S. House Judiciary Committee arguing for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting women the right to vote, 16 years after legislators 1st introduced a federal women's suffrage amendment."

The year 2020 is coming to a close; the next chapter opens featuring new exhibits to enhance your Memorial Day 2021 visit to the Museum and dreams of an ice cream social! By the way, Memorial Day has been the traditional opening day since the first SCHS opening in 1949!

Wishing you all Happy Holidays and a healthy prosperous New Year!

Cheers,
Jeff DuCharme

Just think! SCHS Newsletter traveled to CA, CO, DE, FL, IA, IN, MD, ND, NJ, SC, TX, VA, WA, WI. All these states were in addition to MN's Sibley County and oodles of MN locations. All of 2021 SCHS dues are due February 2021. Thank YOU.

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"When we recall Christmas past, we usually find that the simplest things - not the great occasions - give off the greatest glow of happiness." — Bob Hope

Christmas in Country Schools

According to our published "Remembering Country Schools", memories that were recorded were that the Christmas programs were a big deal. New clothes to wear: sashes and bow ties and perhaps a lovely flour sack dress or plaid flannel shirt. Most of the comments noted that lots of folk would attend the family event at school.

Arlington Township #14 Earl Wieman: For Christmas we had a Christmas party and drew names for gifts.

Arlington Township #41 *Elmyra Maas Krans*: At Christmas time there was always a program and all the parents would come. The teacher would make candy, and every one would get a little bag of goodies, generally an apple and some peanuts, etc. And we always had a tree.

Bismarck #51 *David Mueller*: Christmas programs were done on a raised stage. Santa Claus would appear with treats. As a student I always thought there were 100 people there.

Bismarck #51 *Karen Mueller Klenk*: We had to crawl through a little hole to and down the stage and boxes of curtains and decorations. They were all kept in the attic.

Bismarck #76 *Adeline Rosnau Laabs*: In our 1930 Christmas program we six girls made two-piece dresses from white crepe paper. The lower edges were scalloped by stretching the paper and using two fingers to form the edge. The hats were fashioned in the same manner. Bows were on the front at the waist.

Cornish #56 *Clarence Maidl*: When we had our Christmas programs, to take the planks from up in the ceiling and we put nail kegs under them so parents, grandparents and visitors had something to sit on to watch our program.

Cornish #72 *Bernice Lundholm Raeth*: At Christmas, we put on a program and had a big lunch for our families.

Cornish #72 *Harvey Totman*: His first grade recitation was "I have a little flashlight, 'twill help Santa see, I wouldn't want him stumbling, leaving gifts for me. So I'll leave this handy, for the jolly little gent, so he can fill each stocking without an accident."

Dryden #73 *Dave and Birdine Battcher*: I remember my 2nd grade Christmas when they used real candles to light the tree and how careful they were with them. They only let them burn very short time.

Green Isle Twsp #45 *Ruth Voight Wolter*: We had a Christmas pageant every year and got a bag of candy. They even did the Nativity Story. Diana Hardel was Mary and Ernie Lange was not happy to play the role of Joseph.

Faxon #42 *Harriet Collins Traxler*: We had our Christmas program before the holidays. Sheets were hung on a wire at the front of the room. All the kids had a small part. Parents would sit on chairs and proudly clap. My first year I recited "All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth." Of course!!!! That year I was missing my two front teeth.

Jessenland #12 *Vivian Busse Pinney*: Christmas time was always a big production. Before and during Christmas break, students were expected to sell Christmas Seals. A two piece, wooden stage was brought up from the basement. Curtains of old sheets slid on a wire across the room. Several lanterns (Coleman) lighted the room for the evening program. Santa came with sacks of goodies for the children. The adults enjoyed either a potluck or a box social.

Kelso #7 *Ninety-nine year old Laura Hardel Renneke:* One year we were supposed to say our Christmas pieces at a church program in our neighborhood. I stood up and saw all these people and was so nervous that I mixed-up the verses. (Chances are that she wasn't the only one ever to be so nervous.)

Kelso #7 *Helen Budke Sinell:* At Christmas, we had a stage we put up and a black curtain. We all had parts to learn and we sang. We had a piano. Then at the end of the program Santa would come. We had exchanged names so we would bring those presents.

New Auburn #37 *Verda Bergs Wittenberg:* The Christmas program was always a big deal, when all would have a part in it. They had a stage with planks raised up on cement blocks, they had a curtain to pull. They thought they were really special because one of the students could tap dance. Her name was Donna Kloempken.

Severance #65 *JoAnn Rathmann Gutter:* We always had a Christmas program. We would practice and practice our parts, putting on hold our studies and classes. The stage was made with saw horses and boards put on top of them.

Severance #78 *Betty Lundgren Schlottenhauer:* Christmas was a special time in country school as we always put on a program for the community. A week before curtains went up in the front of the school. There were side curtains on each side for a "back stage". These curtains transformed the school-room into something very magical. The program was held the night before Christmas vacation started which made it even more exciting.

Sibley #36 *Ethel Dahlke Bauer:* One year when I was teaching we were having a Christmas program and it was ready to start; but I was still a home; waiting for my husband-to-be. He forgot to pick me up!

Sibley #47 *Millie Tollefson Johnson:* At Christmas we did not exchange gifts but our mothers made candy and we sold it to people that came to watch the program.

Transit #39 *Bea Michaelis Tews:* In December 1952 the tree was appropriately called a Christmas Tree. In that era, students could put on a Christmas Program, exchange Christmas presents and wish each other a "Merry Christmas".

Washington Lake #29 *Ruth Ann Reiter Buck:* At first we had gas lights that had to be pulled up. When we got electricity, I remember only a single light bulb because people were afraid the bulbs would blow up. The teacher would have extra bulbs in her desk. One year for the Christmas program the light bulb burned out and there were no extras. The school board members went to the neighbors and took a bulb out of the barn so we could continue with the program.

Child's Play is Child's Work



Experts in child development make statements such as "Play is the real work of children." The Sibley County Museum has a collection of donated toys which area children have used in play. Playing alone or playing with others, presents differing learning opportunities. Each setting can add to the physical and intellectual development of the child. The child is "at work" becoming a thinking, analytical, independent person in the play process.

Picture a little boy alone with his 1930s blue-painted cast iron motorcycle. He makes motor revving noises. He thinks, "How fast can I go when I turn a corner on the graveled township road?" He tells himself, "Someday I will have a job and make money to buy a Harley Davidson". This child was "at work".

Toyland, Toyland, I Once you pass its border

An Elephant in the Room

Collections Committee



According to a dictionary, if it is said, "There is an elephant in the room" it means that an obvious problem or difficult situation exists that people do not want to talk about.

The "elephant" today, in the spring-time of 2020 is the

virus caused pandemic, holding usual and customary activities hostage. There really is a tiny toy tin pachyderm at issue for the Collections Committee's consideration for accessioning.

Once upon a time teacher Della Anderly at District #12 had a stubborn first grader to acclimatize to the school routine. An experienced teacher, Miss Anderly, soon had all her students doing well in the fall of 1931. Perhaps she had a reward for several of her students but information exists only about one. "For a good boy" is remembered as accompanying the grey elephant which is about three inches long and two inches tall. The good boy was always careful with his toys, the key wind for this replica of a circus elephant still works! The attached winder causes a few wiggles or dance steps depending on the viewer's interpretation of the action.



Shirley Temple

Collections Committee



A Shirley Temple doll, a little girl's 1930s Christmas present, has been given to the museum. "Go and see what is on my bed" she was told by her mother on that long-ago Christmas morning. When the child returned, the little girl was asked by her mother why she did not bring her gift, her reply was, "She was sleeping". This doll does have sleep eyes which pop open when the doll is up-

right. She has her original blond "curly top" and wears her original blue polka dot dress. Her shoes and anklets have been replaced. This all composition doll, has a swivel head with elastic stringing allowing movable arms and legs.

The doll was made to represent the six-year-old child movie star whose singing and dancing raised the public's morale during the depression. For this reason, President Franklin D. Roosevelt nicknamed Shirley, "Little Miss Miracle".

Shirley related items at the museum are a blue glass pitcher with her image as a child on it and a published Shirley Temple paper doll book with several sizes of paper Shirleys' with changes of clothing. These dolls and clothes were meant to be cut out and used for play.

A biography of Shirley Jane Temple Black contains this bit of trivia: her mother used exactly 56 pin curls to style Shirley's hair before each acting appearance. Shirley's contract with the Fox Film Corporation made her a top earner for that organization.

IN 1950 she married Charles Black. No longer in movies, the former child star became active in politics. From 1969 to 1970 she was the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. In 1974 she was appointed as ambassador to Ghana. Two years later, she became Chief of Protocol of the United States, serving until 1977. In 1988 Mrs. Black was given the rank of honorary U.S. Foreign Service officer. She was born in 1928 and died at age 85 at her home in California.

Little girl and boy land, you can never return again.

Puss In The Corner Collections Committee



Puss In The Corner refers to a board game first published by Parker Brothers Inc. in 1920. On offer to the collections committee is one of those games. If the distressed condition of the box tells a story, it would seem the game was well used by Vivian and Bob Busse, twins born in 1925 to William and Hannah Busse of Jessenland.

Online information about the game states that it was for "2 to 4 players, age 3+". Also it describes it as an "Early children's game that is about as simple as they come. Spin and whatever color comes up gets a marker in their corner. First person with 4 markers in their corner wins."

Grace's Blonde Dolly Collections Committee



Inexpensive china head dolls had their heyday in the Victorian era. Victoria, Queen of England, died in 1901, ending her 63 year reign. Dolls during that period tended to have molded, painted black hair honoring Victoria, black haired when young. It is going to be unusual then, that the children's room at the museum will have more of the less common

blonde china head residents then there are black haired dolls in the children's toy collection.

This will be the story of the doll once belonging to Grace Goodman Spletstazer of Gaylord. Grace was born in 1892. She has said that the doll was given to her when she was four years old. This doll then, in 2020, is about 124 years

old. The blond china head doll has no marking but is typical of German made dolls. She has blue eyes and rosy cheeks. Her hands and for arms are of white china attached to a cloth body.

The William Goodman family lived south of Gaylord in Sibley Township. District 47 was the rural school attended by the children. Grace, an honor student, graduated from the Gaylord High School in 1911. Millie Johnson, long time museum volunteer, said her aunts, Grace and Nellie, attended Normal School for teacher training, held at the Winthrop Public School, during the summer of 1912 or 1913.

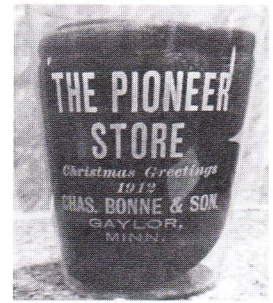
Where Grace taught is not known. On September 8, 1915, Grace married William Spletstazer at the Goodman farm home. The couple farmed in Sibley Township until retiring to Gaylord where he died in 1956. Grace's doll rested on a bed in the attic of this Gaylord home, quietly leaking sawdust from her cloth body. A friend of Grace upon seeing poor dolly took her away for repair. She was returned wearing her dark red dress made by Grace's mother who also had made a white summer dress for her. The doll had acquired a pair of tiny white leather boots while away.

In April of 1973, Grace and her doll attended the Mother Daughter Banquet held at the Gaylord United Church of Christ. Many dolls, old and new, were on display at the event. Grace's doll may have been the oldest. Grace had been ill for a time and died September 14, 1974. Her nieces had the job of emptying Grace's home. One of her directives had been to give her doll to the friend who had repaired it. It was agreed at that time that the doll and her story would eventually find a final home at the Sibley County Museum.

Toyland! Toyland!
Little girl and boy land,
While you dwell within it,
You are ever happy then.
Childhood's joyland,
Mystic merry Toyland!
Once you pass its borders

BONNE PIONEER STORE

Holiday shopping at the Charles Bonne Pioneer Store in the late 1800's and early 1900's must have been quite an experience. Beautiful store window displays and plentiful merchandise would lure shoppers in. A purchase would net you a free souvenir glass etched with the store name. A few of these etched glasses, some over 100 years old, are found even today!



Charles Bonne, born in 1853 in Germany, came to America as a young man and was a pioneer in the Henderson/Gaylord area. He first worked as head bookkeeper for Henry Poehler and then as the first vice-president of First State Bank of Gaylord, which opened in 1883. In 1884, he opened up his first store, the Charles Bonne Pioneer Store, earning the reputation as the “merchant prince.” Then, in 1906, Charles’ only son, Harry, joined his father in the business and the store was called “Charles Bonne and Son Pioneer Store.”



J. HENKE BLOCK, GAYLORD, MINN. S.T.P.D.

The store was operated at various locations, but by 1906, it was in the Henke Building at 410 Main, where it stayed for the next eleven years. In 1917, Charles Bonne and Son relocated to the newer Busch Block where it remained until it closed at the end of 1924.

Harry Bonne graduated in 1909 from Gaylord High School along with eight other graduates. Harry was the captain of the first town Tigers football team, played cornet in the Gaylord Cornet Band, and in 1914, was married to Lillian Groetsch in a double wedding ceremony with her sister, Minnie and her fiancée, Tom Comnick. Lillian’s own family was very influential in New Rome. Her grandfather, Captain John Groetsch, was a

pioneer in the area, living in and naming the village of New Rome. He was Postmaster of New Rome, ran a popular hotel and livery on their family land, recruited men to form Company D, Fifth Minnesota, then fought in various battles of the Civil War. Captain John, as he was known, became a State Legislator from 1874-1876. Lillian became a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse, built on a corner of the Mesker family farm—her grandfather’s farm—her mother being Caroline Mesker Groetsch. (The farm today continues to be farmed by the Mesker family, having acquired the land at the time of the Treaty of Traverse des Sioux.) As was custom in those days, Lillian resigned her teaching position when she married.

In 1914, Harry and Lillian Bonne built a home at 114 Franklin Avenue in Gaylord—the “H. W. Bonne” stamp in the concrete front walkway is still intact. Their first son, Thomas, was born in the home in 1921. Harry continued to work in the family store, but the business underwent a change again in 1920 when Rudy Werges bought Charles’ share and became a business partner with Harry. The store became known as “Bonne Mercantile” and lasted until 1925, when due to a downturn in the economy, the store was sold to Charles Busch who renamed it the “People’s Store.” The store eventually became Graham’s Variety Home Store and Graham’s Shopper’s Village. But for 41 years, from 1884 until 1925, the Bonne family supplied the Gaylord community with clothing and all other necessities.



After the Gaylord store was sold, Harry and Lill Bonne moved to St. Paul and had a second son, Robert. But Harry still had the merchant “bug.” After trying his luck at a few other endeavors, Harry opened his first shoe store in St. Paul in 1931. After returning from duty in World War II, son Tom and younger brother, Bob, joined their dad in running the store and expanding the business by opening stores in many other Twin Cities’ locations. Bonne Shoes became well-known in the Twin Cities, carrying national brand name shoes and honoring its’ motto: “Where good shoes are fitted correctly.” White Bear Lake, Roseville, St. Anthony Village, East Side St. Paul, West St. Paul, Midway, Como, Stillwater, Maplewood, Bloomington, and outside the metro area in St. Cloud were some of the store locations. Harry Bonne retired in 1959, knowing that the stores were in good hands with Tom and Bob. Tom Bonne retired in 1977, and Bob retired several years after that. The demise of small businesses had begun and the Bonne business was not able to survive. But the mercantile and shoe businesses run by the Bonne family (Charles, Harry, Tom and Bob) had been well known and respected by their communities for over 100 years!

Written by Janet (Bonne) Forsys (daughter of Tom Bonne) October 2020 Sources: 1) The Henderson to Fort Ridgely Trail, 2003 edition 2) Bits and Pieces Celebrating 150 Years of Sibley County History 3) Gaylord Hub of Sibley County

Butcher Shop Christmas Play

According to Carol Neubarth Woehler, District #16, Arlington Township, there was a big Christmas party with the parents invited for a program of plays, recitations and songs. One end of the school room was divided into thirds and the outside sections were divided by sheets hanging up and the center section was our stage. One year our play was about a butcher shop. Everybody was to save duck and goose heads and feet from home. We would wrap them up in butcher paper and pretend we were buying this poultry from the butcher shop. Well, during the play one poor kid's duck head and feet fell out of the paper, embarrassment, in front of everybody.

Christmas Was Such a Fun Time

Joanne Monson Bakken tells of District 46 in Alfsboro Township. We had plays, readings, music and lots of treats. Santa would come too. We loved the bags of nuts and candy. We made presents for our parents for the holidays. We collected weeds and painted them for bouquets. One year we made wood candleholders and wood burned our mom's initials on them. Another time we took a board and wrapped it with red or green checked oil cloth and sewed it in the back; then we put gold hooks on it for potholders.

Unusual Cookie Press

Collections Committee



At Christmas time a flurry of cookie making takes place in many homes. If a holiday visitor to the museum kitchen is curious, a rare cookie press may be viewed. When the two parts are assembled it is 13 1/4 inches long. If a good amount of spritz type dough is inserted in the hollow 1 1/4 inch diameter section, the press becomes a bit difficult to handle. The far end of the dispensing tube has a small star shaped hole for the cookie dough's exit.

Spritz is a German word meaning "to squirt". Spritzen refers to squirting or pushing cookie dough through a cookie press.

The age of this cookie press has not been determined. The usual computer search did not produce information for this exact device. A much newer looking cookie press was the oldest "antique" item viewed. The press in our kitchen appears to be hand made. The darkened, scuffed up tin has soldered side seams. The exit star was cut into a small circle of tin which was attached with solder to the hollow tube.

Spritz Cookies

Ingredients:

- 1 cup butter, room temperature
- 1 1/2 cups powdered sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon almond extract (or vanilla if you prefer)
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

Instructions

Preheat oven to 375°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside.

In the bowl of your stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, mix the butter and powdered sugar on medium speed for 1 minute, until combined.

Add in the egg, almond extract, and salt and mix for an additional minute, scraping the sides of the bowl as necessary.

Turn the mixer to low and add in the flour, mixing until just incorporated.

Place about 1 cup of dough (depending on the size of your press) into the cookie press. Press cookies onto the baking sheet using the press. Arrange the cookies about 1 inch apart and bake for 6-7 minutes or until lightly golden at the edges.

Transfer cookies to a wire rack to cool.