

# SIBLEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Henderson, Minnesota 56044 Ph: (507)248-3434

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## My WWII Service

By Bert Karels

The first seventeen years of my life were spent on the farm in Kossuth County in north-central Iowa doing normal jobs on a half section farm. I graduated from Bancroft High School in 1942. World War II had started. My parents thought if I went to an aircraft sheet metal school I might get a job in an aircraft plant and not be drafted. I went to California but found no job in an aircraft plant. So I went to San Francisco and worked at Mare Island Shipyard repairing and modifying Navy ships. Draft boards were taking 18 year olds soon after their birthdays. I turned 18 and decided to volunteer for the Air Force cadets. I passed all the tests but was told the program



Bert 2009

was full. I was told that if I was drafted I should show my papers and I would be put in a holding station for further testing for cadet training.

At Camp Dodge, Iowa the Captain must have tossed my papers in "File #13". The troop train took me to Camp Butner, NC where I went through all the Infantry Basic Training. Ernie Pyle was there. He wrote that the 78<sup>th</sup> Division training was the toughest he had seen, as bad as the Marine Corps, or worse!

A young medical doctor (who had graduated from Iowa State) said he would have me transferred to the Medics. He gave me a pass to check on my Air Force goof-up. So I was transferred to Miami Beach, FL where cadets were evaluated. Since the coordination between my hands and feet was poor, I flunked out. All of the group that did not pass were

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### The Prez Sez by Jerome Petersen

Who is our oldest and who is our newest member? The answer to both - Irene Penk Hahn, who celebrated her 105th birthday recently, and is now a member of SCHS.

I think Bert could have filled the whole newsletter with his experiences. He did a program at the museum several years ago on his WWII experiences and it was exceptional. He is a WWII hero and a veteran of 35 combat missions over Europe. I went to his home to get the pictures and story for the article above. He has an impressive array of mementos from his military service. I am amazed that he had details on all the missions; targets, escorts, temperatures, plane's name etc. Bert and his wife, Arline, have been very involved with our society.

She was secretary for a long time, Bert was treasurer. They both have been guides and did other volunteer work. Bert and I strung a phone wire to the second floor office and the computer room. He helped to rig a homemade part into the microfilm reader a while back. He helped redo the attic windows that were deteriorating, saving us hundreds of dollars with replacements. And best of all, he is a super nice guy. If he has a shortcoming, it would be he is too modest!

Many of you are wondering who is this Charles Meyer guy that has been so generous to SCHS, and he is from Texas. Well y'all. Turns out his family ancestors were some of the very earliest settlers in Sibley County, and they were instrumental in starting the St. John's Church along Hwy. 19 west of Henderson. So his roots in Sibley County go back over 150 years. Charles and his wife Donna grew up in the Winthrop area and graduated from Winthrop High School. When they came to our porch party in June, we were expecting some old people. When they got out of their vehicle, someone remarked "They

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### Calendar of Events

by Judy Loewe

If you have suggestions or comments on upcoming events .... Contact Judy Loewe 507-248-3345 **Calendar Subject to Change.**



(Continued from page 1)

sent to Gunnery School where previously all applicants were volunteers. I guess we were "automatic" volunteers. We did a lot of trap shooting with shot guns, plus much other training at Tyndal Field, FL.

Then we were sent to Lincoln, NE where air crews were formed. Pilot, co-pilot, navigator, bombardier were all commissioned officers. The following comprised the non commissioned positions: engineer, gunner, radio operator, top turret gunner, tail gunner, waist gunner, ball



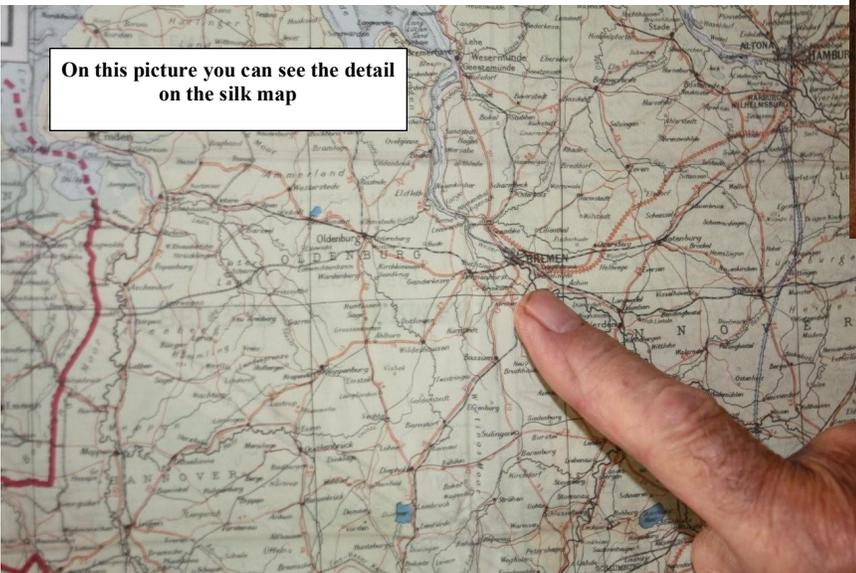
Sgt. Karels



The bomber crew in their flight gear

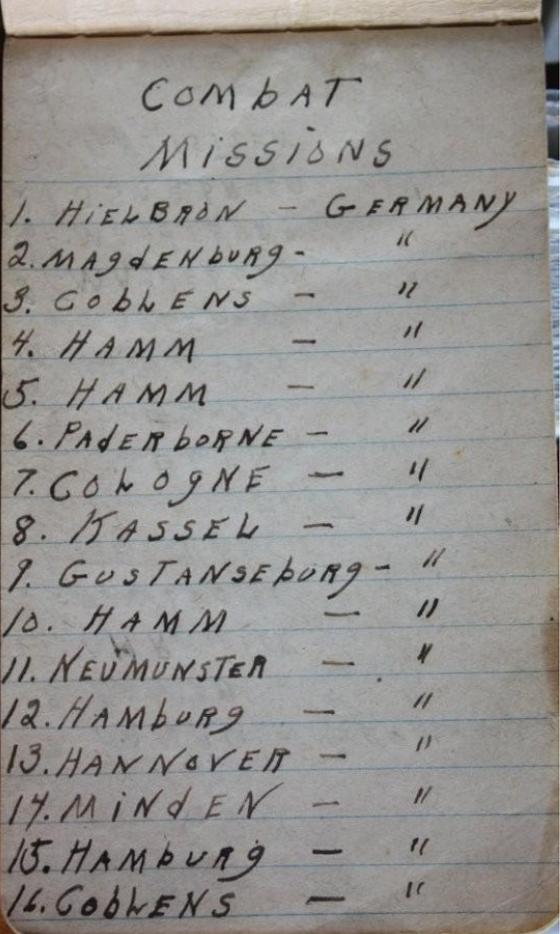


Bert is holding a model he made of the B-24 he flew in. Behind him is the silk map the airmen carried to help find their way if their aircraft was downed. It is a very detailed map of Germany and printed on both sides. It was made of silk to be compact. He framed and has it on the wall.



On this picture you can see the detail on the silk map

Bert's notes from his missions



turret gunner and nose gunner. The worst spot was for the ball turret gunner. That was later eliminated. That left the nose gunner position as a bad spot. A very tight confining space I inherited it.

After our flight crew training in Pueblo, CO we picked up a new B-24 at Lincoln, NE, flew to Bangor, ME, Goose Bay, Labrador and then to Nuts Corner, Ireland. After a month there we went by boat and train to Norwich, England. We were as-

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signed to the 328th Squad, 93<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Group.

Our crew, "Monroe's Crew" (Monroe was the captain and pilot) flew 35 missions over Germany, We were lucky to have fighter planes that stayed with the group on all the trips we made. German fighter planes were short of gas and didn't give us trouble. But Germany did add many more anti-aircraft guns. Our plane was hit quite often by anti-aircraft fire. We lost an engine on one flight. With one engine dead we could not keep up with the group. Our pilot went to a lower altitude. There we did not need oxygen. When we were over the battle front area we were caught in ground fire. A shell came through the bombardier's glass which was right under my gun turret. It came through the turret; hit my flight pants, tearing my flight coveralls to shreds, then up alongside my ear and out the top of the turret. PRETTY LUCKY!!! I only had a welt on my leg.

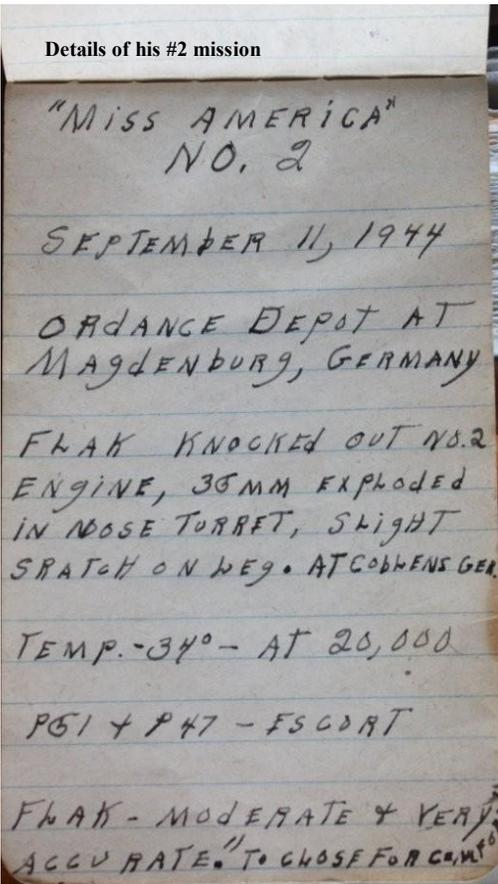
It was good to get out of the high altitude where the normal temperature

to come back, only 13 hours to fly over. A point system was arranged for getting out of the Air Force. Time in service, battle areas of Europe, service decoration gave me 85 points, not the 90 needed. Because of a longer stop for medical reasons and then a declaration of Southern France as a battle area, I now had enough points and was discharged.

Still not 21 years old, I could not vote (President Roosevelt's third term) nor could I get married. But both Viola's (my high school sweetheart) and my parent's signed so that we were married in Bancroft, IA where I worked in sales in a men's department of a clothing store, then for a Ford car dealer and later for an International Harvester farm equipment dealer.

By 1957 our family had grown to six children, four boys and two girls. We decided we should find a better place, especially for school reasons. While driving through the LeSueur area when visiting relatives farther north in Minnesota, I decided the Minnesota River Valley area was very appealing. We bought a little acreage south of Henderson. I worked for Teeter Plumbing & Heating of LeSueur who rented space and tools from the Lieske Shop in Henderson. Later Teeter's decided not to continue renting the Henderson shop. Another employee of his, Jerry Ceminski and I decided to start our own company, Bert and Jerry's Plumbing and Heating. After about two years Jerry had to go to the army so I bought him out and it became Bert's Plumbing and Heating.

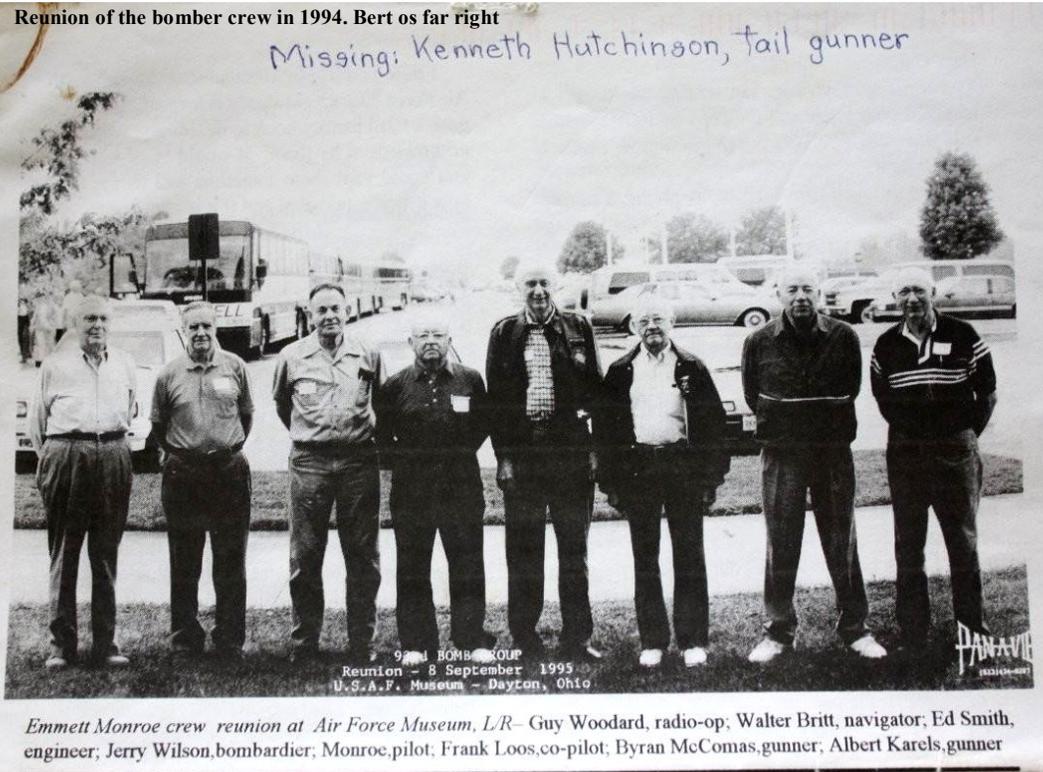
"You know the rest of the story!"



reading was minus 30 degrees. Our flight suits were electrically heated. We wore boots, gloves.....and long underwear. Our oxygen masks had a throat mike and the steel helmet had ear laps. I wore only the harness for a parachute. My chute was in the compartment behind me!

I will not mention the bad times on our 35 missions. With a lot of "prayer" and some luck we made it. We were a pretty young crew and seven of the nine are still living today.

The war was not over when I came back to the United States with a troop ship. The North Sea was VERY rough. Waves were as high as 50 feet. Luckily I didn't get sea sick! Empty fuel tankers with our convoy were very slow. Their props were out of the water most of the time. It took 13 days





## For the record;

During my recent visit to Henderson I shared the attached story with Arlene Busse, one of Sibley County's true historians and preservationists. I still can see the look of horror and incredulity that spread across her face as I confessed what I had done. After arriving home I decided to document our verbal exchange in a vain attempt of contrition; however, to the dedicated preservationist, in destroying these pictures I had done the unpardonable for which there could be no redemption. Believe me I realize it, but it was too late!

*Charles Meyer*

## Two Old Suitcases

Two old suit cases up in the attic, dusty and always in the way, the ones with frayed leather grips and tarnished nickel-plated clasps... They had been there for years, even decades, surviving three moves from one house to another yet they remained unopened and their contents seemingly of little interest and no value. Oh yes, as a young boy I had gone exploring up in the attic and opened one to see what was inside. To my disappointment, just hundreds of old pictures... pictures of unknown, ancient-looking people clad in formal attire and wearing hook and lace shoes. Almost every picture was posed, everyone—even the children—unsmiling. The ones of husbands and wives reflected the patriarchal times; The man seated, the woman subserviently standing behind with one hand on his shoulder. Just who were these people? Were they relatives? In retrospect, I realize that the pictures weren't from my mother's side of the family because she was in the middle of a large family and all

the old documents and pictures were passed down to her oldest brother and sister. Then they must have been from my father's side, the Meyers. But we really didn't have any Meyer relatives other than father's sister and his two Meyer cousins (two brothers and two sisters) also living in Arlington but their name was Mueller and we seldom visited them. I seem to recall, when I was very young and my Grandfather was still alive, hearing the names Wendland and Bullert occasionally mentioned when we visited him but it was only in passing and I certainly did not

realize until years later that Grandfather had three older sisters.

So the years went by. I left home for college and then on to a career. The my father died and mother decided to move to an apartment. While the apartment was spacious it did not have enough room for everything. We had to scale back, get rid of some things. An auction solved most of the excess "stuff" problem, but what about those two old suitcases? As an only child, I made a unilateral decision: I took them out to the farm and tossed them on the burn pile! After all, who would ever want those old pictures, certainly not me!

Fast forward twenty years: Since 1987 I have been the only descendant of Great Grandfather bearing the Meyer surname. He was born in Germany in 1809 and immigrated to America—as a widower with two young children—in 1848. Settling first in Stillwater area, he remarried and moved to Arlington Town-



**Donna and Charles Meyer. Charles is holding the replica of our museum that the Society presented to them**

ship in 1854. He and his second wife (Henriette Narr) had five children, two boys and three girls. My Grandfather, who was the youngest, was born three months after his father died in March of 1873

As the last 'Meyer' I feel the onus is on me to sort things out a bit...maybe come up with the semblance of a Family Tree. NOW, who wants those old pictures? I do!! The moral of this story should be obvious to everyone.



(Continued from page 1)

brought a young couple with them!" I had talked to Charles several times on the phone and had an idea how he "should" look, but that guy is still in Texas. I asked him to write an article for our newsletter which is in this issue. There is another story; Telling how the Meyer family came by oxcart from Stillwater to Henderson. That will be in another newsletter. (Do you suppose they really wanted to go to St. Cloud but Mr. Meyer wouldn't stop at the gas station to ask directions) We had a delightful luncheon and visit with Charles and Donna. She also has a great story to tell. Starting her education in a country school with outdoor plumbing and rising to the top of her profession with a doctorate degree. We are grateful for their generosity.

Our new building plans were going along smoothly. The building inspector made a few minor modifications; He added a cooled drinking fountain and we had to put a urinal in the rest room. (I made the ladies promise they would not use it - one of them probably cornered the inspector and asked for that when I left the seat up) The blueprints were submitted to Sibley County contractors and suppliers for bids. By the end of June, everything was in place. The bids were in and approved and accepted. I thought we could start site work in July. Then we had a visit from representatives of the Minnesota Historical Society. We had a meeting with them, our board, Ian Sing the contractor and members of the Henderson Preservation Committee. They suggested radical changes. Our needs were ignored. We had spent a lot of time designing the space we needed for genealogy, storage, rest room, office equipment and a break room to prepare snacks for open house and meetings. Pete Pinske had spent time arranging and planning this addition along with Ian and his staff at Pinske Builders. We made cut-outs of desks, file cabinets, tables, chairs, computers and knew how they would be arranged. MNHS suggested we take out some walls so to make room for lectures. It was never intended for that purpose. They suggested we take one whole room off so we "touch the building more lightly". We were covering 10% of the building with this addition, and it is mostly behind the house. They said we are taking up too much of the *back yard*. I had not heard that space called that before. This has been fun and exciting for those of us who work there every Tuesday. But since MNHS got involved it has become very frustrating. Up to that point everyone who saw the plans and the drawings liked them. Now it is back to the drawing board with new plans that meet with criteria that is acceptable to the Henderson Preservation Committee. We (SCHS) were not allowed to attend the meeting with the Henderson group. They would decide our addition. Sounds fair. Why should we have a say in this project?! ...or be able to explain our ideas.

As most of you know, everyone in our society is a volunteer. We might not get things done as quickly or as orderly as if we had a 20, 30 or 40 thousand dollar a year staff member. We meet on Tuesday as a work day and try to catch up on the latest phone messages, mail and other duties. We all do a variety of tasks, and sometimes some might get lost in the shuffle. Who can we blame? You might say it seems like the place is run by a bunch of 70 year olds. I can tell you most of us would take that as a compliment! We average closer to 80 than 70. We have a devoted group that performs a myriad of tasks and it all seems to get done, maybe not quite at breakneck

speed. I am amazed. I am bringing this up because there was some question about donations. When we get checks in Henderson, they are kept in the safe, then Marie takes them home and Ray picks them up and deposits them. A check that comes on Wednesday will be at Marie next Tuesday and Ray will deposit it the following Wednesday. Our newsletter comes out quarterly, and all donations are acknowledged in it. Dorothy Peterson also sends a thank you to those of you who donated to our building project. Again, some time goes by between your writing a check and acknowledgement. Then there's the logistics. Ray lives in Gaylord. Mary Petersen, Dorothy Peterson and I live in Gibbon.. Marie lives in Gaylord and so does Millie Johnson. Sharon Shimota (our youthful volunteer) lives in Arlington. Many of the tasks we do at our home, like this newsletter. Becky Briggs lives in Eagan and she does the Ostrom work at home. Ray does the treasury jobs at home, as well as newsletter subscriptions, emailing and label printing and answering frequent how to questions from me I think I will say it again. I am amazed! We do the best we can, and it ain't bad!

Henderson Heritage Days are just around the corner. You should get this newsletter by then. There is a small add on the back page with some information. *Rommie*

## Thousand Thanks Tusen Tak Tausend Dank

Thanks to the growing list of people who have given to our building fund. This list is in addition to the names in our last newsletter: Roger and Holly Harjes, William Mickelson, Jane Delger, Frances Werges, Eunice Beneke-Rucks, Beverly Christensen, Maureen Krumrey, Ruth Mueller, G R Durenberger, Don and Betty Strobel, Legion Post #408, Dorothy Peterson, Lowell Hanson, A R Mueller, Elsworth and Elaine Thies, Bob and Arlene Busse, Virginia Routzon, Marjorie and Earl Renneke, Glen and Judy Loewe, James Mayer, Leon and Beverly Stadther, Denise and Roland Pogatchnik, Charles and Donna, Meyer, Michael Armstrong, Richard and Diane Isakson, Dale Ratcliffe, Judith Monkkonen, Edgar Taggatz, Dayle and Harriet Troidahl, Charles and Sharon Shimota, Schauer Law Office, Gloria Pudewell, Karen Helfert, Bernice Hanson, Beth Christianson, Wilbert and Brenda Pautsch, Harriet Traxler, Dale and Pat Ericson, James and Evelyn Huffman, Brian Anhalt, Verjean Schindeldecker, David and Marie Main, Karen Helfert, Robert and Arlene Busse, Wayne and Louise Quast, Gloria Sinell, Jo Ann Kroells, Janet Mackenthun. We are grateful for your generous support.

Some names appear more than once because some people have given more than one donation.

Oh oh! I just looked at the last newsletter and gave those people a million thanks. I will match that with a *thousand* thousand thanks. Is that a million?? Know in your heart that SCHS appreciates the financial support our members have shown.



# HI HO WE WENT TO THE FAIR

The Sibley County Fair board offered us the use of a country school building that is on the fair grounds and used by the Scouts the rest of the year. What a great place for us. We had ample display space. There were quilts, Ostrom photos, Harriet's barn books, the what's it item, a registration table, our building plans and blue-prints, a quilting frame and chairs and tables to sit down and look at displays. It was a huge success with over 500 people registering in our guest book. The ladies did a swell job of setting it all up. Taking carloads of things from the museum and their homes.



Dorothy Peterson had this large vinyl banner made for our fair building



Carol Forst, Chuck Lundgren and Jon Forst, all of Gibbon. Forsts visited our display and Chuck was a volunteer

One of our spinning wheels was displayed on the step in front of the school.



A butter churn and some real plastic geraniums added color to the entrance.



Some of the many quilts that were shown

Harriet Traxler showing her Sibley County Barn books to visitors. This was a very popular item. She has two versions of the consolidated book, and also one of each township



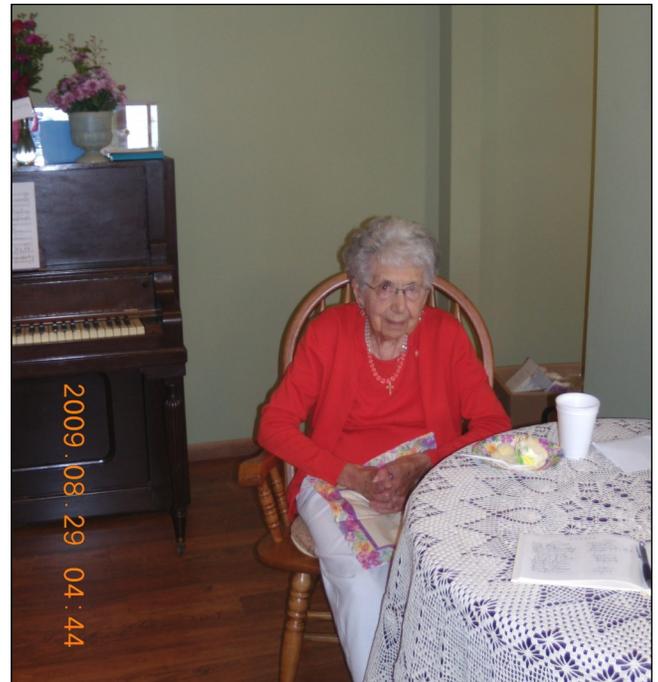


# SIBLEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY—60 ANNIVERSARY OF OUR BUILDING CELEBRATING WITH THE MUSIC BOX SOCIETY



**ARLENE BUSSE PREPARES THE POTLUCK LUNCHEON**

**Some of the music boxes on display for the anniversary celebration**



**HAPPY BIRTHDAY, IRENE!**

As usual Irene Hahn was smiling as she greeted Dorothy Peterson, Millie Johnson and Marie Main, and 70 other relatives and friends at her 105th Birthday Open House on August 28th.

In our conversation she called attention to the antique beveled window pane doors in the new sunroom at Golden Hearts in Arlington, where she lives.

To the caregivers she had joked that the doors were older than she was, but a restored antique piano, (shown on the picture) manufactured 103 years ago, was younger.

She gives God all the credit for a still sharp mind, the ability to appreciate her advanced age, the people, activities and the things around her.

The doors and piano had been donated by Molly Borjas, who bought the "Don Koch" house in Arlington from which they were salvaged.

*Marie Main*



**The ladies enjoying lunch; Gloria Sinell, Marie Main, Mary Petersen, Dorothy Peterson, Sharon Shimota and Millie Johnson**



**Holly Harjes tending to the military room. Holly had the program at our August 25 meeting when she told member about the information she takes to 6th grade students telling them the history of the USS Sibley and how it got its name., and the men who served on it.**



# The Joy of Guiding

By Marie Main

We are well into the 60th year of welcoming visitors into the Sibley County Historical Society Museum. Throughout those years many have served as guides. We are grateful for those faithful volunteers, both past and present.

In 1996 The Music Box Society brought quite a number of large music boxes which graced the lawn on a beautiful May day. Music Boxes were playing both inside and out. Our clocks, pianos and organs were repaired by the Society and were also being played by the members. Representative David Minge among many others happened to be passing by and seeing and hearing the festivities stopped and enjoyed seeing our museum. This was my introduction to guiding.

We have had visitors who have told us about long gone relatives who worked for the Poehlers, people who lived here during the time it was an apartment and visitors to the library which was in the now music-office room.

Earl and Clara Hebeisen recently brought a large following of family when they came to see artifacts that had been donated in the past. Earl is originally from Green Isle, and members of their family are



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**UPPER RIGHT ; Visitors from Maryland; Lynelle Brant, daughter Olivia and her friend told us she was the great, great, great granddaughter of Louisa and Christian Didra who built and lived in our log cabin. Lynelle sent this photo And also a family history. Lynelle’s ancestors were good friends of the Poehlers.**



**Clara (Allenson) Hebeisen standing by her grandfather Harry Allenson’s coat which he wore in WWI that she donated**



**Earl Hebeisen standing by the uniform he wore while serving in the military in Japan from 1952 to 1954, Earl holding his combat boots He donated these items**



# Membership Form

I would like to become a member of the Sibley County Historical Society.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ SCHS TREASURER

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ 49858 316 ST

\_\_\_\_\_ Winthrop MN 55396-2038

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

Individual--\$10, Family-- \$15, Business-- \$25 Send to:

**Larger amounts will accepted**



Regular meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the fourth Tuesday of the month, March thru November at the museum in Henderson. The public is invited. The museum is open to the public for tours on Sundays from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. June thru October and by appointment.

Send articles, announcements, photos and comments to the SCHS Newsletter, P.O. Box 407, Henderson, MN 56044 or Email: [schs1@frontiernet.net](mailto:schs1@frontiernet.net)

**Check your due date on the mailing label.** Membership dues are as stated on the form. Please use it to renew your subscription or pass it along to anyone who is interested.

**NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERS**

Ian & Kimberly Sing	Gaylord MN	Bernice V Hanson	New Brighton MN
Ray & Liz Jacobson	St Peter MN	William & Vickie Holtz	New Auburn MN
Diane D Neubarth	Hutchinson MN	John & Dorothy Johnson	Gibbon MN
Wallen Jacobson	Gibbon MN	Caroline Norman	Henderson MN
Beverly Christianson	Chanhassen MN	Roman Jaus	Winthrop MN
Jeff Ducharme	Henderson MN	Beth A Christianson	Eagan MN
Dale & Pat Ericson	Gibbon MN	Clara Heberle	Hooper CO
Janice Ogren	Gibbon MN	Diane Fredin	Winthrop MN
Joy Cohrs	Glencoe MN	Janice Parrow	Minneapolis MN
Carol E Jackson	Eden Prairie MN	Joice & Richard Gardner	St Peter MN
John Gerald Berger	Lafayette MN	Ed & Dorothy Kruse	Apple Valley MN
James Berger	Minnetonka MN	Andrea Nell	Winthrop MN
Clark J Kube	Eden Prairie MN	Delores Messerli	Lafayette MN
Earl & Marjorie Renneke	Le Sueur MN	Charles & Donna Meyer	Houston TX
Ellsworth & Elaine Thies	Gaylord MN	Colleen Deis	Gaylord MN
Ruben & Eldrene Ebert	Gaylord MN	Judy Loewe	Henderson MN
Elden Egesdal	Gaylord MN	Eugene & Jeanette Bening	Hutchinson MN
Dayle & Harriet Troidahl	Gaylord MN	Elton & Marvel Vorwerk	Gibbon MN
Linda L Cancio	Sacramento CA	Wayne & Louise Quast	Arlington MN
Esther Grischkowsky	Stewart MN	Allen County Public Library	Fort Wayne IN
David & Diane Laabs	Gaylord MN	Steve & Jeanine Grosam	Gibbon MN
Arlene M Marek	Arlington MN	Howard & Frances Armstrong	Gaylord MN
Rod & Alix Nelson	Gaylord MN	Shane & Kris Zeppelin	Litchfield MN
Sandi Andersen	Henderson MN	Gordon & Maurean Krumrey	Glencoe MN
Doris M Wigand	Henderson MN	Janet Mackenthun	Glencoe MN
Lawrence Crawford	Arlington MN	Steve Kleist	Richfield MN
Marlene Nelson	La Salle MN	Richard & Sandra Weckwerth	Gaylord MN

700 Main Street  
P.O. Box 407  
Henderson, MN 56044  
Phone: 507-248-3434  
Email: schs1@frontiernet.net



**Henderson Heritage Days**  
**September 19 and 20th**  
*Celebrating the 1920s*  
We will be open for visitors Saturday 11 to 5  
And Sunday 2 to 5  
We will be serving refreshments on our spacious grand front porch. Come and join us!

**WE'RE ON THE WEB!**  
<http://history.sibley.mn.us>

*(Continued from page 8)*

from Illinois, Arizona and Plymouth MN

Charles and Donna Meyer toured the museum and were so impressed that a large donation was given to the Sibley County Historical Society.

We met the Poehlers, Caleb, Miles and Travis who with their mother, Tori Syverson, came to tour the museum. They are 6 generations removed from Henry Poehler who lived in the house now occupied by Bud and Dolores Hagen. Henry was a brother of August Poehler who built our museum



Mike McNamara and son James from the Twin Cities are pictured with the cupboard made by Mike's godfather, Archie Baudette who said Mike would have the cupboard some day. After a stint in the Armed Services, Mike found Archie had died and so Mike never knew the whereabouts of "his" cupboard. He was content the cupboard was in safe keeping, after seeing it at the our museum