

SIBLEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter - December 2022

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Words from the President – 2022, The Year in Review

In January we held two Sunday (January 7 & January 14) SCHS Christmas events: “Toys, Toys, Toys” with programs highlighting special toys from the past. Both events were very well attended.

Our Annual SCHS Meeting was held in April at Hahn’s Dining in Winthrop. We enjoyed an excellent meal, followed by speaker Dwight Grabitske from Arlington.

The display at the Sibley County Fair in August was very well received featuring “Music In Sibley County”. Each city had a display of local bands and musicians, along with items brought from the SCHS museum or the individual city local museums.

In August we had the Ann Tracy photograph display at the museum, which stayed through October. Ann also did a special program attended by a group of interested people from the area.

In September the board met at the Winthrop Museum and we enjoyed a program from Diane Fredin the “Hat Lady” along with a tour and lunch.

Our October meeting was held at the Gaylord Library followed by speaker Stephen Osman. He spoke about the Dakota Conflict of 1862, Minnesota’s other Civil War. This event was also well attended. A more detailed synopsis of his program is included in this newsletter.

Unfortunately, our porch painting project did not get finished as planned. We hope to have this project finished in the Spring of 2023. We are also working on obtaining a new SCHS sign on the front lawn, replacing the sign that is in dire need of replacement.

I guide at the museum on Sundays and it is sad to say most of our visitors are from out of town. It would be great if we could get more of our local residents to come and see our beautiful and interesting museum.

I was asked to write about a special Christmas memory; I have had many special memories over the years but feel that one of the most memorable is when I was a teenager, joining a new church, the pastor pointed out that he thought my name was unique. He went on to say that Joy stood for Jesus, Others and Yourself. I liked this thought and have always remembered his kind words.

Wishing you all Happy Holidays and am looking forward to the New Year!

Joy Cohrs, SCHS President

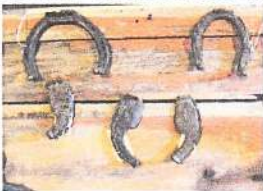
"This Old House" – continued

Square Nails In An Old Bread pan: Found in the museum's attic, were a few pounds of old square nails with no donor name or history information in museum records. Roger and Holly Harjes of Green Isle have sorted the nails. Should some be offered for sale? If so, where? At the museum or the county fair?

The Peasley and Clark Saloon was built, "down by the river side" in Henderson in 1854. It was constructed using square nails. It was rented to house the Federal Land Office in 1857, the building was then moved up the West Hill Road to Eighth Street and used as a private home. Years later, the property owner then, wanted the shabby old building removed from the back of his lot.

Bert Karels and Orville Beuch, volunteers for the development of the JR Brown, Minnesota River Center, salvaged portions of the building, reconstructing it as a ghost of the land office. They reused the original 1854 square nails for the project. Those nails look just like some in the bread pan. The reconstruction can be seen on the second floor of the Henderson Community Building, built as the Sibley County Courthouse in 1879.

A museum basement display has several sizes of horseshoes and oxen shoes donated by pioneer



families. These were attached to hooves using small square nails similar to those used by present-day farriers.

Are the large and small, bread-pan



handmade or machine made?

A Google search stated, "Square-head nails were made in the late 1700s until about 1830. Most were machine cut and finished off by a blacksmith who squared the heads . . . modern . . . nails were introduced about 1890.

Up The Stairs:

Most likely, everyone who travels the way to the museum's upstairs, wishes they could slide down



that banister! The elegant, glassy-smooth stairway's handrail and other millwork parts were made of black walnut from the local forest of the 1880s. The forested part of Sibley County was a part of the area that has been called, "The Big Woods of Minnesota".

Turned parts, including the heavy rail sections, are minders of the superb handcrafted items created by our forefathers.

The hanging light in the stairwell is an elaborated version of a kerosene lamp. The delicate chain system allows the two-lamp fixture to be lowered for cleaning, adding fuel and lighting wicks.

Christmas Ornaments in a Museum Collection Box:

Plastic Birds –

From the 1950s, among many Plastic ornaments replacing Glass.



Small Buildings – Many styles, over many years, from Germany first, then Japan. Some were placed over light bulbs, soft light glowing through cellophane windows. A little house with red and blue glass trim,



marked Japan, 25 cents.

A string of small glass ornaments.



Every Little Boy Wished For A Tonka Toy For Christmas

I was visiting with David Tesch one day; we both share an interest in genealogy, and he was telling me that a friend was working at the Mormon Library, and she found a lot of information for David and his family. He said there was even a couple of articles about his uncle Alvin Tesch who was one of three founders of the Minnetonka Toy Company. He knew this information before but was surprised these articles were in the packet of papers he received. So, when I got home, I had to Google Alvin Tesch, Mound MN and sure enough there were several articles about the start of Tonka Toys. Every boy I knew had a collection of Tonka Toys.

Alvin Tesch, born in 1915, was the son of Emil and Mabel Schmidt Tesch, he was born near Belle Plaine, MN in Scott County. Alvin was the second of five children, three brothers and a sister. David said his grandpa and grandma Tesch moved around many times, moving to Henderson Township, Sibley County before settling in one place. Alvin and his sister and brothers attended school in Henderson Public School and Country School District 2, out on county road 62.

He attended school at Dunwoody, to be a machinist. Even though in the 1940 Federal Census it said Alvin only went to two years of high school he still went on to get a higher education. The 1940 census also said he lived in Minneapolis. Also in 1940, Al registered for the draft. He married Louise Adams from Henderson, in 1941.

His daughter Venita (Tesch) Cronk remembers that they moved from Minneapolis to a house on Lake Independence in 1946, this is the same year that Lynn Baker contacted Avery Crouse and a very sought out Alvin Tesch who were the founders of Mound Metalcraft. Each of the founders had their own specialty—Baker was sales, Crouse in financial and Tesch in engineering and production. Their original intent was to manufacture garden implements and closet accessories. They were in an old Mound school building. One of the things they made at that time was a necktie valet and many other forgettable items. Then in 1947 they stumbled across a product line that would make them famous; they bought out a company owned by Ed Streator who had the designs and stamping dies for two metal toys, a crane and a steam shovel. They made some improvements and branded them Tonka Toys, with a logo that showed three seagulls representing the three founders.

Although Al's main responsibilities were at the plant, Vinita remembers her dad went to a toy show in New York. They were trying to demonstrate how indestructible the toy was and her dad weighing about 230 pounds stood on it.

Alvin and Avery left the company in about 1952. They had a philosophical conflict about the future of the toys. Al was ready to try something new. He was the kind of man who liked the challenge of making something work and when he succeeded, he was ready to move on to another challenge. After Al sold his share, he and his wife Louise took a month-long vacation to the southwest and Mexico, first and last time they ever did something like that.

After that Al and his brother-in-law formed a well drilling company, which they ran successfully for several years. Then a friend asked him to straighten out his machine shop, which was the start of many years of being a consultant for different companies. He continued doing this well into his 70's.

Al gave some of the toys he made to his nephew David Tesch, who took very good care of them. Some of these toys he passed onto his daughter Jennifer Sissons.



Christmas Traditions

Christmas Trees date back to Germany in the Middle Ages, with German and other European settlers popularizing them by the early 19th century. The first Christmas tree lot was in 1851. In a 2019 survey by the American Christmas tree Association, it was predicted that 77% of all households displayed a Christmas tree in their home. Among the trees on display, 81% were artificial and only 19% remained real.

Christmas Pickles – If there's a pickle among your snowman, angel and reindeer ornaments, you're likely taking part in the tradition of hiding the green ornament on the tree, so that the first child to find it wins a gift, or gets to open the first gift on Christmas morning. It is not real certain how this practice originated, but it likely grew from a Woolworth's marketing gimmick from the late 1800s, when the retailer received imported German ornaments shaped like a pickle and needed a sales pitch.

Yule Logs were part of ancient winter solstice celebrations. The candles and lights associated with Christmas, meant to symbolize guiding beacons for the Christ child, may have evolved from the Yule log, which was lit to entice the Sun to return as part of the jo'l (Yule) festival in Scandinavia. It was Americans who turned the wood burning into must-see TV. Back in 1966, TV aired a continuous 17-second loop of a fireplace for three hours along with holiday music. That led to an eventual better production and nearly 20 years of annual viewing.

Advent Calendars – Early versions of this tradition, started in Germany in 1903 by publisher Gerhard Land, offered a way for children to count down to Christmas by opening one "door" or "window" a day to reveal a Bible passage, poem or small gift. This tradition gained mass popularity by 1920.

Gingerbread Houses – Although Queen Elizabeth I gets credit for the early decorating of gingerbread cookies, once again, it's the Germans who lay claim to starting the gingerbread house tradition. When the German Brothers Grimm wrote "Hansel and Gretel", in 1812, a new holiday tradition was born. Today, the edible decorations are available in a slew of pre-packed kits.

Ugly Christmas Sweaters – Those of us that live in the north are blamed for this silly, ironic tradition that really gained steam in the 1980s. This tradition has turned into a multi-million business. The trend is seemingly here to stay, so don't forget to get yours ready for your celebrations this year.

Cookies and Milk for Santa – While leaving treats for Santa and his reindeer dates back to ancient Norse mythology, we began to sweeten up to the tradition during the Great Depression in the 1930s, as a sign of showing gratitude during a time of struggle.

Candy Canes – Whether devoured as a treat or hung on the tree as decoration, candy canes are the No. 1 selling, non-chocolate candy during December, and date back to 1670 Germany. The red and white peppermint sticks arrived stateside in 1847, when German-Swedish immigrants placed them on a tree. By the 1950s, as an automated candy cane-making machine was invented, they were cemented into our traditions.

Door wreaths – Wreaths have been around since the ancient Greek and Roman times, but the evergreen Christmas wreath, often adorned with boughs of holly, eventually took on Christian meaning, with the circular shape representing eternal life and the holly leaves and berries symbolic of Christ's crown of thorns and blood. Today's wreaths, which come in all varieties, from flowers and fruit to glass balls and ribbon to artificial and themed, are most often seen as a secular winter tradition.

Christmas Cards – The first official Christmas card debuted in 1843 England. In 1915 the Hall Brothers (now Hallmark) created a folded card sold with an envelope. Today more than 1.6 million holiday cards are sold annually to be shared with family and friends.

Elf on the Shelf – Love it or loathe it, moms and dads have either joyously or begrudgingly been hiding a toy elf each night from Thanksgiving to Christmas. More than 13 million elves have been "adopted" since the book with a toy was published in 2005

The Nutcracker – for many, the holiday season is not complete without a trip to watch this ballet. The romantic tale of the young Clara's Christmas Eve premiered December 18, 1892 in Russia. It was performed for the first time outside of Russia in 1934 and made its way to the U.S. in 1944. It became a must-see event in America in the 1960s as performances spread across the nation.

The Christmas we celebrate today

seems like a timeless weaving of custom and feeling beyond the reach of history. Yet the familiar mix of carols, cards, presents, trees, multiplicities of Santa's and holiday neuroses that have come to define December 25th are little more than 100 years old.

It was not until the middle of the last century that Christmas was known as a national holiday. Like many other such 'inventions of tradition', the creation of an American Christmas was a response to social and personal needs that arose at a particular point in history, in this case a time of sectional conflict and civil war, as well as the unsettling processes of urbanization and industrialization. The holiday's new customs and meanings helped the nation to make sense of the confusions of the era and to secure, if only for a short while each year, a soothing feeling of unity.

Even as late as the early 19th century, many Americans, churched and unchurched, northerners or southerners, hardly took notice of the holiday at all. By mid-century, however, new conditions had begun to undercut local customers and create needs for common and visible celebrations.

Communication and transportation revolutions made once isolated parts of the country acutely aware of each other.

The swirl of change caused many to long for an earlier time, one in which they imagined that old and good values held sway in cohesive and peaceful communities. It also made them reconsider the notion of 'community' in larger terms, on a national scale, but modelled on the ideal of a family gathered at the hearth.

At this cross-road of progress and nostalgia, Americans found in Christmas a holiday that ministered to their needs.

The many Christmases celebrated across the land began to resolve into a more singular and widely celebrated home holiday.

One custom of the holiday has stood the test of time. As early as 1832, Harriet Martineau had identified what would become one of the most familiar symbols of the American Christmas. She had 'little doubt' that the Christmas tree would become one of the most flourishing exotics of New England. By the 1850s, many Americans, not just New Englanders, had fallen in love with the German custom.

Christmas has become a time of year that many wait for all year round, but before 1850 many U.S. citizens did not dream of Christmas at all. From its Puritan roots to complaints of rampant commercialism, Christmas has been filled with traditions, old and new. Some date back to 16th-century Germany or even ancient Greek times, while others have caught on in modern times.

20. FROM ITS PURITAN ROOTS TO COMPLAINTS OF rampant commercialism, Christmas has been filled with traditions, old and new.

21. IN SOME WAYS WE CELEBRATE THE season and how they came to be.



A Christmas Card from the 1800s

2022 – Special Programs

August 11, 2022:

Prior to returning to Arizona, Ann Tracy shared her art with friends and relatives. The group convened at the SCHS Museum, Henderson, on Thursday evening. The art showing continued at the SCHS Museum through the end of October.

Both Ann and Lil spent the first part of their lives in Sibley County. In fact all their ancestors were early settlers in Sibley County—Green Isle, Arlington, Henderson, Jessenland, Faxon & Assumption Townships. The exhibit *A Century of Walking Art* focuses on their original landscape, with old and new photos of places in Sibley County, and paintings inspired by their walks and adventures.

In her book, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, arts writer Rebecca Solnit says that walking “is a state in which the mind, body and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together.” Walking as an art has a long history, from ancient pilgrimages to modern performance art. In its simplest terms, “walking art” is movement combined with awareness.

“The rhythm of waking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This . . . suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it. A new thought often seems like a feature of the landscape that was there all along, as though thinking were traveling . . .”. – Rebecca Solnit

September 22, 2022:

Our September board meeting was held at the Winthrop Community Historical Society Museum in Winthrop. After the meeting we enjoyed a tour of the Museum followed by a program on “Hats”. Board member, Diane Fredin gave an interesting talk on the history of hats through the years. Christmas trees have been placed throughout the Museum adorned with her many hats—a collection she acquired throughout the years. A “Christmas in the Country” Open House will be held on Saturday, December 10, 2022 at the Winthrop Museum from 1:00 p.m. to 5 p.m. Poster of the event is enclosed.

October 27, 2022:

On Thursday evening a speaking event on the Dakota Conflict (also known as the Sioux Uprising) was held at the Gaylord Public Library following the October SCHS Meeting.

Guest speaker was Steven Osman, A St. Olaf graduate. He has recently retired as the senior historian with the Minnesota Historical Society. He managed Fort Snelling for over 30 years. He has studied the Dakota Conflict and its events, the people involved, and the effects on our Southern Minnesota region.

Mr. Osman gave a wonderfully detailed overview of the 1862 Dakota Conflict. His presentation went through in a timeline fashion, allowing the listener to understand the causes that led up to the conflict, the context of the conflict and the aftermath left on the area, the settlers, and the Indians.

Mr. Osman’s presentation included many depictions (paintings/photos) of the conflict and of the people involved. Mr. Osman provided the audience with the details of the Indian’s siege of Fort Ridgley and the attack of New Ulm—both major events in Minnesota’s history. Mr. Osman used percentages to explain the impact this conflict had on the local community. For example, comparing the number killed percentage wise to what this would equate to with today’s population. This gave the audience an understanding of the huge impact this conflict had on the local community.

We sincerely thank Mr. Osman for speaking at this room-filled event!



Submitted by Shirley Black, SCHS Secretary

A New Copier in 2022!

Thanks to Charles & Donna Meyer from Texas for providing us with our new technological luxury. The copier "does everything"—interacting with our computers when needed. Colored copies are priceless. Sharon Haggenmiller is not the only museum volunteer who's thrilled with the new copier, as it is necessary to the SCHS operations and is appreciated and used by all our volunteers.

Sidenote: The manual is printed in Thailand with English, Espanala, Francoies and Portugues language versions. We can welcome many new volunteers since directions are printed in several languages.



Time to hear the sleigh bells ringing.

Time to guess what Santa's bringing.

Time for singing, laughing, playing!

Happy, Happy Holiday-ing!

MERRY CHRISTMAS!



(This type of reflector was popular in the 1920s thru 1930s. It was placed over small light bulbs to increase glow.)

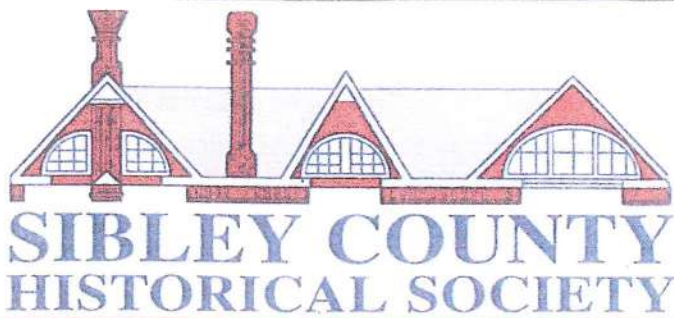
Do you have a love for history with an interest in preserving and sharing it? If you do and have some free time, consider volunteering your time at the Sibley County Museum.

The Sibley County Museum in Henderson, Minnesota is seeking volunteers to assist in the Museum with greeting visitors, working the information desk, assisting visitors in the exhibit gallery, and giving guided tours. Other volunteers do clerical work, help catalog and file the library, set up displays or assist in the Gift Shop.

Volunteers normally work a four-hour morning or afternoon shift, once a week. Some work one day each week, others work every other week or once a month, and some just assist with special events.

Please contact one of the board members or the museum volunteers for more information.

schs1@frontiernet.net or 507-248-3434



SIBLEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The Sibley County Historical Society membership dues are renewed every February 1. The 2022 membership fees were due last February (running from February 1, 2022 through January 31, 2023). Renewal date information may be found on the label of your newsletter (see above). If you have not paid your 2022 membership, please send your check and information to SCHS Treasurer, P. O. Box 407, Henderson, MN 56044.

The 2023 memberships will run from February 1, 2023 through January 31, 2024. Membership dues are as follows: \$20 per year for Individuals, \$25 per year for family, and \$50 per year for Businesses.

The membership form can be found on the SCHS website. You may submit your form electronically and then mail your payment; or may use the form shown below, attach your payment, and mail to SCHS Treasurer, P. O. Box 407, Henderson, MN 56044.

SCHS Membership Form

Circle: New or Renewal

___ Individual: \$20.00
___ Family: \$25.00
___ Business: \$50.00

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