

SIBLEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter - June 2023

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Beginning Memorial Day 2023,
the Sibley County Historical Museum is open on
Sundays
2 p.m. to 5 p.m.
during the months of
June, July, August, September & October, 2023

Words from the President –

The museum opened on Memorial Day as usual and is now open every Sunday. Prior to opening day we had a school tour in May with 88 total people from Sibley East School. It gets a little hectic with that many at once but went well. I think it is good for kids to learn about the history of our county and see things they would never see anywhere else.

Our porch painting is done and looks very nice; within the next week our new Sibley County Historical sign will be up. Both are good improvements to our beautiful museum.



We have been talking about our 75th Anniversary which will be next year and hope to come up with some good ideas to celebrate it.

We have a couple of new volunteers join us which is very much appreciated. Our volunteers are so important to the museum and it is good to get new ideas. We now need to figure out how we can get more visitors. Sad to say many local residents have never visited.

Plans are underway to plan for this year's Sibley County Fair held August 2-6. The theme will be communications which I think all visitors will find interesting. Our featured town this year will be Green Isle. I am looking forward to it as I spend much time at the fair with my grandkids who are in 4H. Hope to see many there!

Joy Cohrs, SCHS Board President

Museum's Kitchen Icebox - By SCHS Collections Committee

Donated long ago, an old icebox had a prominent place in the kitchen. On-line sources have provided the following information.

To preserve perishable food, especially meat, Americans in the late 1700's began storing food in pits buried in the ground with huts built above them, known as ice houses. These pits were filled with ice harvested from nearby lakes, which remained frozen all summer by using straw for insulation and stone walls to prevent heat transfer.

For convenience, storing food inside the home was desired. Keeping food chilled beat other forms of food preparation such as salting, drying, and canning which are labor intensive and eliminate all signs of freshness of the food.

By the end of the 1800's, many households began storing perishable food in ice boxes. These were typically made of wood with a tin or zinc lining backed with straw, sawdust, cork, or seaweed for insulation. A large block of ice in a compartment or tray near the top of the icebox kept food chilled and fresh for a reasonable period of time.

Iceboxes ranged in price from \$15 to \$50, depending on sizes and features. Cheap models had a drip pan that had to be emptied daily; fancier iceboxes had spigots for draining melted ice into a holding tank, which then could be used for drinking.

Users replenished their ice supply from the iceman who made home deliveries from his horse-drawn ice wagon. Ice tongs were used to carry the block of ice into the home. His receptacle necessary to preserve tons of lake ice for distribution would have been a large, well-insulated structure. The Museum kitchen has ice tongs and an ice chopper displayed with the icebox.

By 1935, the era of electric refrigeration had begun and by 1944, 85 percent of American households featured a refrigerator in the kitchen.



Doughboys

An early use of the term “doughboy” occurred during the Mexican American War in 1846 – 1848; soldiers on the march appeared to be covered with flour, a light-colored dust churned up by many feet. Early in World War I, doughboy had a different meaning; new soldiers were soft as bread dough and needed rigorous exercise to reach fighting condition.

Reconciliation with Mexico had just occurred in 1916 when marching foot soldiers in Pershing’s Expeditionary Force traveled south of the border to fight rebel Poncho Villa. Covered in white adobe dust, the foot soldiers were called “adobes” or “dobies” by mounted troops. Within a few months, these dobies or Doughboys, were redeployed to Europe.

The “Great War” marked the first time in history that the United States sent soldiers abroad to defend foreign soil. Indelibly tied to the Americans, “Doughboys” became the most enduring nickname for General John Pershing’s men.

A new use for the Doughboy began in 1965 when the Pillsbury Company advertising introduced “Poppin’ Fresh” as their mascot, widely known as the Pillsbury Doughboy. Animation advertising showed him being poked in his soft belly causing giggles and smiles.

The Museum has Doughboys on display—Pillsbury Guys in the kitchen and a WWI doll in uniform in the Military Room.

FLAG DAY

Wikipedia informs readers, “In the United States, Flag Day is celebrated on June 14th. It commemorates the adoption of the flag of the United States on June 14, 1777 by resolution of the Second Continental Congress. In 1916 President Woodrow Wilson and in 1927 President Calvin Coolidge issued proclamations for June 14th to be observed the national observance and President Harry Truman signed it into law.

In 1937 Pennsylvania became the first state to declare June 14 a state holiday. In Minnesota, several cities celebrate Flag Day with parades or other celebrations. Proper flag display has a set of do’s and don’ts to be found in many places.

One surprising source is a cereal box from 2003. Kellogg USA, Inc. with headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan, produced Kellogg’s Corn Flakes and has done so since 1894. It was “invented” as a good food for sanitarium patients at the request of the superintendent whose brother ran the Kellogg Company. In 1952 their corn flakes cereal box showed a set of “Flag Display Guidelines”. About 50 years later, preparations to use the feature again were underway.

“Better if used before May 6, 2003” is stamped on the bottom of a corn flakes box that is in the Museum collection. In 1912 the appearance of the flag changed as New Mexico was added to the Union as the 47th state and Arizona was added as the 48th. The last change occurred in 1959 when stars were added for Alaska and Hawaii, the 49th and 50th states.

Grandma's Apron

By Vivian Busse Pinney (daughter of William Busse)

Dad's mother, Sarah Oldenburg, always wore an apron. Style didn't dictate the reason for this apparel; utility was the most important. As I remember, it was styled with a front bib that was held in place by narrow bands that went over the shoulder and were fastened to the waist band near the center back. At the waist a narrow band linked the bib and those two bands over the shoulder bands, and the bottom of that band was attached to the long shirred rectangular skirt that would allow plenty of room for whatever needed to be toted in that soft hammock. Added to the narrow waist band in back were sashes that tied into a bow in back. Pockets (two) were sewn on either side in front on the skirt were used to carry smaller objects like safety pins, garden seeds, or possibly a letter that came in the mail that would be read while resting from a task, etc.

The fabric was always a plain, darker color or a small dark print that would not show soil very easily. If unexpected company arrived, Grandma could easily slip off that soiled apron and put on a clean one.

Sundays were generally days to wear a white, lighter colored, or maybe even a brighter colored one; but always an apron styled much the same over a dress with a rounded neckline, elbow length sleeves, a bloused bodice, and a long gathered skirt.

Grandma's apron was used for so many daily tasks. Little chicks were carried in her apron; as she gathered up the bottom edges, they snuggled in the hammock-like carrier while she held the apron with one hand and the cluck (mother hen) with the other hand to take them to the new pen after all of the chicks had escaped their shells during the hatching process. In lambing season the little ones that weren't being welcomed by their mothers were snuggled into the large hammock and carried into the house to be warmed near the open, oven door of the cook stove until they were completely dry and be returned to hopeful acceptance by the ewes. Baby ducklings, goslings, puppies—anything needing to be brought to a different area—had a ride in Grandma's apron.

When taking wood in to keep that cook stove fire going, a much larger amount could be carried in the apron than could be piled on the arm. Dry corncobs for starting a fire could be carried in much larger amounts in the apron than could be carried in the hands. Clean clothes from the wash line and the clothes pins that held the clothes were all stowed in Grandma's apron. When harvest time produced ripe vegetables and fruits, all were gathered and brought to the house without looking for a container.

Aprons are still worn today, but are styled very differently because the needs have changed. No longer do we have women working in an agricultural society where so much hand work and raising of animals call for Grandma's utility apron.

The Great Storm

In early November of 2021, Carolyn Mankell Sowinski contacted the Sibley County Historical Society; she stated that she was looking for information on victims that died in the snowstorm of January 7-9, 1873, as she was researching for a book about that snowstorm. She had a list of six victims, from Sibley County, and wanted more information about the victims and their families. We were happy to look in our history books and our newspapers that went back that far to find information that would help her.

This was during Covid-19 time and many museums were closed, especially the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul and the Library of Congress and the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington D.C., MNHS and LOC reopened to researchers later in 2021 and NARA, in 2022.

Originally, she had a list of 70 victims, but in her book she tells of 84 victims that died in 31 western and southern counties. Only two counties, Watonwan and Kandiyohi, had more deaths recorded than Sibley. Watonwan had eight deaths, and Kandiyohi had eleven deaths, Sibley had seven deaths.

Author Carolyn Mankell Sowinski graduated from the New-London-Spicer school district in Minnesota and St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. She received Masters Degrees in Library Science and American History from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has written several non-fiction books about her ancestors. She wrote a book in 2017 *Almost saved, But Lost: The January 1873 Blizzard in Kandiyohi County Minnesota*. She later learned that there were more deaths throughout the state.

Carolyn has done a great job describing the storm taken from newspaper articles. She also told what the last year had been like, many were not prepared for the winter, they did not have enough wood to last the winter or food supplies, so when they had a break in the weather many were out gathering wood or had gone to town to get supplies and were caught completely off guard.

Carolyn wanted these people to be remembered as more than just a name and a statistic. She has worked hard at finding information on each victim and their families. Some had been here for years; some were recent immigrants to this country. It is a sad story to read but it so interesting to read about their lives. Some of the victims' families got aid from the state. The most any family got was \$50 from the state, because they had nothing. Others had livestock and wood for fuel, so they were denied aid. Some who died had no one depending on them so no request was made, or they were denied.

Some were found alive but their limbs so badly frozen that they had to be amputated and then died suffering from complications, but they lived long enough to tell their story. Those that survived their injuries received some aid.

There are stories of families and how they survived the storm, their memories told to others years later and were written down. Some of these stories are factual and some may have been exaggerated, who is to know.

It is a sad book, but yet it is fascinating to read, especially when reading how they survived. Carolyn wanted the book done by the 150th anniversary of the storm, and she made it. This book and her previous book, ***Almost Saved, But Lost: The January 1873 Blizzard in Kandiyohi County, Minnesota*** can be bought from Amazon. [The Great Storm: Minnesota's Victims in the Blizzard of January 7, 1873: Sowinski, Carolyn M Mankell: 9798840710913: Amazon.com: Books](#), the price is \$25.

Ruth Ann Buck

Ruth's special note:

"We have recently gotten through the longest winter in history, or at least it seemed that way. I don't think any of the snowstorms of 2022/2023 could compare with the snowstorm that happened January 7th--9th of 1873. As I am writing this it is almost 90 degrees, hard to relate to snowstorms."

Marlys Gaucher
December 3, 1939 to January 25, 2023

Our Sympathy to the family and friends of Marlys Gaucher. She passed away January 25, 2023. Her daughter, Sara Oakland from California, wrote to us that her Mom is to be remembered for her quiet nature, her inquisitive and playful spirit and her love of beauty."

After graduating from Arlington-Green Isle High School in 1957, she attended Concordia College, St. Paul and Concordia Teacher College in Seward,- NE. Her teaching career began in Rhode Island by providing enriching environments for young children.

Marlys returned to Arlington in the 1990's to care for her aging father. Her "back home" years were devoted to reading, music, gardening and participating in her church community.

She served as a member of the Lions Club and the Garden Club with community service projects.

Marlys loved history. The Sibley County Historical Society benefited by her endless hours volunteering at the Museum. Being a guide demonstrated her commitment to Sibley County history.

SCHS Staff appreciated you. Many thanks for your service.

Exploring Historical Societies for Family Research

By Jodi Decker

Local city and county historical societies are a rich resource for exploring your family's history in a location. While genealogy societies help with researching family trees (and there can certainly be overlap), historical societies provide information on the time periods, events, and places your relatives resided in. This can include providing residential records, family or local artifacts, photos, maps, and books, newspaper clippings, and resources which provide context to their life stories.

Poems From the Asylum authors took a lively road trip to Minnesota to walk in the footsteps of their ancestor Martha Gruening Nasch, by visiting several historical societies in the places significant to Martha's life. The visits provided the opportunity to ask the knowledgeable docents questions, learn new information, and verify existing research.

The first stop on the tour was the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, to experience an immersive exhibit on World War II history. This was one of the most significant events in Martha's life, as she saw her one and only son Ralph off to war. Going back in time, the next stop was at the Bell Plaine Historical Society, as Martha was born in Bell Plaine in 1890. The authors toured an historically preserved home with a docent who explained the customs and lifestyle of families who originally settled in that town.

A stop at the Sibley County Historical Society in Henderson was a particular delight for Martha's descendants. Docent Arlene Busse displayed the donated wedding dress of Martha's oldest sister Mary, her brother Hugo's mud shoes, and the portrait of August Gruening, Martha's mother. Seeing relatives' artifacts in a museum is a unique experience, but it's reassuring to see them carefully preserved for others to appreciate. Arlene also escorted us to the nearby cemetery to see where Martha was buried near her second husband, Bill.

Next, we visited the Nicollet County Historical Society, located in St. Peter, which partners with the Historic Treaty Center to provide exhibits and resource materials regarding the local town history. The primary tour of the St. Peter State Hospital Museum provided visitors with an insider's experience into the life of an insane asylum patient, much as Martha herself would have lived. Docent Beth Zabel narrated a detailed tour with stories that enhanced the exhibits.

The final stop was the Otter Tail County Historical Society in Fergus Falls. Martha's brothers and mother lived here for a time, and Martha visited and stayed, too. Museum displays of historically accurate rooms, along with a beautiful collection of men's and women's hats, were reminiscent of how Martha lived and the clothing she wore. An outside tour of the preserved Fergus Falls State Hospital grounds was compelling to see.

Incorporating historical societies in family research adds cultural and historical context, can fill in gaps in research, and may produce some surprising artifacts. Knowledgeable docents are invaluable resources to ask for help. Most historical societies also have books available for purchase on-site as well.





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Check your membership date on the mailing label. Memberships now run from February 1, 2023 through January 31, 2024. Mail your check and information to: SCHS Treasurer, P. O. Box 407, Henderson, MN 56044

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