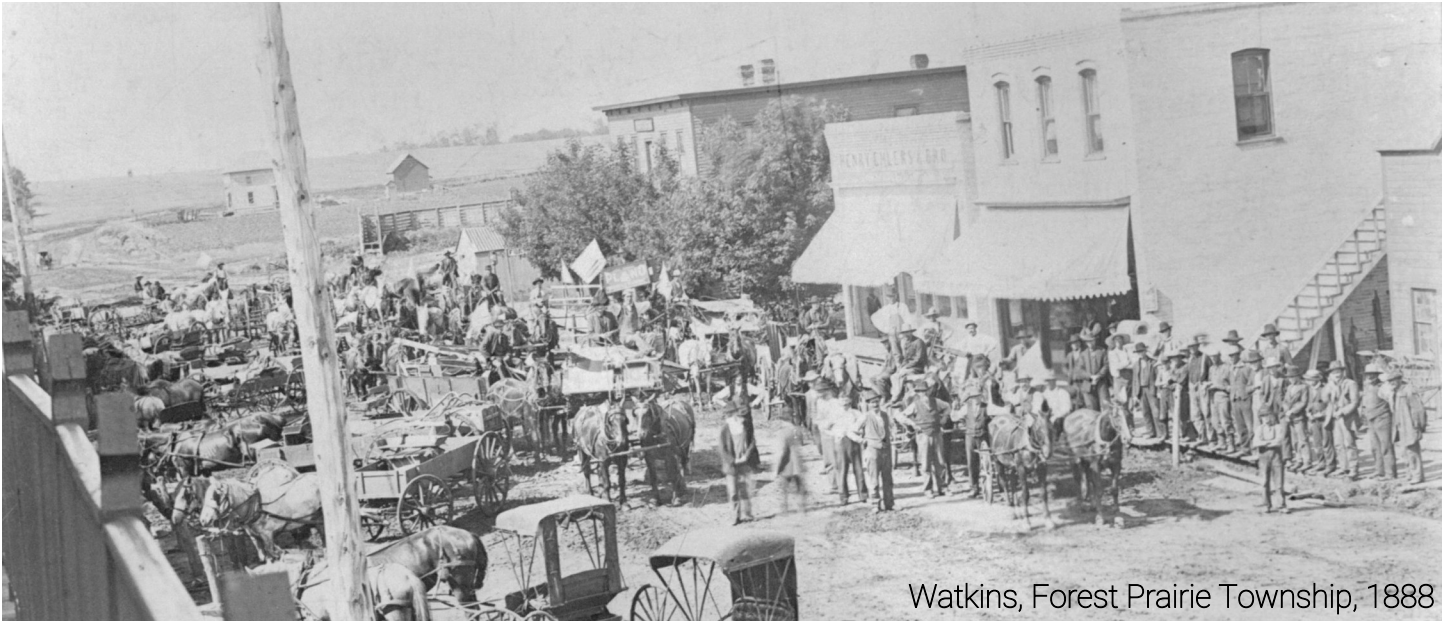


MEEKER MEMORIES

WINTER 2024

MEEKER COUNTY
MUSEUM
QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER



Watkins, Forest Prairie Township, 1888

The mission of the Meeker County Historical Society is to enhance and preserve the Meeker County Museum, Civil War Building Complex, and its growing collection of artifacts of local historical and genealogical significance. We also serve to provide educational programming and other means for dissemination of local historical and genealogical information for present and future generations.



**Meeker County Museum
at the G.A.R. Hall**

Sharing Our Stories Since 1885

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TALES"**



Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall

308 N Marshall Ave
Litchfield, MN 55355
320-693-8911

www.meekercomuseum.org

Admission

Adults - \$3

Members & Children Under 12 - FREE

Board of Directors

Jessica Bondhus

Mark Cashman

Pam Dille

Jesse Fuchs

David Holle

Keith Johnson

Connie Lies

Theresa Nelson

Chuck Pease

Dave Pease

Barb Penk

Jessica VanLanduyt

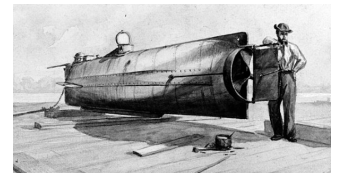
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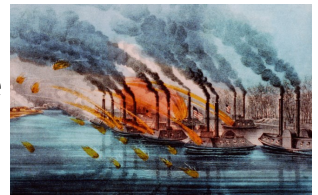
January

- 11 **Civil War Roundtable: Hunley: The First Submarine to Sink a Warship** with Gary Blessman. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/ general admission



February

- 8 **Civil War Roundtable: Fort Henry and Fort Donelson** with Joyce and Jim Hinderks. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/ general admission



- 29 **Puzzle Exchange** 7:00 p.m. at the Museum/G.A.R. Hall. See page 3 for details.

March

- 14 **Civil War Roundtable: Military and Civilian Forts of the US-Dakota War of 1862** with Professor Robert Mann. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/general admission

SAVE THE DATE!
Minnesota Civil War Symposium
Saturday, April 27
Litchfield Opera House

Follow us on Facebook or see page 7 on how you can sign up for our monthly emails "Meeker Memos"

Director's Notes

Collection Spotlight

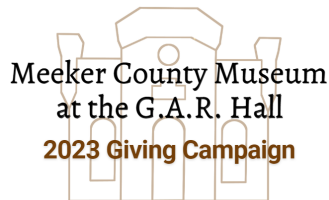
Danelle Erickson
Executive Director



Happy New Year!

I want to start by saying a HUGE "Thank you!" to our two outgoing board members. Sid Willson (president) and Ken Zachman (treasurer) were both part of our Board of Directors for the past six years. Their leadership and contributions to the Museum have been invaluable. As sad as we are to see them go, we are also excited to welcome two new board members, Jesse Fuchs and Jessica VanLanduyt.

Thank you to everyone who donated to our 2023 Giving Campaign! Your generous gifts combined to over \$8,000—a total that was doubled thanks to a generous matching gift! Your support means we ended 2023 with a balanced budget and have a great start to 2024.



Speaking of starting 2024, we have another great lineup for our Civil War Roundtable. As always, we have a wide variety of topics. You can find the full lineup on our website at www.meekercomuseum.org/civil-war-roundtable


Puzzle Exchange
A fundraiser for the Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall

Thursday, February 29 at 7:00
308 N Marshall Ave., Litchfield

Bring up to 5 jigsaw puzzles of 500+ pieces to exchange with others!

Admission: \$5

The evening will include light refreshments, puzzles to work on, and a museum to explore.

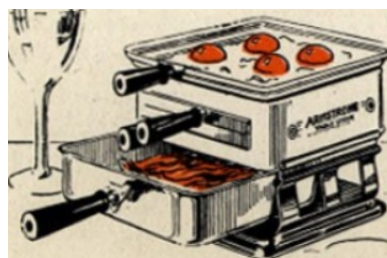


Bit by bit, the museum staff has been cataloging, photographing, and documenting the artifacts in our collection.

One of the items we recently documented was an Armstrong Table Stove. Curious about the small appliance, we took to the internet to see what we could



learn. Turns out this stove was the ultimate in convenience cooking in the 1920s. This handy appliance could cook multiple items at once, all while sitting on your dining table! We found a



digital copy of the original *Table Cookery the Armstrong Way* booklet that was packed with instructions and recipes. One could

fry eggs on the top, make waffles in the middle compartment, and cook bacon or sausage in the bottom!

Another item we came across that took a little research was this colored light from Peterson Pharmacy in Dassel. The light is a "show globe," and they have been used for hundreds of years to indicate a pharmacy. In some places, it is still illegal to display these in a business that is not a pharmacy.





Members



Donors

New* and Returning Members October-December 2023

Kate and Jen Andrews van Horne	Chris and Sarah Morris*
Dale and Linda Atkinson	Barb Penk
Patrick M Campbell	Tom and Shirley Smith*
Dennis and Colleen Compton	James and Roberta Swenson
Mindy Desens	Tami Tagtow*
Keith Johnson	VFW Post 2818
Kathy Maas*	Shirley Vivion*
Jody Markgraf*	Heather Woodlee

Financial Donations October-December 2023

American Legion Post 104	Ron Johnson
Sarah Anderson	Darlene Kotelnicki
Auggie Anderson	Ladies of the G.A.R.
Tim Bergstrom	Elaine Lenhard
Gary Blessman	Don and Connie Lies
Carol Blunt	Tony Lorber
Mike and Louise Brooks	Carol & Tim Lundstrom
Cheryl and Craig Bulau	Adam Malamen
Joyce Burgstaler	Doug Meeker
Ray Doering	Linda Miller
Ralph and Jill Erickson	Marveen Minish
Tami Erickson	Theresa & Brad Nelson
Sam & Vonnie Feistner	Judy Oestreich
Sarah Fjellanger	Joe and Nancy Paddock
Lynne Gelston	Chuck and Merna Pease
David Glesne	Dave and Jan Pease
Chris Hansen Estate	Dr. Dhanush & Eva Prasad
John and Jean Hartwell	Dennis & Nina Rutledge
Les Heitke	Bob and Beth Schnell
Joyce and Jim Hinderks	Bernard Schulte
Lee & Audrey Hollaar	Larry C. Sharpe
Dr. Daniel & Brenda Johnson	Lois Sosenheimer
Margaret Johnson	James and Roberta Swenson
Sandy Johnson	William E. Taylor
Jerome Johnson and Anita Robeson	VFW Post 2818
Keith & Marian Johnson	Ken and Mary Zachman

Business and Nonprofit Members



American Legion Post 104



Conway, Deuth & Schiesing, PLLP



GROVE BANK



Litchfield Opera House



Litchfield Rotary



VFW Post 2818



Artifact Donations October-December 2023

Carol Barnaal	Robyn Richardson
Harlow Karg	Alice Schwartzrock
Sarah Morris	William E Taylor
Jeff Niedenthal	

If you are considering donating an artifact to the Meeker County Museum, please contact us first.

Township Tales

Forest Prairie & Forest City



Watkins, Forest Prairie Township, 1888

Come along as we continue our Township Tales series, featuring stories from Meeker County townships. This issue includes Forest Prairie and Forest City Townships.

Forest Prairie Township

On the shelves at the Museum, we have many family history books people have donated over the years. Some are professionally printed genealogies. Others are a collection of papers in a 3-ring binder. And everything in between. One of the publications on the shelves is a copy of a ledger that belonged to Valentine Hoffman. The ledger was copied, compiled, and indexed by Val's great-granddaughter. Val was born in Luxembourg and came to Minnesota in the 1870s. He settled first in Stearns County and later in Watkins, Forest Prairie Township, Meeker County.

1888 marks the birth of Watkins, Minnesota and Val's name appears on the list of the village's first councilmen. He was also one of the first to purchase a lot in the newly-formed community, buying Lot 17 in Block 2, just north of the railroad tracks on Central Avenue. It was probably here that Val started his business. By March 1888, the first entries were made in Val's ledger for the Watkins House.

Although we haven't found any additional information on the Watkins House, we can piece together some details from Val's ledger. [There



Val Hoffman

was a "Watkins House" that burned down in 1893, but this appears to have been a later hotel located south of the tracks and probably wasn't connected with Val's business. In more recent years, there was another Watkins House that served as a retirement/assisted living home.]

Although the ledger doesn't clearly state the "Watkins House" was a hotel, Val was known as a Watkins hotelier in later years. One of the expenses listed in the ledger was wages for a few women, perhaps for laundry and housekeeping. However, the biggest recorded expense is for beverages.

During the first year and a half of business, Val purchased 398 ½ kegs of beer along with \$37.25 worth of bottles of beer from Cold Spring Brewery. That's over twenty kegs a month! Another big account was for John Rodange and his bottling company in Litchfield which provided Val with a variety of beverages including pop, ginger ale, birch beer, and three kinds of cider (apple, pear, and orange).

The Watkins House also offered cigars and tobacco, purchased from Carver County. Cigars called Companions, Forest Rose, and Charter Oak were sold alongside Ole Bull tobacco.

In February 1892, an entry appears under the account for Cold Spring Brewery and just three days later, Val sold his property to John Roedl. A few months earlier, Val and his wife had purchased 80 acres just southeast of Watkins with the property being recorded under the name of his wife, Catherine. The next date found in the ledger doesn't appear until 1898.

The Hoffman family settled into their new home. But around the start of 1898, Val must have gotten the urge to try his hand at the hotel business again. In February 1898, he leased the American Hotel in Litchfield. It was owned by Ludvig Schultz and was previously known as the Exchange Hotel.

Upon renting the hotel, Val returned to his ledger, writing a lengthy list of items for the hotel



Stamped in Val Hoffman's ledger

with everything from bedding and furniture to artwork and a kitchen stove. The list is written twice – once in German, Val’s native tongue, and the other in English.

Like with the Watkins House, not much is known about Val’s time at the American House. Did Val run the day-to-day operations, or did he turn it over to someone else? Did the whole family live in Litchfield, or did they remain on the farm outside of Watkins? Whatever the situation, it was fairly short-lived. From the meticulous expenses and income reports from March to November 1898, we find the hotel net just \$.33.

Val continued in business for a few more months, and the ledger’s last hotel-related entry was made in April 1899. Val’s expenses indicate he was heading back to the farm, purchasing \$10 worth of wheat seed and a cow for \$35. There is also a wonderful list of thirty-four fruits, vegetables, and herbs. The Hoffmans’ garden would have been quite the sight with everything from Big Boston lettuce and double-curved parsley to French breakfast radish and Cobb gem watermelon!

Val returned to his farm in Forest Prairie Township and by all accounts, remained on the farm for the rest of his life. One has to wonder if he ever had the desire to bring out his old ledger and plan for another business venture. Val died on his homestead in 1922 at the age of 72.

Forest City Township

In May 1915, a group of women met under the guidance of Christina Mueller and formed the Forest City Women’s Club. The club was “organized for the social benefit of the community and to give financial aid to worthy causes.” The Meeker County Museum is home to some of the early record books from this organization, giving us a unique view into this long-standing club.

Like any good club, they established their by-laws, elected officers, and held regular business meetings. In these early days, member dues were \$.10 a month and meetings were held on the first Wednesday of each month at 2:30. The ladies took turns hosting and had strict guidelines each hostess must follow. The menu must include sandwiches (up to two different kinds if the hostess preferred), two kinds of cake, pickles, coffee, and one additional dish if desired. If the rules weren’t followed, there was a \$1 fine.

A typical meeting started with rollcall where the members were asked to respond with a current event. Litany was read, the Lord’s Prayer recited, and a song was sung. Most of the songs were of a religious nature although occasionally a more patriotic title was selected from their songbook.

The educational portion of the meeting often included a member presenting an article she had read or a topic she had learned about, such as “uses of the soybean” or the concern about cigar bootlegging. In the 1940s, one of the members spoke about an imaginary voyage from New York to South America. This must have caught the members’ attention as several of the following meetings featured a presentation on various South American countries.

Each meeting also focused on the various charitable activities of the club. At least once a year, they held a large fundraising event, raising over \$100 each year. The bazaar was usually hosted at the Forest City Hall. The ladies would spend hours creating quilts or rugs to sell and raffle. A meal was served alongside other fundraising activities, including a fish pond one year. Ice cream socials, oyster suppers, and a Christmas party were also favorite activities of the club.

These fundraisers, when combined with the monthly dues and collections taken up at each meeting, provided the club with the funds to help others. One of the first charitable acts the club did was to purchase glasses for young Guy Peters. Money was often gifted to the Red Cross and the group was a regular supporter of Rev. McLeod.

Other recipients of the clubs’ generosity included the USO, Father Flannigan’s Boys Town, Sunshine Society of Minneapolis, families affected by tornadoes or fires, and foreign relief.

When America became involved in the World Wars, the women’s club also got involved. Upon learning of the troops’



Forest City Women’s Club, 1940s

need for socks, the women purchased the needed supplies, shared them among the group and started knitting. They sent Christmas packages to the troops and found ways to conserve resources at home – including adjusting their meeting menus to confirm with rationing. In the aftermath of WWI, the group also “adopted” a French orphan, making a note in the minutes when they received a letter from the child their \$36 was supporting.

The club itself was connected beyond Forest City. They hosted the first meeting of the

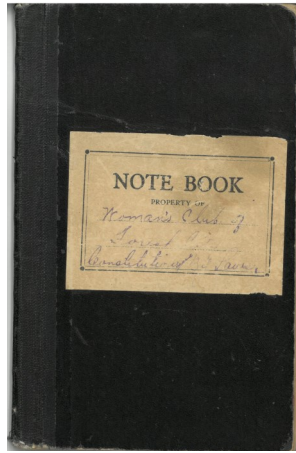
Federation of Women's Clubs of Meeker County and became a member of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. This national organization boasted 16,000 clubs at its height and is still in existence today.

As for the Forest City Women's Club, it would continue on for decades as its members enjoyed their friendships, socialization, and the good deeds to others. Their last meeting was in 2004.

Sources:

- Val Hoffman's Ledger
- Records of the Forest City Women's Club
- Various issues of the Litchfield's newspapers

Note: While writing the article, we reached out to Bev Ewing, a great-granddaughter of Val Hoffman. She donated the photocopies of Val's ledger years ago and is now in the process of donating the original ledger to the museum. Bev also shared the photo of Val. Thanks, Bev!



This small notebook contains the by-laws and constitution of the Forest City Women's Club. Part of the Museum's collection.

Meeker Memos

Monthly email



Each month, we will send you a short and to-the-point email with the latest news and events from the Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall.

To signup, just send an email with subject "email signup" to Director@meekercomuseum.org

Wish List

3 or 4, 3-inch (or larger) 3-ring binders. They don't need to be in new, but the bindings must be in good shape.

THANK YOU to the Greater Litchfield Opera House Association and their in-kind donation of printing this publication.

Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall Membership

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number: _____

Email _____

Annual Museum Membership

- Single \$25
- Family \$40
- Senior Single \$20
- Senior Family \$35

Annual Litchfield Civil War Roundtable Membership

- Single \$30
- Family \$40

I'd like to make an additional donation \$ _____

Membership Matters!

Your membership to the Meeker County Museum not only gives you some great benefits, including free/reduced admission and a subscription to *Meeker Memories*, but you are also supporting the ongoing work at the Museum. **Thank you!**

Members can find your renewal date on your mailing label.

Meeker County Historical Society, 308 N Marshall Avenue, Litchfield, MN 55355

Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall
308 North Marshall Ave
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