

Meeker County Museum

308 N Marshall Ave
Litchfield, MN 55355

Return Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 2
Litchfield, MN
55355

Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall

Spring 2019

In This Issue...

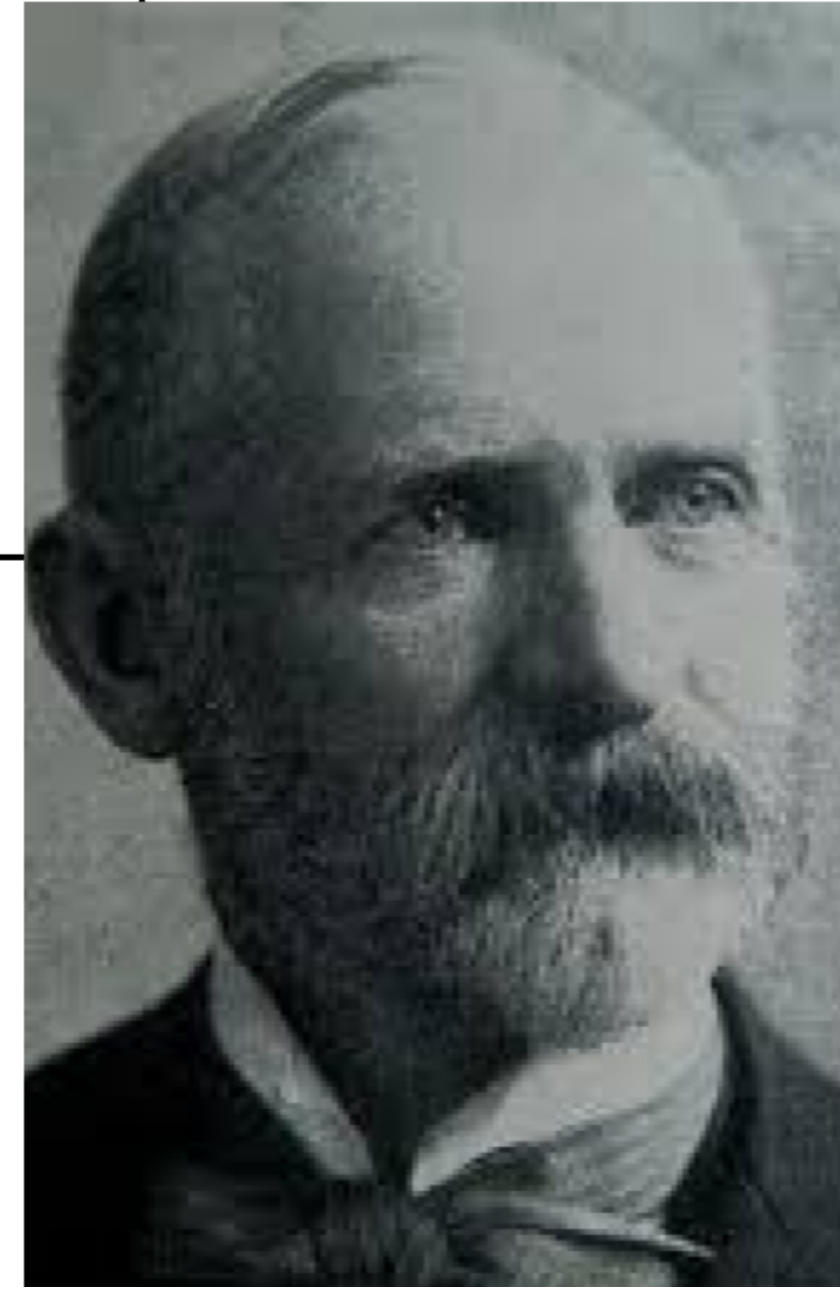
Letter from the Director

Plans for the Future

Civil War Stories

“Jesse V. Branham:
The War is His Backyard”

Calendar of Events



Mission Statement

To enhance, archive and preserve the Meeker County Museum, Civil War Building Complex, and it's 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

Board of Directors

Chuck Pease - Charles Holmquist - Bruce Nelson - Sam Feistner - Tom Westrum - Bob Bohrer - Bruce Nelson - Bob Schaps - Sid Wilson - Auggie Anderson - Barb Penk

Executive Director

Bayley Schluter

Staff and Volunteers

Sandy Johnson - Mark Cashman - Jessica Schaps - Connie Lies

Museum Information

Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall
308 N Marshall Ave
Litchfield, MN 55355
320-693-8911
staff@meekercomuseum.org
www.meekercomuseum.org

Museum Hours and Admission

Sunday: CLOSED
Monday: CLOSED
Tuesday: 10am-4pm
Wednesday: 10am-4pm
Thursday: 10am-4pm
Friday: 10am-4pm
Saturday: 12pm-4pm
Free Admission to Members and Under Age 12
Nonmembers: \$3.00

In This Edition...

Page 2.....Letter from the Director

Page 3-4.....Civil War Stories: *The War in His Backyard*

Page 5.....Calendar of Events

Page 6.....Membership



Show your love for local history by becoming a member of the **Meeker County Museum**

Membership Benefits Include
Quarterly Newsletter - Free Admission to Annual Meeting -
Reduced Price on Certain Museum Events

Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Civil War Roundtable Annual Membership

___ : Single Membership (\$25)

___ : Family (2) Membership (\$35)

Please make checks payable to:
Meeker County Historical Society
308 North Marshall Ave
Litchfield, MN 55355

Membership Levels	
___ Single Annual Membership	\$15.00
___ Family Annual Membership	\$25.00
___ Supporter	\$50.00
___ Sustainer	\$100.00-\$249.00
___ Advocate	\$250.00-\$499.00
___ Visionary	\$500.00+
Business Levels	
___ Annual	\$50.00
___ Supporter	\$100.00
___ Sustainer	\$250.00
___ Advocate	\$500.00
___ Benefactor	\$750.00
___ Visionary	\$1000.00

April

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

April 6: MN Civil War Symposium - Historic Fort Snelling - 8:30am

April 11: Litchfield G.A.R Civil War Roundtable - GAR Hall - 1:30pm - "Antietam: The Morning Phase - Free for CWRT Members

May

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

May 9 - Litchfield G.A.R. Civil War Roundtable - GAR Hall - 1:30pm - "The Grand Review in Washington D.C., May 23-24, 1865" - Free For CWRT Members

May 13 - MCHS Potluck Annual Meeting - 6:30pm - Free Admission to Members

May 27 - Annual Memorial Day Picnic - Litchfield Opera House - 11:30am - \$8/Adults \$5/Child \$4/Dessert Only

June

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

June 13 - Litchfield G.A.R. Civil War Roundtable - GAR Hall - 1:30pm - "Slavery in MN" - Free for CWRT Members

Meeker County Museum News From the Director

Springtime has finally come to Meeker County. The snow is melting, the sun is shining and a new kind of energy is in the air. I see people taking walks past the Hall, children dusting off their bicycles and splashing through puddles. It's amazing how much of an effect a 40° day can have on a person's mindset and energy levels. It's this special kind of enthusiasm that I'm hoping to take advantage of as I begin my tenure as the permanent Executive Director of the Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall. Spring is a time of year when most of us begin to make plans. We check on the condition of our lawnmowers, strategize the position of our flowerbeds and start to think about summer vacation. As the snow melts and the temperatures rise, we think about the future. As I sit at my desk here at the Museum, I'm smiling to myself because of the plans that we have in store for this organization. Plans that will affect our members directly through special events or programming, and indirectly through behind-the-scenes reorganization and technological updates. In the coming months, I look forward to sharing these plans with all of you and working with you to make them come true.

If you look back to the first page, you'll see that we've tweaked the Museum's open hours to give guests more opportunities to visit during the week. Also, thanks for the I.T expertise of Board Member Bruce Nelson, the Museum has a new website that more accurately represents the mission of the Meeker County Museum. Visit the site to get acquainted with our staff, preview upcoming events and learn about some of the artifacts and displays that you can only find at the Meeker County Museum.

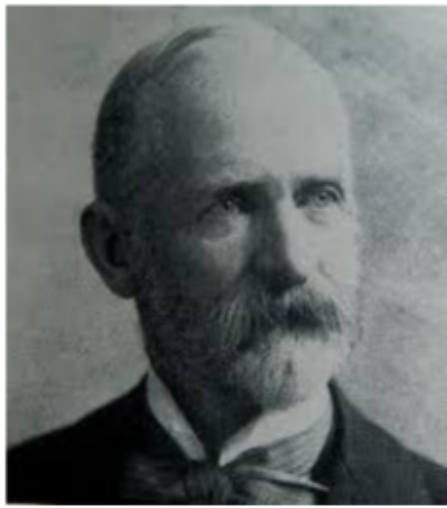
I've been learning a lot about Frank Daggett Post No. 35, aka the G.A.R Hall, these past months. Particularly about how it was a gathering place for Union veterans and civilians alike to laugh, share and be together. People would visit the Hall to borrow books from the first Litchfield Public Library, to attend fundraisers for "widows, orphans and handicapped veterans," or for public readings and performances. This space has a deep history of being a public one, a tradition that shouldn't stop now. It's one of my goals as Director to give back the Hall's reputation as an informal place to learn, laugh and have a grand time together. I look forward to working with you all to plan events that can bring the community together in a way that the Hall had done for generations.

With a new energy in the air and plans to make, I hope that I've peaked your curiosity enough to pay the Museum a visit soon. In the meantime, enjoy this newsletter!

Bayley Schluter - Executive Director



GAR Memorial Hall Litchfield, Minn.



Civil War Stories

Jesse V. Branham, jr.

A War in His Backyard

No one planned for this, no one expected it. They might have heard the disgruntled murmurs or whispered rumors, but few could have known that they were living near the outbreak of war. Jesse Branham certainly didn't when he settled in Ness Township in June 1857. Accompanied by his father and a party of fellow pioneers, he came to the Minnesota Territory from Franklin, Indiana to look for a peaceful and prosperous life. The wild game was plenty, the land was fertile, and it was his. The twenty-three year and wife of two years, Mollie Stark, devoted their time to developing the farm and living in contentment. The work was hard, the lifestyle was difficult, but it was good. Good for four years at least.

On Sunday, August 17, 1862, Jesse Branham was crossing a field and thinking to himself when a neighbor approached with deadly news. Two families, Jones and Baker, had been murdered on their homesteads by a party of Dakota men. After getting over the initial shock, Branham resolved that everyone should gather at the most central home of George Whitcomb for safety and to discuss the situation. When everyone had gathered, Jesse and his brother William volunteered to ride to Acton and learn the truth of these awful reports. Before reaching their destination, they came across survivors from the attack, who confirmed that men, women and children had been shot by native Indians. With no time to process all of the emotions associated with such a brutal turn of events, Branham escorted the party back to Whitcombs and then again to Forest City the next day.

But Tuesday, word reached Forest City that these outbreaks of violence were occurring all over the state. The settlers didn't know what to think, but they knew what it might mean, they would soon be at war with their neighbors. A council in Forest City resolved to send all women and children to Clearwater with Jesse Branham serving as their guide. On Wednesday morning, three days after the Acton Massacre, Branham lead a wagon train a half mile in length through the Big Woods. The party reached Clearwater without incident, in which Branham kissed his wife and young children goodbye and quickly returned to Meeker County, meeting other men in Kingston and then moving to the Forest City Stockade.

During his travel, the rumors of war grew stronger and louder. Chiefs of the Dakota and Sioux tribes were meeting to organize their troops. War parties were moving and attacking towns at random. When the men arrived in Forest City, they found an order from Governor Ramsey to form a company of State militia. It was official, seven years after their country ended the Civil War, it looked like their state was about to begin one of their own.

Jesse Branham remained at the Stockade until September 2nd, 1862 when a report came about a company from Minneapolis encamped in Acton. They were slowly being surrounded by a troop being lead by Chief Little Crow and had no idea of their coming doom. Jesse Branham, Jesse Holmes and Albert Sperry were the only volunteers to ride to Acton and warn their fellow soldiers. Their captain warned them of the dangers awaiting in Acton, but the men were resolute and quickly readied themselves to meet a "merciless and murderous foe." Using the cover of darkness as protection, the three men rode to Acton without incident and with enough time to help prepare the state militia for battle. The militia sat defenseless and decided it was best to try riding to the fortified stockade in Hutchinson, drawing the Sioux away from weaker communities.

At daybreak, the soldiers began their journey, but barely made three miles before the small company of 60 newly recruited craftsmen and businessmen were ambushed by an army of 300 Sioux Indians. Chief Little Crow reportedly mounted a fence post and waved a signal blanket to his warriors - the state militia fired at Little Crow but in their terror, each missed their aim. Branham told his daughter later that the "Chief remounted the fence and made the soldiers a deep bow."

Outmatched and outgunned, the militia had to no choice but continue running to Hutchinson. The few who escaped said that supplies and food were tossed from the wagons in a desperate attempt to lighten the load and quicken their pace. Branham himself was shot through the lung and tossed into a wagon. The journey was spent in agony as the wagon bore him across rough fields and prairies, with the sounds of hollering and gunshots coming from every direction. 17 men out of the original 60 arrived in Hutchinson; after Branham's wound was cleaned with a silk handkerchief, the doctors left him for dead.

The next day, September 4th, three weeks after his friends were slaughtered in his own backyard, Hutchinson was attacked by Little Crow's forces. Jesse Branham, alive but unable to move, lay helpless in bed while the sounds of war rang out outside. The city of burning and all he could do was pray for some kind of relief. As the sun set that day, the majority of Hutchinson's buildings were destroyed. But the stockade stood tall and Branham was still alive.

He remained in Hutchinson for four weeks, slowly making enough of a recovery to retrieve his family from Minneapolis and live temporarily in Kentucky and while the hole in his lung continued to heal. The Branham's returned to Meeker County in the fall of 1863, the area was still working to recovery from the devastation of the U.S./Dakota War, but the resiliency of these settlers should never be underestimated. In 1872, Jesse Branham was elected to serve as the first mayor of Litchfield. His name is on the bills that elected to call the town "Litchfield" and move the County Seat there from Forest City. So much was asked of him and his neighbors in the early years of Minnesota's statehood, it would be understandable if some questioned their motivations. After Jesse's death in 1914, his daughter said that "Mollie.. and Jesse Branham lived through the early struggles of their State - never regretting that they gave their all to the State that they never ceased to love."

