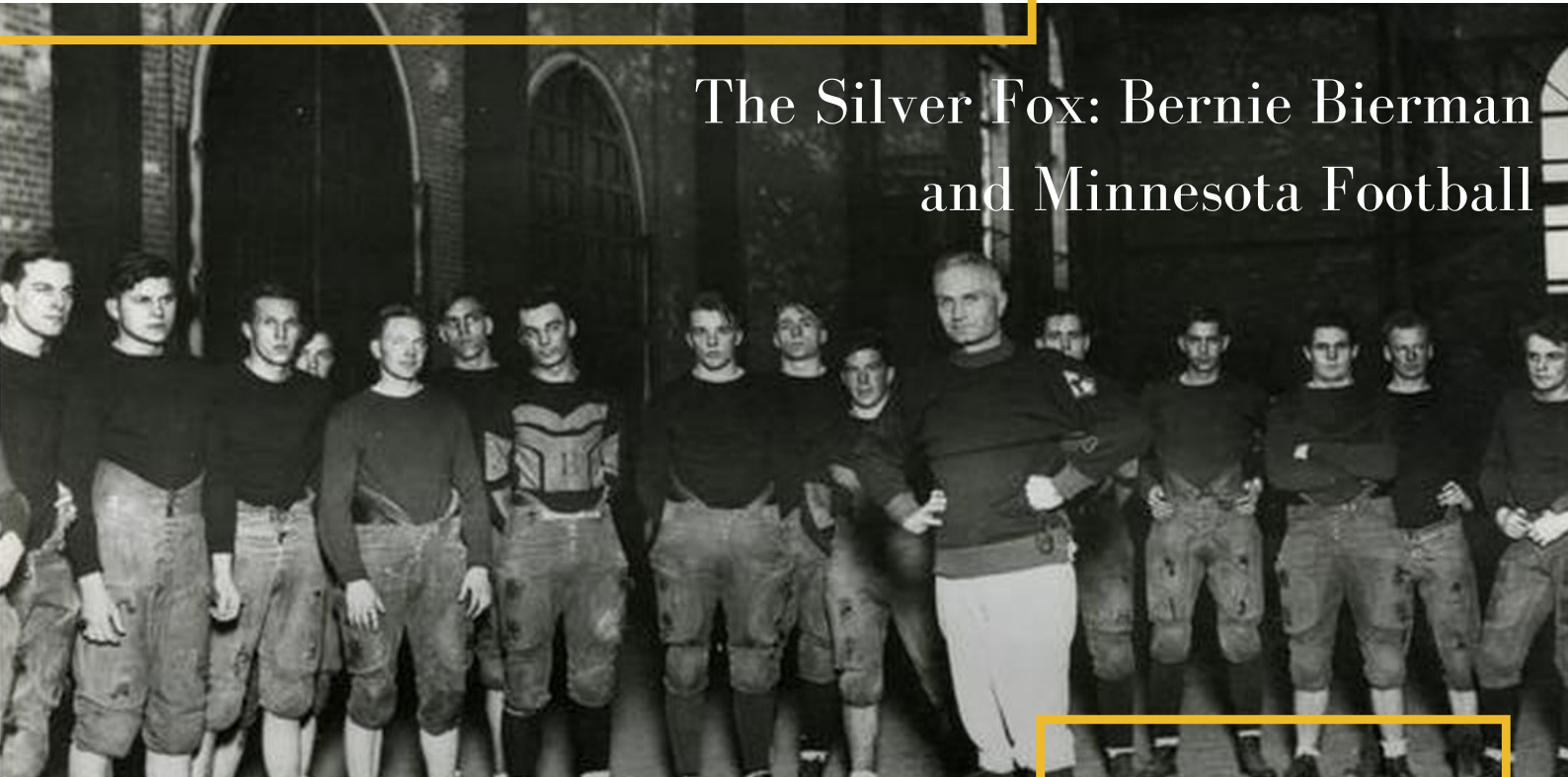


MEEKER MEMORIES

SPRING 2021

MEEKER COUNTY
MUSEUM
QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER

The Silver Fox: Bernie Bierman and Minnesota Football



The mission of the Meeker County Historical Society is to enhance 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

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About Us



Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall

308 N Marshall Ave
Litchfield, MN 55355
320-693-8911
www.meekercomuseum.org

MCM Hours

Tues - Fri : 10am-4pm
Sat: 12pm-4pm

Appointments are required for use of the
Research Library (Admission is Free)

Admission

Exhibit Admission

Adults - \$3
Members & Children Under 12 - FREE

Research Library

Free access to materials
\$0.25 per B&W copy
\$1.00 per Color copy
\$2.00 per Copy on Large Paper

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Go to
**[www.meekercomuseum.org/
volunteer](http://www.meekercomuseum.org/volunteer)** to learn about you
can be a volunteer today!

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

BY BAYLEY SCHLUTER

We're open! After approximately 11 months of closure, the Meeker County Museum finally reopened to the public in February 2021. We've been visited by researchers who spent their quarantine digging through family genealogy and parents whose children are excited to leave their neighborhood. The fog is clearing and the phrase, "back to normal" is finally beginning to feel like a reality. However, mask wearing and social distancing will remain a requirement at the MCM for as long as the state-wide mandate remains in place. If you'd like to visit our Research Library, you can make an appointment by emailing the Research Librarian or by calling the Museum during open hours. Visitors can also pay for an exhibit admission ticket in advance by visiting the "Hours and Information" page on the website.

Speaking of "back to normal," we hosted our first in-person event in a year! Bryce Stenzel brought his talent (and striking physical similarities) to the MCM to portray Abraham Lincoln during a time when the president deliberated the approval or denial of 303 death sentences charged against Dakota Indians who participated in the US/Dakota War of 1862. Acting as the 16th president, "Mr. Lincoln" outlined the events that lead up to the War, described how politicians in Minnesota appealed to Washington for assistance, and explained what lead Lincoln to reduce the number of death sentences from 303 to 38.

Photo Credit - Bryce Stenzel



**Abraham Lincoln standing
outside of the G.A.R Hall**



Finally, we have custom face masks for sale! Board Member Jessica Bondhus has handcrafted several masks that feature the MCM's new logo. There is a variety of colors to choose from and will be available at the Meeker County Museum while supplied last. The cost is a freewill donation.



April

3rd at 1pm - The MN Virtual Civil War Symposium - Online via Zoom - Free Admission

There will no monthly of the Litchfield G.A.R Civil War Roundtable in April

May



13 at 1:30pm - Litchfield G.A.R Civil War Roundtable - *Steele's Army: The Campaign for Little Rock and Beyond* by Gary Blessman - In person & Virtual Attendance Available - Free for CWRT Members and \$3/guests

31th at 11am - Annual Memorial Day Picnic - Litchfield Opera House - More details to follow



Upcoming Events

June

11th at 1:30pm - Litchfield GAR Civil War Roundtable -
Infamous Veterans of the Civil War by Vince Botz - In Person
and Virtual Attendance Available - Free for CWRT Members and
\$3/guests



Look at our website or follow "Meeker County Museum at
the G.A.R Hall" on Facebook or Instagram for event details
and updates

Photo Credit - MNHS

Silver Fox: Bernie Bierman and Minnesota Football

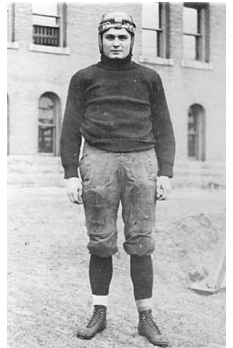


BY BAYLEY SCHLUTER

Young Bernard was a sickly child, often confined to his bed due to an illness called "Osteomyelitis," an infection that travels through the bloodstream and infects the bone. It took 3 operations before Bernard could participate in any sort of outdoor play, especially sports. Who would have guessed that this feeble child would grow to become one of Minnesota's most successful college football players and coaches in state history.

Bernard William Bierman was born to William and Helena (Roesler) Bierman in Springfield, Minnesota on March 11, 1894. The family moved to Litchfield when he was in primary school, where his father operated a small farm. It was during his sophomore year at Litchfield High School that he was finally healthy enough to join the football team. His dedication and natural skill was evident from the beginning and was made captain in 1911 (his senior year), during which the Litchfield Dragons outscored their opponents 137 to 0. He moved on to the University of Minnesota (U of M) and continued to grow as a player and leader. During his senior year, as a team captain, the Gophers won the 1915 Western Conference Championship.

Photo Credit - MNHS



Bierman in a football uniform - circa 1915

After an impressive time as a player, Bierman was hired as the head coach for Butte, Montana high school in 1916. After 1 year, however, he left his job and signed up to serve with the U.S Marine Corp during the Great War. He served for 2 years and was a Captain at wars end.

After leaving the military, Bierman was hired as head coach for the University of Montana. Between 1919-21, he finished each regular season with an average record. Without an impressive standing in the Independent Conference, Bierman left Montana and worked as a bondsman in Minneapolis for the next 2 years. In 1923, Bierman was able to return to his first love when former U of M teammate, Clark Shaughnessy, offered him a job as assistant head coach at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana. In 1925, he was hired by Mississippi State University as their head coach. However, when Shaughnessy resigned from Tulane in 1927, Bierman returned to Louisiana and took over the role.

It took a couple years for Bierman to build the type of team that matched his personality, but all his efforts proved fruitful in 1929. After finishing the '28 season ranked 10th in the Southern Conference, the Tulane Green Wave went on to have an undefeated season and earn a place among the top 10 football programs in the nation. Coach Bierman had been given the nickname, "Silver Fox of the Northland;" partly because of his premature silver hair, but also to describe his quiet but fierce nature as a Coach. The following story taken from an article from the Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame describes how Bierman didn't need many words to make a strong point.

"One of the most famous halftime speeches consisted of three words. With Tulane trailing Georgia 15-14...assistant coach Lester Lautenschlaeger chewed out the Greenies during the intermission. He concluded his remarks by throwing his hat on the floor, stomping on it and shouting, 'Georgia! I can lick the whole state of Georgia by myself!' Bierman then stepped forward, driving his own heel into the crumpled hat, and added, 'So can I.' (Tulane won, 21-15.)"

Tulane University were Conference Champions for the next 3 seasons. Athletic programs across the country were paying close attention to Bierman's potential availability, especially his alma mater.

While Tulane was winning games, the U of M was middling. After their all-time winningest coach (to this day), Henry L. Williams, retired in 1921, the U of M struggled to find someone to fill those shoes. The school went through 3 coaches in 10 years before finally offering the head coaching job to Bierman. The news was leaked to George Barton, a sports writer for the Minneapolis Tribune, before the U of M was ready to make the announcement themselves. This could have made for a distracted season in Tulane, but they give Bierman everything they had and finished his last season in Louisiana, 11-1.



**Bierman with the Little Brown Jug travel case -
DailyGopher.com**

His first season with the Gophers was an adjustment period, finishing with a 5-3 record. However, the next 9 seasons (1933-41) saw Bierman lead his players to 3 conference titles, 5 national championships and a combined regular season record of 58-9-10. His success came from a dedication to conditioning and perfecting the fundamentals. He used whatever natural talent was available to him and created plays around his players. Bierman once said, *"Why did I put so much emphasis on blocking, tackling, and the running game? Well it was the potential ability of Midwestern lads to block so powerfully which first tempted me to stress the running game as a major part of the Minnesota attack. Under another set of circumstances and blessed with a different type of material, I'd probably have favored the forward pass or the lateral lateral."*

It was then that that university mascot received the nickname, "Golden Gophers," in reference to the Golden Age of the program. However, the events of December 7, 1941 would bring this Golden Age to a halt. In 1942, Captain Bierman was ordered to return for a 2nd tour as a member of the Navy V-5 Pre-Flight Program. During the next 3 years, he was the Director of Marine and Navy physical training, Commander of the Pre-Flight School Training Cadre for First V-5 Instructors and Coach of the Iowa City Pre-Flight Seahawks. Bierman left the marines as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1945 and was determined to return to Minneapolis and bring the football program back to how he left it.

However, something had changed in Minnesota. It's difficult to know whether it was the program, the players, or Bierman himself. The 6 seasons between 1945-50 never reached the same heights as before the war, with the 1950 season ending with a 1-7-1 record. It was then that Bierman made the difficult decision to announce his retirement from coaching college football. Coach Bierman finished his 26-year career with 153 wins, 65 loss and 12 ties.

Bernard Bierman was inducted in the College Football Hall of Fame in 1955, which describes him as a man who *"...never lost his temper, never raised his voice, never shed a tear, [and] never appealed to sentiment..."* His play style matched his personality; low key and fundamental. His dedication to common sense football produced 7 Pro Football Hall of Fame players. After leaving the U of M, Bernie moved to Laguna Hills, California (the hometown of wife Clara McKenzie) and lived a quiet retirement until his death on March 7, 1977 at age 82. Bernard William Bierman was the son of immigrants with humble origins, who overcame a potentially crippling illness to become a decorated athlete and coach. His attention to detail and fierce dedication to the sport has ensured his legendary status in Meeker County, throughout Minnesota, and in the history of college football.



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meekercomuseum.com/become-a-member to create or renew your MCM
membership today!



Spotlight on the Collection

BY BAYLEY SCHLUTER

When visitors to the Meeker County Museum walk through our early 20th-century bedroom display on the second floor, one particularly favorite artifact of mine often goes unnoticed. Sitting on a small bureau is a lovely watch chain sitting inside of a gold colored frame. The chain was gifted to A.P Nelson of Grove City by his wife in the 1880s, and eventually donated to the Meeker County Museum by his daughter Anna. The chain has an appealing design, and still is in a good condition for it's age, however, my favorite factoid about this artifact is that it's made out of braided human hair.



Using hair to create jewelry or types of household decorations was a common practice for women between the 1860s-1920s. The trend began when Queen Victoria began wearing a locket of her husband's hair around her neck after he died in 1861. People of this time period did not view death in the same way we do today. The tradition of hosting a funeral in ones own home meant that people spent more time around the dead or dying than may be considered appropriate in the 21st century. The practice of hair works was more about sentimentality instead of a form of overcoming grief. By the time that the practice reached the United States, women began making wreaths a love ones hair form of public mourning. Wreaths made from the hair of multiple people -dead and alive- became sentimental family trees.

Hairworks was ultimately seen as a proper task for reputable women of the home, a way to tend to the home and family. The practice expanded to using ones own hair to create rings, brooches, bracelets, and of course, watch chains and gifting them to loved ones that were still alive. It was common for men to carry fob watches made of their wife's hair to work, and for teenaged girls to parade their latest homemade piece of jewelry around the neighborhood. The trend fell out of fashion the way that all trends do, when something else rose into popularity. But the legacy of hairworks is on display at the Meeker County Museum.

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Membership

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Submit the form below with a cash or check payment to create or renew your MCM membership. You can also pay online at

www.meekercomuseum.org/become-a-member

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NOTE: Annual memberships expire the same month as the original enrollment. See the mailing label on each Newsletter to check your renewal date

Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall

308 North Marshall Ave

Litchfield, MN 55355

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