

Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall

Winter 2020

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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

Sid Wilson - Bruce Nelson - Sam Feistner - Jeff Niedenthal
Bob Bohrer - Chuck Pease - Auggie Anderson - Barb Penk - Ken Zachman

Executive Director

Bayley Schluter

Staff and Volunteers

Sandy Johnson - Mark Cashman
Connie Lies - Auggie Anderson - Ian Maner

Museum Information

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

Hours and Admission

Monday: CLOSED Tuesday: 10am-4pm
Wednesday: 10am-4pm Thursday: 10am-4pm
Friday: 10am-4pm Saturday: 12pm-4pm
Sunday: CLOSED

Admission & Research Library

Exhibit Admission

Adults \$3 - Children Under 12 Free - Members Free

Research Library

Free access to materials

\$0.25 per B&W copy made

\$1.00 per Color copy made

\$2.00 per Copy on large paper



Letter from the Director

Bayley Schluter

2019 was a fun year for us at the Meeker County Museum and was made better by all of you. By the end of the year, we saw a 31% increase in visitors from 2018, many of whom came from at least 99 Minnesota towns, 17 states, and 2 countries (Thailand and Australia). And that's just what we got from the guest book! We worked with a local teacher to improve our school tours, created programs that were family friendly, and strategized new ways to reach local history enthusiasts across the World Wide Web. Thank you to everyone who came in off of the street, attended an event, booked a school or group tour, or made a donation. We especially want to thank those who donated during Give to the Max Day in November and our Lifetime members who donated as part of our year-end donation drive. Your financial contribution will help us remodel the research library and design new exhibits.



A group of German exchange students touring the Museum

If you look at the last page of this newsletter, you might notice that we've simplified our Membership structure, effective January 1st. We still have Single and Family memberships, but have added two new levels for Seniors. If you are above the age of 65, then you qualify for a Senior Membership. Seniors receive free admission to the Museum, reduced admission prices for MCM events, free admission to the Annual Meeting, the MCM Newsletters sent to your mailbox or inbox, and reduced price on most items at the giftshop. Seniors can pay a one-time fee of \$500, or \$20/year for a Single membership or \$35/year for a Family membership. If you're interested in changing your membership status or have any questions; you can visit our website (<https://www.meekercomuseum.org/become-a-member>), stop by the Museum during Open Hours, give us a call at 320-693-8911, or send an email to staff@meekercomuseum.org. We also restructured our Business Membership to include a Nonprofit Organizational Membership for only \$75 and a newly reorganized Business Membership for \$150. Information about that can be found on the last page of this newsletter.



One of the new exhibits that we're planning for Spring 2020 will feature the history of Baseball in Meeker County and the West Central Minnesota Baseball Hall of Fame Class of 2020: Quinten "Lefty" Johnson! After graduating from Twin Valley High School in 1952, Quinten went on to play baseball for Eastern Arizona College and Colorado State College, participating in the College World Series in 1955. Quinten played amateur baseball for 25 years with the Belgrade Redmen and Dassel-Cokato Saints where he played in five state baseball tournaments. Quinten coached high school and Legion baseball for a number of years. He received the R.M. Farrish Award for American Legion baseball and was inducted into the University of Northern Colorado Athletic Hall of Fame in 2002. MCM staff are excited to be a part of his induction ceremony planned for late-January and to tell his story at the Museum this Spring!

Speaking of exhibits, we would love your help! Do you enjoy research and learning new things? Maybe you have a creative side that would like to explore a new outlet? Come to the Meeker County Museum on January 28th (Time TBD) and be a part of the Exhibit Planning Committee, a volunteer group aimed towards creating new exhibits for May 2020. The firsthand knowledge and experiences of Meeker County's local residents are invaluable to any exhibit, and a committee comprised of its citizens would ensure the development of unique and engaging exhibits. Sign up for the committee by following this link (<https://www.meekercomuseum.org/volunteer>) and typing "Exhibit Planning Committee" or calling the Museum directly. Our first meeting will be on Tuesday, January 28th (Time TBD) at the Meeker County Museum. We hope that you would strongly consider using your talents to help us share the unique stories of Meeker County.

January 2020

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	31	

January 1 - New Years Day - The Museum is Closed

January 9 at 1:30pm - Litchfield Civil War Roundtable - "The Union vs the Confederacy: Whose Strategy was Stronger?"

January 28 at Time TBD - First Meeting of the Exhibit Planning Committee

February 2020

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

February 13 at 1:30pm - Litchfield GAR Civil War Roundtable - "Battlefield of the Western Theater"

February 29 - Leap Day

March 2020

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	31				April 4

March 12 at 1:30pm - Litchfield GAR Civil War Roundtable - "Beginnings and Achievements of the GAR and the Women's Relief Corps: 1866-1896"

April 4 at 8:30am - MN State Civil War Symposium - \$15 with Lunch Included - Registration Required - Hosted at the Litchfield Christian Church

Meeker County Memories

The Foundations of Land O' Lakes in Meeker County

"Land O' Lakes was founded in Meeker County, the company was born out of Litchfield." That was one of the first things people told me after being hired as Director of the Meeker County Museum. The pride that such a successful corporation got its start in Meeker County was evident in the MCM's staff and volunteers. This excitement intrigued me enough to learn more about this local origin story, and I quickly realized that it might be more complicated than the simple line that I had heard multiple times. The first meeting of the Land O' Lakes Board of Directors was held in Ramsey County, Minnesota, so how can we claim that the company was founded here in Meeker County? Is this a simple misunderstanding? Or is there some truth to the statement, *"Land O' Lakes started here"*?

Before 1920, nearly every town and township in the area had its creamery that farmers will sell their cream to. The variety of creameries was advantageous to the dairy farmers, who had a daily race against the clock to deliver the cream before it could spoil; but it wasn't helpful to the creameries themselves. Because of the competition with private butter sellers, cooperative creameries were often forced to accept all varieties of cream: clean or dirty, sweet or sour. If a creamery rejected a farmer's product, the farmer could easily sell it to a private creamery who would then pay up front instead of at the end of the month, which was the model for most creameries. Faced with fierce competition and a declining quality of milk and butter, eleven local creameries met in 1920 to form the Meeker County Creamery Association (the first county dairy co-op in Minnesota) and elected John Brandt as President of the Board of Directors.



The Danielson Creamery in Rosendale, the 1st of its kind in Meeker county and possibly the state



John Brandt was a 34-year-old dairy farmer from Forest City who took over his father's farm at the young age of 22. Brandt quickly became one of the largest patrons of the Litchfield Creamery; known to be innovative, dependable, and hard-working. He quickly proved his capabilities as President of the Association by saving the creameries money in shipping costs. He observed that the Dassel and Lake Stella creameries were shipping their butter on the same train, usually in the same traincar, but were each paying an expensive rate for "less-than-carload freight." He proposed that if the creameries better coordinated when the product was shipped, they would get a better rate for filling the train car and pay even less by sharing the cost, leading to possible savings across the Association of over \$12,000. He also worked out that if each of the eleven creameries put up a 1/3 cent on each pound of butter they produced the previous year, it would be enough to hire a professional county fieldmen, the first of its kind in Minnesota. Brandt and the the Board hired S.G Gustafson, an expert buttermaker and former inspector for the State Dairy and Food Department. Gustafson's job was to organize the butter from the member creameries into carload shipments so that it would arrive faster and in better condition, and to ensure that the farmers were receiving payment more quickly.

On March 31, 1921, the Meeker County Creamery Association changed its name to "Cooperative Creameries Association, No. 1" (CCA No. 1) so that creameries from the surrounding counties could join the association. In a few

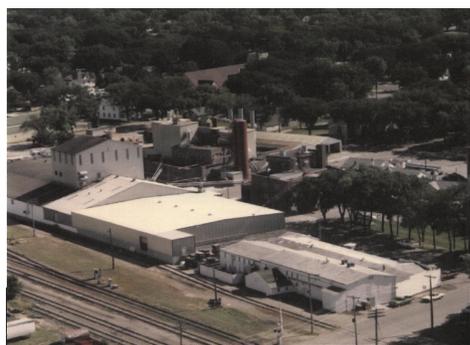
short months, the membership of CCA No. 1 grew from 11 to 19 local dairy creameries in Meeker, Kandiyohi, Wright and McLeod county. The association was producing 2.5 million pounds of butter annually with every member creamery seeing larger profits than before the co-ops founding. These successes were being noticed by dairy farmers and politicians around the state and in July 1921, Governor J.A.O. Preus pledged the state's support with incorporating the Minnesota Cooperative Creamery Association (MCCA) as a state organization.

A state association had already been established and boasted over 130 member creameries across Minnesota, but were struggling to effectively market their product and turn a profit. John Brandt attended meetings of the MCCA to explain how the Meeker County co-op had had found success so quickly and to suggest that the Meeker County business model be used as a foundation for a newly-reorganized state agency. Facing pressure from all sides, the Board agreed to reorganize and a ten-person committee (including John Brandt) was formed. At the first meeting that same summer, one of the decisions made by the committee was that the State Association would initially be divided into 15 districts; each district would first organize themselves and then join the association as a group, with the districts hiring and directing their own fieldmen. The Meeker County association instructed Brandt to join the MCCA as a unit. The 19 creameries of CCA No. 1 voted unanimously to join the new organization; this action kept CCA No. 1 intact and gave them the new name, "District 1"



A Land O' Lakes - Litchfield jacket from the MCM Collection

Brandt began traveling around Minnesota as an advocate for the MCCA and spokesman for the success found for dairy farmers in Meeker County; using specific figures from District 1 as evidence to prove that a larger-scale cooperative could profit every dairy farmer involved. By the time that the Association officially adopted the name, "Land O' Lakes," in 1924 the association had expanded their offices to Minneapolis, New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago and boasted over 400 member creameries across the districts. Today, Land O' Lakes is one of the largest producers of butter and cheese in the US, responsible for over 12 billion pounds of milk every year. Based in Arden Hills, Minnesota, the co-op has nearly 2,000 direct producer-members and 751 member-cooperatives, one of whom remains to be District 1 in Meeker County.



First District Association in 1975

After the founding and redistricting of the MCCA, District 1 continued to grow and find success; an organization that began with 11 members today works with over 1,100 local dairy farmers, all of whom serve as members/owners of District 1. In 1934, in order to maintain an independent identity from Land O' Lakes, the association changed its name one final time to the First District Association (FDA). FDA today now produces a combined 2.5 billion pounds of milk and cheese a year from their base of operations in Litchfield, and works diligently with local farmers to ensure the safe and healthy production of milk, butter and cheese.

So is it accurate to claim that Land O' Lakes was founded in Meeker County? The answer that MCM staff have settled on is, "sort of." If it wasn't for the vision of John Brandt and the cooperation of so many Meeker County farmers, the Meeker County Creamery Association would not have been successful enough to inspire the establishment of a state-wide co-op. Forming a dairy cooperative was a brand new idea in 1920, the farmers who served as FDA's founding members had no idea if this enterprise would help or hurt them. Each man had to independently choose to trust their local creamery and to trust each other with the success of their family business. It was this trust that inspired so many across the State to take the same leap of faith, and it was this trust that helped create what Land O' Lakes is today.



One of the pumpkins hidden during the Pumpkin Scavenger Hunt in October



The Winner of "Best Decorated Tree" at this year's Christmas Village. Decorated by Broken Roads Ranch in Eden Valley

Show your love for local history by becoming a member* of the
Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall

Membership Benefits Include

- Quarterly Newsletter sent by Mail or Email - Free Admission to Annual Meeting
- Reduced Price on Museum Events - 10% Off Most Items in the Gift Shop - Reduced Admission Price to Many Museum Events

*Check the address label on this newsletter for your membership expiration date

Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall
 Nonprofit and Business Membership

Business Name _____

Contact Person _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

Email Address _____



- Nonprofit Members Enjoy**
- Logo in the Newsletter & Website
 - 4 Adult General Admission Passes
 - Newsletters Sent to Your Business
 - Certificate of Membership

- Business Members Enjoy**
- Logo in the Newsletter & Website
 - 10 Adult General Admission Passes
 - 1 Free Rental of the GAR Hall
 - Certificate of Membership
 - 4"x6" Ad on a Poster displayed at the Museum and at Public Events

Sign Me Up!

Nonprofit Membership (\$75) _____

Business Membership (\$150) _____

Cash _____ Check _____

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

308 N Marshall Ave
Litchfield, MN 55355

Return Service Requested

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

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

Email Address _____

Add Me to the Email List



Make checks payable to

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

Annual Museum Membership Levels

Single (\$25)___ Family (\$40)___

Senior Single \$20/year OR \$500/One-Time

Senior Family \$35/year OR \$500/One-Time

Litchfield Civil War Roundtable

Membership Levels

Single (\$30)___

Family (\$40)___

Note: Your renewal month is the same is your enrollment month.
Check the mailing label on your Newsletter to find the renewal date