

MEEKER MEMORIES

SUMMER 2026

MEEKER COUNTY
MUSEUM
QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER



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

Sharing Our Stories Since 1885

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

www.meekercomuseum.org

Tuesday-Friday 10:00-4:00
Saturday 12:00-4:00
Closed major holidays

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EUROPE"**



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

308 N Marshall Ave
Litchfield, MN 55355

Admission

Adults - \$5

Members & Children Under 18 - FREE

Free admission to view the G.A.R. Hall

Board of Directors

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Lois Sosenheimer
Dean Urdahl
Jessica VanLanduyt
Warren Shepard

Staff

Danelle Erickson - Executive Director
director@meekercomuseum.org

Sandy Johnson - Research Librarian
staff@meekercomuseum.org

July

3-4 **Museum will be closed for the July 4th weekend.**

8 **Reading of the Declaration of Independence and Community Potluck,** 5:00, Litchfield Central Park

9 **Civil War Roundtable—Boredom of War,** presented by Danelle Erickson 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$5/gen adm.

11 **Extended Hours: 10am-4pm**

Jul 30- **Meeker County Fair—find us in the**
Aug 2 **historic schoolhouse**

Every **Thursday, June thru August,** Extended
Thur. Museum hours until 6:00. Free

August

13 **Civil War Roundtable—Guarding the Northwest Frontier: The Civil War in Minnesota 1862-1865,** presented by Mike Penrod 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$5/general admission.

September

10 **Civil War Roundtable—Lew Wallace - General, Artist, Governor, Diplomat, Author,** presented by George Romano, 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$5/gen adm.

24 **Litchfield Centennial Revisited,** 7:00. See page 3 "Collection Spotlight" for more details.

Director's Notes

Collection Spotlight

Danelle Erickson Executive Director



This summer is looking to be a fun and busy time at the Museum!

We are excited to be hosting a reading of the Declaration of Independence on July 8 at 5:00 in Litchfield's Central Park. This is part of a world-wide simultaneous reading of the Declaration. Participating groups can be found in all US States and Territories, plus dozens of international locations.



In Litchfield, the Declaration will be followed by a community potluck. We invite you to bring a dish to share, along with drinks, plates, utensils, and lawn chairs for you and your family. In case of rain, the event will be moved to the Litchfield Opera House.

We are also looking forward to the Meeker County Fair, July 30 through August 2. We are going to be teaming up with the volunteers in the historic schoolhouse. There will be plenty of ways to reminisce with old school books, photos, and yearbooks. Check the fair schedule for schoolhouse hours.

In celebrating the milestone of America 250, the Museum got to thinking about the different major celebrations in Meeker County's history. We even have a new display showing how Meeker County has a history of celebrating history. We've included photos and mementoes from several celebrations, such as major anniversaries for churches and towns.

One of the biggest events was the Litchfield Centennial in 1969. Lately, we've been sharing some photos from the event on social media and have loved all of the memories people have been sharing.



Coincidentally, just a few weeks ago at the Museum, we came across a box of slides and scripts that were also from the 1969 celebration. We immediately realized this would make a great program! We will be digitizing the slides and using much of the original script as we revisit this memorable time in our local history. See below for details.

**Reading of the
Declaration of Independence
and
Community Potluck**

**Wednesday July 8
5:00, Litchfield Central Park**
Rain location Litchfield Opera House

Bring a dish to share, along with drinks, plates, utensils,
and lawn chairs for you and your family.

Hosted by:
**Meeker County Museum
at the G.A.R. Hall**

**America
250**

**Litchfield Centennial
Revisited**

Rediscover Litchfield's 1969 grand celebration

7:00, Thursday, September 24
Meeker County Museum





308 N Marshall Ave, Litchfield, MN MeekerCoMuseum.org



Members



Donors

New* and Returning Members April–June 2026

Noah and Nicki Barka	Gerry Moen
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Business and Nonprofit Members



American Legion Post 104



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Financial Donations April–June 2026

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**In Memory of
Marie Rick Cottington**
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**In Memory of
Barb Langmo**
Linda Miller

**In Memory of John and
Marlene Schmidt**
Linda Miller

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Douglas A Whitaker**
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Artifact Donations April–June 2026

Carver Co. Hist. Soc.	Kristine Koran
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Dave Kelly	Robyn Richardson

If you are considering donating items to the Museum, please contact us beforehand.



Collage of various pieces from the Colemans' honeymoon scrapbook

As we continue our series featuring letters from the Museum's archives, let's look at the travel letters from Frank and Ollie Coleman.

Rose Aurelia Weiler, also known as Ollie, was the daughter of Mathias and Mary Weiler of Eden Valley. She married John Francis "Frank" Coleman on June 6, 1928. Prior to their marriage, Ollie worked at the State Bank in Eden Valley, where her father was president. Frank worked in insurance, was a veteran of the First World War, and was a dedicated member of the American Legion.



Frank and Ollie Coleman, June 6, 1928

Directly after their wedding, Frank and Ollie departed on their three-month-long honeymoon. They traveled by train to New York City, with a stop at Niagara Falls and to visit family in New Jersey. Then they boarded the SS *Pennland* and sailed to Europe, where they visited eight countries.

Throughout their travels, Ollie, with some assistance from Frank, wrote at least three dozen letters to her parents. After they returned home, Ollie and Frank put together a scrapbook which they called "Mooning in Europe." They included photos, postcards, receipts, brochures, menus, price tags, and much more.

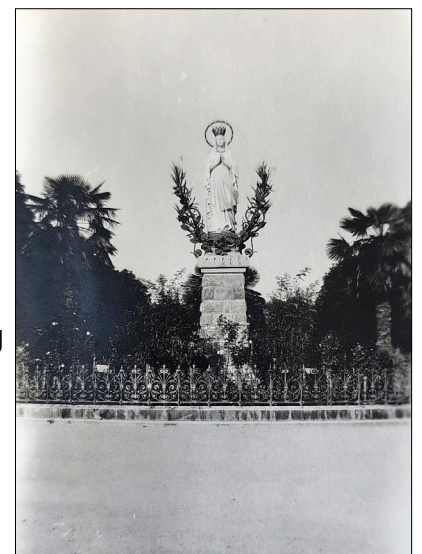
For some of their travels, the newlyweds adjusted their itinerary as they went. Frank spoke French, and Ollie spoke German, a huge advantage as they made their way through Europe. However, after a couple of weeks, they decided to book a tour through Thomas Cook.

This was a popular travel company that provided guidebooks and travel advice as well as full travel accommodations. For \$200 (about \$4,000 in today's money), the Cook tour took them on a 12-day tour from Paris to Venice with stops in Lourdes, Nice, and Milan. The tour included all transportation, lodgings, and meals.

Frank and Ollie were devout Catholics and attended Mass often. One of the few times they didn't go to Mass was while on the ship at the start of the voyage. Despite feeling the effects of seasickness, the couple rose early to attend, only to discover they had been told the

wrong time and the service was already over.

One of the highlights for the couple was their visit to Lourdes, France. In 1858, the Virgin Mary appeared to a young girl in Lourdes, and the site became an important place of pilgrimage and healing. The water from a spring at Lourdes has reported healing properties, and Ollie



The Colemans took just two photos while in Lourdes.

This monument is The Crowned Virgin of Lourdes.

sent some home to her mother. Her mother was happy to report that the bottles arrived intact.

Ollie and Frank did a lot of shopping. Sometimes it was out of necessity, such as when Ollie's dress was torn, and Frank's clothes had become too worn out. They also purchased a couple of walking canes, one from the famous Selfridge's department store in London. These canes were later donated to the Museum. Other items were gifts or requests made by people back home. The purchase Ollie was most looking forward to was Irish linen, which she finally accomplished at the very end of their trip. Ollie's purchase was rather large and had an added perk for Frank. He was invited to go golfing with the linen shop owner. Several times during their trip, the Colemans sent boxes of items to Eden Valley, but they still needed to purchase extra suitcases before going home.

With all of their shopping, the couple was concerned that they might owe more money at customs. Ollie had heard that customs going into England could be strict. She admitted to her mother that they hid her new French perfume in her purse and that she would wait until they got home to tell her mother how they hid the diamonds they bought in Amsterdam. Despite their concern, Frank and Ollie didn't have any problems with the board crossings they encountered.

While the couple wasn't afraid to spend money, they also watched their expenses where they could. Ollie's letters include many purchases she considered making, but decided against in the end. Their ship accommodations were third class, and while their hotel rooms were usually

nice, they generally weren't the best a city had to offer. Several of the hotels they stayed at are still in operation today.

The Colemans' trip was in the middle of Prohibition, and they didn't hesitate to enjoy some alcoholic beverages during their travels. Almost immediately, they were enjoying wine and beer on the ship. In the first letter after getting off the ship, Ollie noted that in France "everything is wine." After spending just a few weeks in Europe, Ollie figured she had drunk more wine and beer in

Europe than she had drunk the rest of her life combined. Frank really loved the German beer! So much so that they had to make sure to get a photo of him raising a couple of glasses. They also purchased a dozen beer steins to send home.

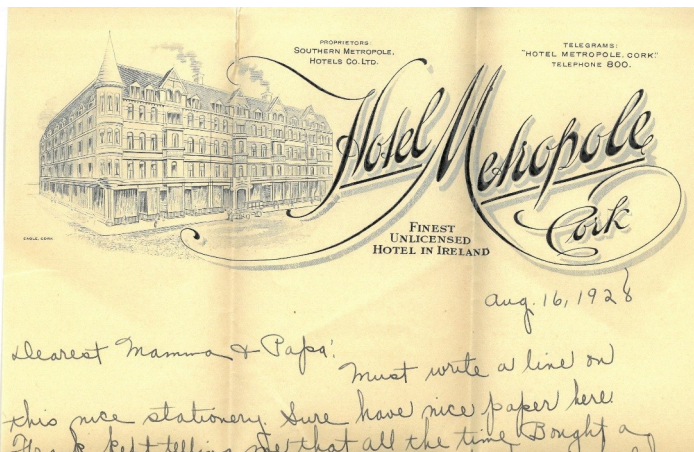
Frank served in France for two years during World War I as part of the military police. While in France, the Colemans visited the Verdun battlefield and the nearby village where Frank had been during the war. They were also in Paris on July 4 and attended the dedication of the Lafayette Escadrille Memorial, which honored French and American aviators from the war.

Throughout their travels, Ollie and Frank met a lot of interesting people and exchanged addresses with many of them. They also met up with several relatives. They were able to meet some of Ollie's distant relatives in Germany, despite not knowing exactly how or where to find them. In Ireland, they met several of Frank's Irish family and saw his father's childhood home.

In reading the letters, it is safe to say that Frank's least favorite part of the trip was Venice. He found the city to be dirty and didn't see the appeal of the canals and its smelly water. Plus, the weather was extremely hot. He was glad to leave behind "Hot Italy. Dirty Venice." As for Ollie, she wasn't overly impressed with parts of Ireland. While she said it was beautiful, she also



Frank enjoying his German Beer



Ollie enjoyed the different hotel stationery. One of her favorites was from Hotel Metropole in Cork, Ireland with its glossy ink on the logo.

found in a bit too rustic for her tastes. Most of the hotels didn't have running water, and she would have preferred to travel by car instead of by horse or by foot to some of the local tourist spots.

Despite a few low spots, the trip was certainly not short of highlights for the Colemans. They got to kiss the Blarney Stone in Ireland. In Amsterdam, they watched the US men's relay team win a gold medal at the Olympic Games. Ollie had her first experience collecting seashells. They bought Venetian glass in Venice and perfume from the perfume center of the world in Grasse, France. And in Paris, they even got a special look at some of Notre Dame's treasures, including items not normally on display.

Frank and Ollie left Ireland for the United States on August 25. They both suffered from



Frank and Ollie at sea

seasickness and were very excited when they finally landed in Quebec after a week at sea. They spent a few days with family and friends as they made their way back to Minnesota, finally arrive in Eden Valley on September 9.

The Colemans' first home was in Hutchinson. Before long, however, they moved to Eden Valley, a place they would call home for the rest of their lives, leaving for the occasional vacation and winter in Florida. Frank and Ollie were married for just over 50 years and died with two months of each other in 1978. After their deaths, several items from their estate were donated to the Museum, including their letters and scrapbooks.

Sources:

Letters, scrapbook, and diaries from Frank and Ollie Coleman

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

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Annual Museum Membership

- ☐ Single \$25
- ☐ Family \$40
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Annual Litchfield Civil War Roundtable Membership

- ☐ Single \$30
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☐ 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

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