

MEEKER MEMORIES

SUMMER 2022

MEEKER COUNTY
MUSEUM
QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER



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

WITHIN THESE PAGES

- 02* **UPCOMING
EVENTS**
- 03* **DIRECTOR'S
NOTES**
- 03* **COLLECTION
SPOTLIGHT**
- 04* **MEMBERS &
DONORS**
- 05* **"TOWNSHIP
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

Sid Willson (President)
Ken Zachman (Treasurer)
Theresa Nelson (Secretary)
Jessica Bondhus
Mark Cashman
Pam Dille
Sam Feistner
David Holle
Jeff Niedenthal
Dave Pease
Barb Penk
Tom Westrum

Staff

Danelle Erickson - Executive Director
director@meekercomuseum.org

Sandy Johnson - Research Librarian
staff@meekercomuseum.org

July

- 14 **Civil War Roundtable: Minnesota and the Western Theatre, Concentrating on the Battle of Nashville** with Dean Urdahl. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/general admission
- 26 **Genealogy Program: Researching Your Family Tree Using In-person and Online Resources** with Danelle Erickson. 7:00pm. Free for Museum Members; \$3/general admission



August

- 11 **Civil War Roundtable: Over 20 Flags of the Confederate States Army** with John Cain. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/general admission



September

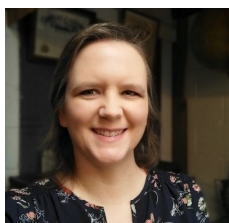
- 8 **Civil War Roundtable: The Law and the Civil War** with Robert Feidler. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/general admission

Coming in October
Civil War Spy Mystery
An interactive, hands-on history mystery.
Fun for all ages.
Watch for details!

Director's Notes

Danelle Erickson Executive Director

It's been a fun past few months here at the Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall!



We welcomed over a dozen school tours, including students from Litchfield Elementary, School of St. Philip, Dassel-Cokato Middle School, Willmar's Community Christian School, and the American Legion's Boys & Girls County program. We loved asking them about their favorite museum artifacts.

And remember – tours aren't just for school children. Consider including a museum tour for your next reunion or special event. Hour-long, private tours are \$4/adult (8-30 people) and can be arranged by contacting the Museum.

Thank you to everyone who attended our Annual Memorial Day Picnic. While the rain put a bit of a damper on our "parade," we still had a wonderful time. Be sure to see (and thank!) our picnic sponsors below.

We were also awarded a grant from the Southwest Initiative Foundation and Litchfield Area Community Foundation. With the funds, we have purchased archival supplies to better preserve our photographs and documents.

Collection Spotlight

A Brief Look at Handbags

You might think handbags are just a fashion accessory, but in truth, they can give a mini-history lesson!

Early handbags were called reticules. They were small, often made with beading, embroidery, or lace. While nice to look at, they weren't very practical.

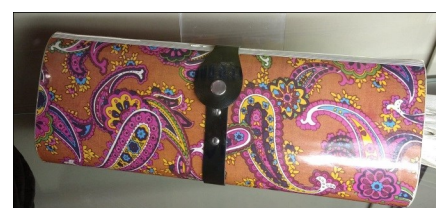


Early reticules

As women gained more rights, they began spending more time away from home, whether for work, travel, or social outings, and needed to carry more items with them.

By the start of the 20th century, handbags were more functional and were often made out of sturdy leather and metal closures. When resources became scarce during World War II, handbags were made out of materials such as cardboard, plastic, or wood.

Stop by the Museum to see these and other handbags on display.



Handbags also show the styles of the era, such as this paisley bag from c. 1960s.

Memorial Day Picnic Sponsors and Donors



Litchfield Rotary
Venue Sponsor



American Legion
Post 104

Frank Daggett Circle



Ladies of the G.A.R.



KINSELLA CHIROPRACTIC
CLINIC





Members

New and Returning Members April-June 2022

Kate and Jen Andrews van Horne	Sam Feistner Keith Johnson
Dale and Linda Atkinson	W D McQuay
Jessica Bondhus	Gerry Moen
Suzanne Braun	Bruce & Anita Nelson
Patrick L Casey	Jeff Niedenthal
Mark Cashman	Judy Ostreich
Connie Cleary	Mike Welbaum
Dennis & Colleen Compton	



Donors

Financial Donations April-June 2022

Anderson Chemical Company	David McGraw
Suzanne Braun	MN Department of Ladies of the G.A.R.
Les Heitke	Jeff Niedenthal
Keith Johnson	Judy Ostreich
Ron Johnson	Bernard Schulte
Gwen Krebsbach	Mike Welbaum

Business and Nonprofit Members



American Legion Post 104
American Legion Post 381



Conway, Deuth &
Schiesing, PLLP



Greater Litchfield Opera
House Association



Ron Dingmann



VFW Post 2818



Memorial Donations in Honor of John E. Miller

Lifetime Member of Meeker County Historical Society

Mary Allison and family
Darlene and Dave Arness
Joann and Lyle Hicks and family
Sue and Gordie Kruse and family
Sharon Lueking
Jane and Bill Lichter and family
John and Kim Lueking and family
Beau and Katie Miller and family
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Ron and Sue Miller and family
Jim and Anita Peterson and family
Wanda Urdahl and family
Lester and Kitty Van Alstyne and family
Kitty Van Alstyne
Scott and Susannah VanDyke and family
Mary Ellen and Bruce Whitaker

Artifact Donations

Ronald Bomstad	Lucy Larson
Pamela Dille	Carole Miller
Esther Gustafson	Diane Rohrbeck
Frances P. Hillier	Kathy Swanson

Township Tales

Union Grove & Swede Grove

This issue of *Meeker Memories* is the start of a series that will feature a story from each Meeker County townships. We will start in the Northwest corner (Union Grove) and eventually make our way to the Southeast (Collinwood), featuring one or two townships each issue. Topics will vary – from people and places to businesses and events.

Union Grove

In Union Grove we find the hamlet of Crow River. For over 60 years, one business stood the test of time – the Crow River Store.

The store was built in 1902 by Ancil Staples. Ole Jacobson worked as a clerk for Staples from 1902 until 1904, when he purchased a share in the store. In 1910, he became sole owner. Jacobson would go on to own and operate the store until 1965.

In those early years, rural stores were often the local post office and Crow River Store was no different. Jacobson was the last Crow River postmaster, holding the position from 1905 to 1907, when the post office was closed.

Even without the post office, the building was much more than just a store, but also a social hub where news was shared, rumors were spread, and politics debated. It was even once the scene of a fight! It started when Mrs. Stewart hit Mrs. Houk with her buggy whip while on the road. Later, Mrs. Stewart was in

the store when Mrs. Houk came in. She “grabbed Mrs. Stewart by the hair, mauled and scratched her, and tore her clothes to ribbon.” It was Ole Jacobson who broke up the fight.

Jacobson ordered most of his merchandise from Minneapolis, and every Tuesday he would collect his varied wares from Grove City.

Ole Jacobson was married to Lillian Elizabeth Anderson, and they had two children, Clifford and Luella. A few years after Lillian died in 1942, Jacobson remarried Mable Bergstrom. One winter, Mable’s son and daughter-in-law, Oliver and Elizabeth Bergstrom, helped in the store. Elizabeth wrote of that time in *Reflections in a Rearview Mirror* in her article called “Helping Ole in the Store.”

The smells she describes are the perfect summary of a day spent in the store. “My nose was greeted with the heavy scent of ripe bananas, apples and grapes, mingled with the peculiar smell of new rubber boots and galoshes. There were other store aromas which clamored to be observed, such as the matchless fragrance from the coffee mill. Of course, there were rows of wet woolen mittens and cowhide gloves drying on the wood

burning stove” brought in by the men who gathered at the back of the store. As the men sat



Ole Jacobson behind the counter of the Crow River Store, c 1912.



For the first 30 years, the local creamery was next door and the store was known as the Creamery Store.

and talked, they ate peanuts, tossing the cracked shells into the wood stove, adding to the store's smells.

In June 1965, Jacobson fell ill while tending the store. He spent sometime in the Litchfield Hospital before moving to a



Much stayed the same in 50 year. October 1965.

nursing home in Willmar. The store and its contents were auctioned off in October 1965 to George Liedman, a former customer of the store. Jacobson died on January 3, 1966.

A replica of the Crow River Store, built by Ole Jacobson's son, Clifford, can be seen at the Meeker County Museum.

Swede Grove

It was thought to be the largest gathering ever seen in Meeker County, with anywhere from 7,000 to 25,000 people in attendance (depending on which newspaper you read). It was the Northwest Aerial Derby, held outside of Grove City on October 15 and 16, 1927.

This airshow, a novelty in that day and age, was the work of Grove City men John Engel and Walter McRae.

Where events of similar sizes today could take months to plan, just eight days before the show was to take place, the final location still wasn't selected. Luckily, the farmland of Alfred E. Larson, located east of Grove City and just north of Highway 10 (now Highway 12) in Swede Grove township was available.

The weekend's activities and events were numerous and varied. The airplane race was won by Gene Shank of Robbinsdale. He completed the 65-mile course in 47 minutes on Saturday and 42 minutes on Sunday. There

was a stunt competition with barrel rolls, tailspins, and loop-the-loops. Nineteen-year-old Miss Frances Clark impressed the crowd with perfect parachute jumps from 3,000 feet. And the planes weren't just for the pilots. For \$2.50, the public could ride in one of the eight passenger planes. For many, this would have been their first plane ride.

Other activities include a football game between Litchfield and Glencoe (Glencoe won 51 to 0), trap shooting contests, performances by the Cosmos and Paynesville bands, and a motorcycle polo match in which one of the cycles burst into flames, but was quickly extinguished, thanks to the crowd.

Not every problem was solved so swiftly.

With so many people attending, parking was a huge issue. Cars lined the highway and other



roads, and traffic cops had a hard time keeping lanes clear and traffic moving. For Sunday attendees hoping to enjoy refreshments while watching the planes, they were out of luck, as everything from hot dogs to popcorn and cigars was sold out early in the day.

Perhaps the biggest disappointment of the weekend was the canceled flight of Walter McRae's airplane. McRae was the owner of a Grove City garage and started building his homemade plane in July. He was said to have been an aeronautics expert, despite never having flown a plane. The plane was originally scheduled for its maiden flight during the airshow, but state officials forbade the voyage because of a lack of proper registration.

For John Engel, McRae's fellow event coordinator, the airshow was a turning point in



Large crowds at the airshow

his life. Because of the derby's success, he was asked to organize another such show held just two weeks later in Freeport, MN. By 1928, he was in Chicago, organizing automobile and bicycle races, and the 1930 US Census gives Engel's profession as an aviation promoter in Minneapolis.

Perhaps no one enjoyed the airshow more than 93-year-old Enoch Eastman. Sixty-two years earlier, he had been fighting in the Civil War, but on that October weekend, he was flying high above the county in his first plane ride.

Sources

Various newspaper article

Meeker County Minnesota History

Photos from Museum's collection; airshow photos from Edwin "Ted" Gruenhagen, assistant to Walter McRae.



Airshow attendees line Highway 10 (now Highway 12)

Meeker Memos

NEW 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

- 4-6 new or slightly used **metal folding chairs**, preferable the same style so they can fit easily in a corner when not in use.
- Reams of **11x17 white copy paper** for printing *Meeker Memories*.

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

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

Annual Litchfield Civil War Roundtable Membership

- ☐ Single \$30
- ☐ Family \$40

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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