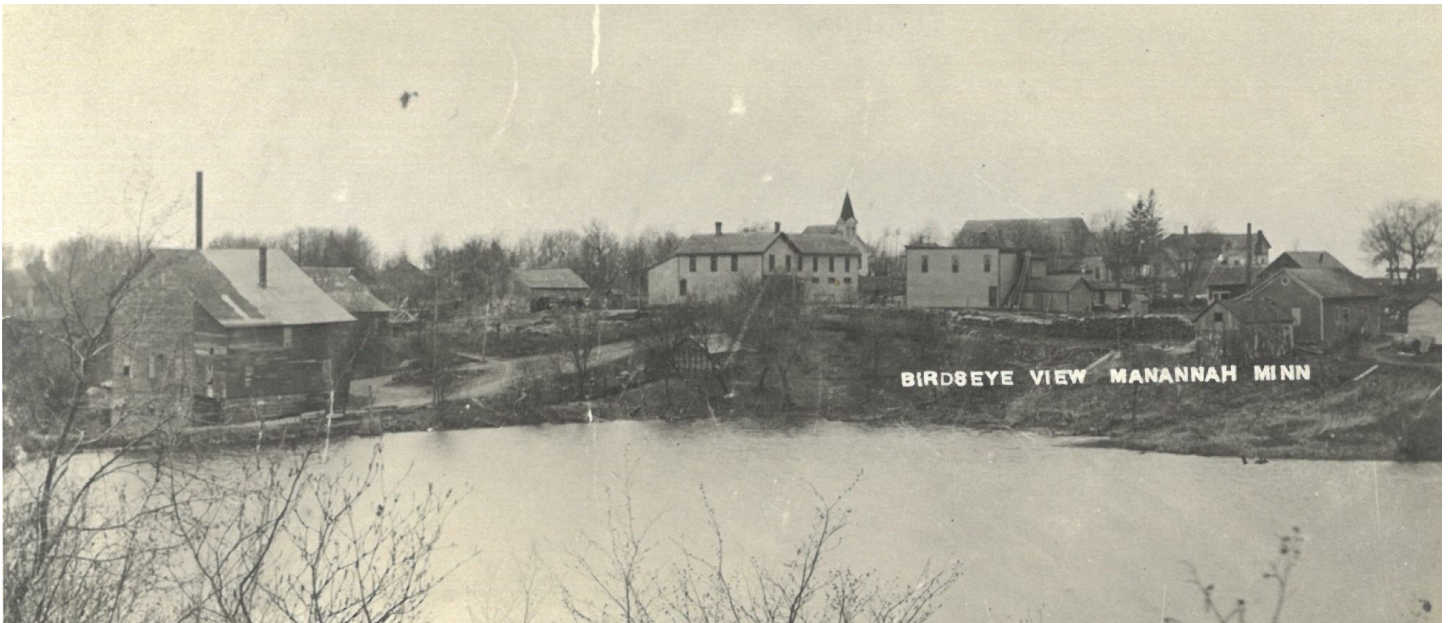


# *MEEKER MEMORIES*

FALL 2023

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*

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

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

[www.meekercomuseum.org](http://www.meekercomuseum.org)

### Admission

Adults - \$3

Members & Children Under 12 - FREE

### Board of Directors

Sid Willson (President)  
Keith Johnson (Vice President)  
Ken Zachman (Treasurer)  
Theresa Nelson (Secretary)  
Jessica Bondhus  
Mark Cashman  
Pam Dille  
David Holle  
Connie Lies  
Chuck Pease  
Dave Pease  
Barb Penk

### Staff

Danelle Erickson - Executive Director  
[director@meekercomuseum.org](mailto:director@meekercomuseum.org)

Sandy Johnson - Research Librarian  
[staff@meekercomuseum.org](mailto:staff@meekercomuseum.org)

## October

- 12 **Civil War Roundtable: U.S.-Dakota War—The Minnesota 5th Regiment, Companies B,C, and D with Vince Botz.** 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/ general admission

## November

- 4 **G.A.R. Hall Anniversary Celebration—Civil War Era-Inspired Meal** Lunch served 11am-1pm. Free, donations welcome.
- 9 **Civil War Roundtable: Our Army Nurses: Northern Women Answer the Call** with Daniel Hoisington. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/general admission



## December

- 7 **Annual Meeting**  
6:00—dinner (please RSVP) and business meeting  
7:00—"How the Civil War Changed Christmas" program with Mary Soroko
- Civil War Roundtable—No December Meeting**

Follow us on Facebook or see page 7 on how you can sign up for our monthly emails "Meeker Memos"

# Director's Notes

# Collection Spotlight

**Danelle Erickson**  
Executive Director



Over the last couple months, I've had the opportunity to work with other museums and history-buffs as we look for ways to share more history. First up, I had the privilege of being on the planning committee for the newly formed Central Minnesota Regional History group. It's a great way for local museum professionals and volunteers to gather a few times a year and share ideas, struggles and successes.

Secondly, Litchfield will be the location for the 2024 Minnesota Civil War Symposium! We look forward to welcoming history and Civil War enthusiasts on Saturday, April 27. We will get a chance to show off the G.A.R. Hall and enjoy a variety of Civil War talks at the Opera House. Watch for more info in the coming months.

As we move closer to the end of 2023, at the Museum our thoughts turn to the necessity of money, budgets, and our year-end fundraising drive. Please consider including the Museum on your gift-giving list this holiday season. Watch for ways you can support us in the coming weeks, including Give to the Max Day on November 16.

It's that time of year when Halloween decorations start appearing. For many museums, this time of year is a fun time to bring out what many museums dub the "creepy doll collection." The vacant eyes, matted hair, and marred features that sends a chill down some peoples' backs.



On the other hand, one could argue the dolls only look that way because they are, of course, toys. Many of the museum's dolls come from an era when most children didn't have a lot of toys. The dolls on display might very well have been the only doll a child had to play with. It's no wonder the dolls look like they have had a hard life—because it's true!



Stop by the Museum this October and see our doll display and decide for yourself - are the dolls creepy or well-loved?

**Anniversary Celebration**  
 Saturday, November 4  
 Lunch served 11:00am - 1:00pm  
 G.A.R. Hall  
 308 N Marshall Ave, Litchfield

Enjoy a Civil War Era-inspired lunch in the historic G.A.R. Hall, a place built by and for veterans.

**Free!**  
 Donations Welcome



**M** Meeker County Museum  
 at the G.A.R. Hall  
 Sharing Our Stories Since 1885

**Annual Meeting**  
 followed by  
**"How the Civil War Changed Christmas"**  
 Thursday, December 7  
 6:00 - Member Dinner and Meeting  
 Please RSVP by December 2  
 7:00 - Program with Mary Soroko

G.A.R. Hall, 308 N Marshall Ave, Litchfield

**Free!**  
 Donations Welcome



**M** Meeker County Museum  
 at the G.A.R. Hall  
 Sharing Our Stories Since 1885



# Members

## New\* and Returning Members July-September 2023

|                             |                           |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Allen Ahlbrecht*            | James Kennedy*            |
| Allen County Public Library | David Johnson & Bev Meyer |
| Patricia Arnold             | Marveen Minish            |
| Burton Bard Jr.             | Theresa and Brad Nelson   |
| Kelli and Ryan Beckler      | Jeff Niedenthal           |
| Jessica Bondhus             | Judy Oestreich            |
| Mike and Louise Brooks      | Jennifer B. Otto*         |
| Pamela Dille                | Chuck and Merna Pease     |
| Ron Dingmann                | Robyn Richardson          |
| Sam and Vonnie Feistner     | Carol E Rowell            |
| Sarah Fjellanger            | Gregory Swenson           |
| Jim and Mona Haag           | Tom and Candy Westrum     |
| David J. Kelly              | Sid and Deb Willson       |

## Business and Nonprofit Members



American Legion Post 104



Conway, Deuth & Schiesing, PLLP



Litchfield Opera House



GROVE BANK



Litchfield Rotary



VFW Post 2818



# Donors

## Financial Donations July-September 2023

|                           |                  |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| Marvel Blom               | Judy Oestreich   |
| Ron Dingmann              | Jennifer B. Otto |
| Jim Felling               | Nick Schommer    |
| Dennis & Kathy Garoutte   | Bernard Schulte  |
| David Johnson & Bev Meyer | Gregory Swenson  |
| David J. Kelly            | William Taylor   |
| Jeff Niedenthal           |                  |

## Artifact Donations July-September 2023

|               |                    |
|---------------|--------------------|
| Mark Anderson | Sarah Nelson Meyer |
| Pamela Dille  | Robyn Richardson   |
| Jeanie Doran  | Lois Sosenheimer   |
| Andrew Grewe  |                    |

If you are considering donating an artifact to the Meeker County Museum, please contact us first. As exhibit space and storage is limited, all items must be from Meeker County and will be evaluated based on condition, history, and uniqueness to the current collection.

## Calling History Lovers!

**Meeker County Museum is seeking new board members.**

The Museum Board has two openings starting in January. Members serve for three years and meet the third Thursday of each month at 6:30 at the Museum and G.A.R. Hall.

No special skills or background is required - just a desire to share history and serve our community.

Members are welcome from across Meeker County.



Contact us at the museum or any of our current board members for more information.

# Township Tales

## Harvey & Manannah

BIRDBEYE VIEW MANANNAH MINN

Come along as we continue our Township Tales series, featuring stories from Meeker County townships. This issue includes Harvey and Manannah Townships.

### Harvey Township

Harvey Township could be considered the most “rural” of all of Meeker County townships, with no towns, villages, or community hubs within its borders. Even churches were scarce in the township. Schools, on the other hand, were a different matter. By 1884, there were over 70 schools across Meeker County, with five in Harvey Township and two more to form shortly after.

The archives at the Meeker County Museum include one of the teachers’ register books from District 29, once located in the northwest corner of Section 30, Harvey Township. This was the era of one-room schoolhouses, with one teacher and students from grades first through eighth. The first year recorded in this book was 1933-1934, taught by Florence Youngquist. Stella Carlson became the teacher in the fall of 1934 and used the book through 1938.

In the book, the teachers kept detailed accounts of their class schedule, sometimes

### Comparison of 1930s curriculum and today’s.

| 1930s Third Grade                        | 2023 Third Grade   | 1930s Fifth Grade  | 2023 Fifth Grade  |
|--|--|--|---|
| Reading, Phonic, Language                | Reading, Phonic, Writing   | Reading and Language                                       | English Language Arts   |
| Citizenship                              | Social Studies   | American History   | Social Studies  |
| Math                                     | Math   | Math   | Math  |
|  | Science  | Geography  | Science   |
| Others: Spelling, Penmanship, Music, Art | Others: Cursive, Music, Media/Computer Skills, Phys Ed, Character Education, STEAM | Others: Spelling, Penmanship, Music, Art, Health & Hygiene | Others: Keyboarding, Music, Phys Ed, Art, Applied Tech, Family & Consumer Science |

Village of Manannah in southwest Manannah Township down to the last minute! For example, the school day started at 9:00 with ten minutes for “opening exercises,” which included a musical lesson. For the next fifty minutes, the younger grades would read while the older students learned social studies and history. Then



District 29, Harvey Twp., date unknown

from 10:00 to 10:02, there was an “activity break,” perhaps a time to stretch or get a drink of water and prepare for the next subjects. There were three such two-minute breaks throughout the day. There were also two ten-minute recesses and an hour break for lunch. Hopefully, the busy teacher would have a few minutes to rest before the lessons resumed. The teacher would have to be a master of multitasking. For example, at 2:00, first and third grades were reading, second grade had spelling, fourth and fifth grade had geography, and the oldest

students were learning science. The youngest two grades were dismissed at 3:30 and the older students at 4:00.

The teachers' book also includes a more detailed list of what each grade learned in each subject. The teachers wrote what specific textbooks were used and sometimes specific notes about their students such as "Eunice and Harry are good readers so I gave them longer lessons" and "Gale had no phonics in other school." (Don't miss the chart comparing the 1930s classes with today's curriculum on the previous page.)

Classes were held in District 29, later District 1098, until the early 1960s when the district was consolidated with Litchfield. The land reverted to the original farm and the building was demolished. Such was the way for many one-room schoolhouses.

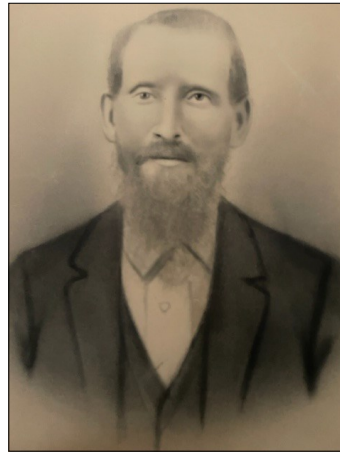
### Manannah Township

On the morning of May 11, 1875, the William Porter family was working on their home in northwest Manannah Township. William and two of his daughters were working outside behind the house when four men took down their fence and approached the family home. They had two teams of horses and a team of oxen. In their wagon was a plow. Leading the group was George Fletcher Wood with his brother Alex by his side.

William's wife Jane, saw them arrive and sensing trouble, told the men to leave. They refused. The Porters had settled on the land the previous year. Some of the Wood family lived on the same plot of land, not far from the Porters. Both families believed the homestead was theirs to do with as they wished.

William came around to the front of the house, rifle in hand, and told the quartet they had no right to be there. If they wanted to fight about the property, they should go through the proper channels. Before they had even arrived at the house, Alex Wood was looking for a fight. He declared they were there to plow the land then and there, "kill or be killed." Alex unloaded the plow from the wagon, hitched it up to his oxen, and drove the team to within ten feet of the front door, all set to start plowing.

William warned the men that as soon as they sunk the plow into the ground, he would shoot. Alex taunted in return "You won't shoot, I know



William Porter

you won't shoot" and started plowing the Porter's front yard. In response, William raised his rifle and fired, hitting Alex. Although he was seriously wounded, Alex was able to return fire.

What happened next isn't completely clear. Some reports said Alex only shot once at William, others that he shot multiple times. Jane

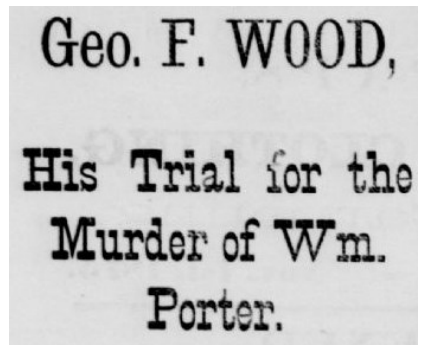
Porter ran to her husband's defense, knocking Alex's revolver from his hand with a pitchfork. Alex soon dropped to the ground. Some witnesses said George Wood immediately fired multiple shots at William. Other reports said he first ran to help Alex and fired at William in self-defense. George admitted to firing two shots at William, including shooting once over the shoulder of one of the Porter daughters.

Once the guns grew silent, two men lie seriously wounded. Alex had been hit in the head and would die later that afternoon. William had six gunshot wounds, with the most serious being in his chest. Over the next 18 days, several doctors tended to William, but everyone knew it was only a matter of time. William died on May 29, 1875.

On January 19, 1876, George Wood was brought to trial over the death of William Porter. The trial would last over a week with sessions in the morning, afternoon, and evening. On January 28, the jury debated for over twelve hours. By midnight they had reached a verdict: guilty.

George Wood was sentenced to life in prison at the state prison in Stillwater, Minnesota. As soon as the sentencing was made, many thought it was too harsh. Judge Brown, who oversaw the trial, said the punishment was dictated by the law, but told George that if he conducted himself as a model prisoner, the Governor may pardon him.

George did receive a pardon, although his



time in prison had taken its toll, having become sick with lung disease while in prison. He was pardoned in January 1879 and three years later died in Manannah from lung fever.

In 1880, the Porter/Wood land dispute made its way to Washington where it was ruled the land belonged to George Wood. However, two years later, Jane Porter filed ownership of the same plot of land. For the next several decades, Jane and her family (including baby William who was born six months after his father died) continued to live on the land that caused so much heartache for so many.

Sources:

Meeker County Memories

Teacher's Register, District 29

Various issues of the Litchfield News Ledger

Fun Fact: The day after Museum staff started researching and writing about the Porter and Wood feud we received a phone call from PJ Miller, a descendent of William Porter. It was a pure coincidence! The PJ knew nothing about how William had died and the drama that followed. Thanks to PJ for sharing the image of William Porter and other Porter family history.

## 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](mailto:Director@meekercomuseum.org)

#### New or Seasonal Mailing Address?

Please help the Museum by informing us of any new or seasonal mailing addresses you might have. This not only makes sure you receive your newsletters, but also helps us save in postal fees. Thank you!

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

#### Annual Litchfield Civil War Roundtable Membership

- Single \$30
- Family \$40

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

Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall  
308 North Marshall Ave  
Litchfield, MN 55355

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