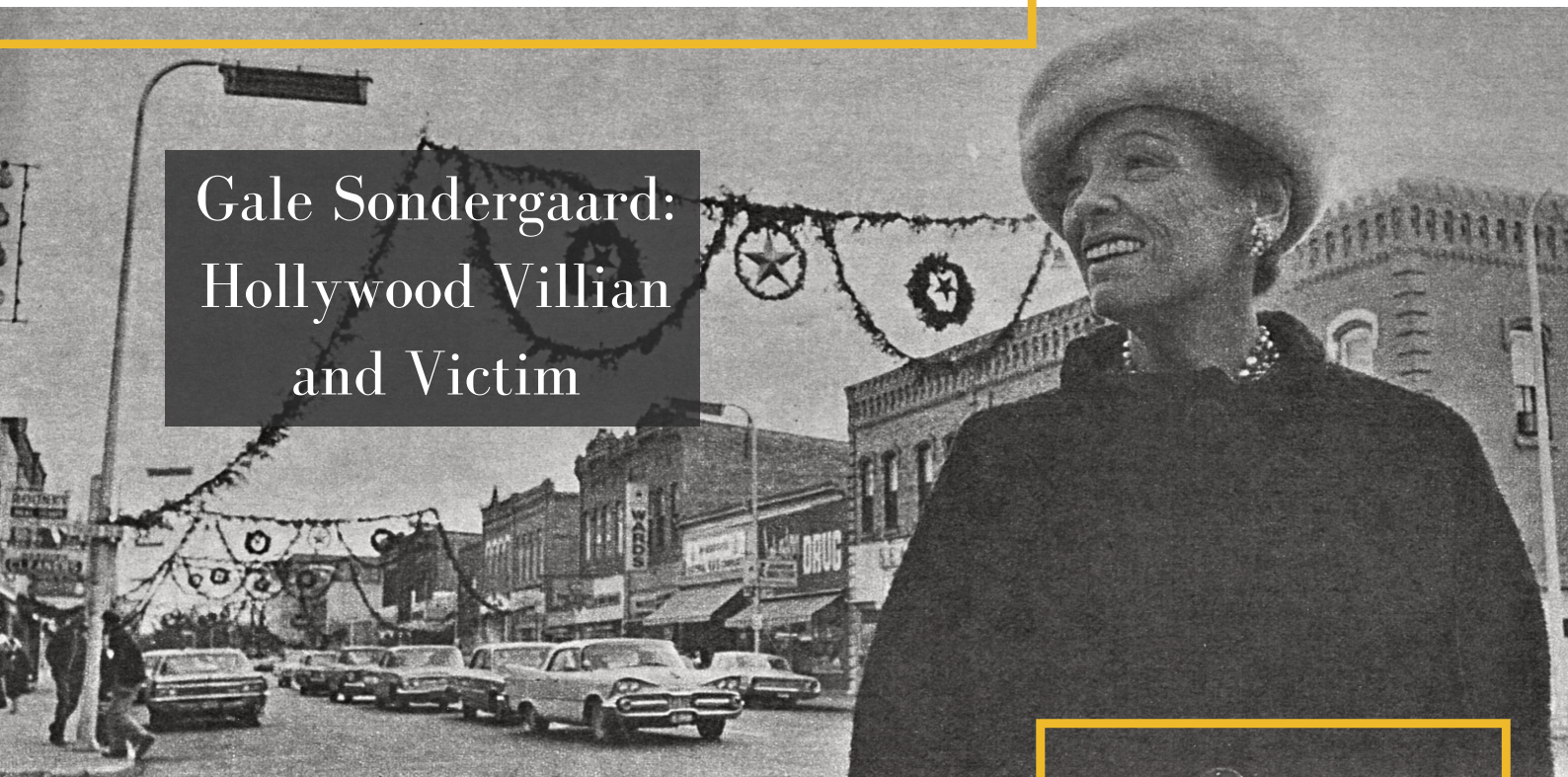


# ***MEEKER MEMORIES***

WINTER 2021

MEEKER COUNTY  
MUSEUM  
QUARTERLY  
NEWSLETTER



## Gale Sondergaard: Hollywood Villian and Victim

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

## **MCM Hours - Reopening January 19th**

Tues - Fri : 10am-4pm

Sat: 12pm-4pm

Appointments are required for use of the  
Research Library

Every guest will have their temperature  
checked at the door

### **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

### **Board of Directors**

Bob Bohrer - Sid Wilson - Bruce Nelson - Ken  
Zachman - Jeff Niedenthal - Jessica  
Bondhus Auggie Anderson - Barb Penk - Sam  
Feistner Theresa Nelson - Tom Westrum -  
Mark Cashman

### **Staff**

Bayley Schluter - Executive Director  
[director@meekercomuseum.org](mailto:director@meekercomuseum.org)

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

### **Volunteers**

Connie Lies - Auggie Anderson - Butch  
Schlute

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**

I'll be honest, we are not ending 2020 the same way that I predicted one year ago. The Meeker County Museum had a total number of 326 guests during the entire calendar year. For the first time in decades, the MCM could not host the Annual Memorial Day Picnic or field trips from area schools. It would be easy to focus on just how debilitating this last year has been, but that is not the purpose of this newsletter.

Let's review some of the highlights from 2020. The MCM received over \$18,000 in grants and state/federal aid. Our fantastic members and supporters gave so generously, that the MCM saw a 22% increase in financial donations from the 2019 fiscal year. Also, thanks to social media, the unique stories from Meeker County have reached over 53,000 people across the world.

Most recently, we were still able to host the Annual Christmas Tree Village throughout December and want to thank Broken Roads Ranch, Girl Scout Troops of Litchfield, Firefighters with PTSD, and the Litchfield Fire Squad for participating in this virtual event. We also want to thank Custom Products for donating the \$100 grand prize for "Best Decorated Tree," which was won this year by Firefighters with PTSD based in Dassel. In early November, a couple of Conservators visited the MCM to help us draft a Long Range Preservation Plan. This Plan will be a great aid when planning for future endeavors regarding our exhibits and manner in which we store the historic collection.



Keep an eye on our website and social media pages for updates on the status of future events, particularly the Abraham Lincoln event that we had to postpone in November. In 2021, we'll be hosting more events at the MCM and undertaking projects to improve the conditions in which our artifacts are stored and put on display. 2020 was one for the history books, but personally, I'm looking forward to everything that 2021 has in store.



# January

**1st** - New Years Day - The Museum will not be staffed

**9th at 1:30pm** - Litchfield GAR Civil War Roundtable - *Baseball during the Civil War* by Adam Katz - Online via Google Meet - Free for CWRT Members and \$3/guests



# February



**11th at 1:30pm** - Litchfield GAR Civil War Roundtable - *Lincoln's Spies: Their Secret War to Save the Union* by Douglas Waller - Online via Zoom - Free for CWRT Members and \$3/guests

**23rd at 7pm** - *The Constitutionality of District Courts* by Assistant Chief Judge Stephanie Beckman - Litchfield Opera House - Freewill Donation



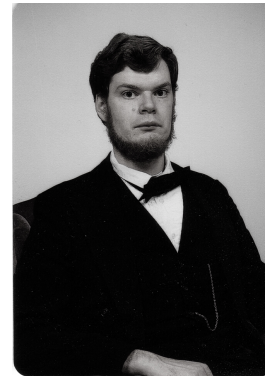


# Upcoming Events

## March

**11th at 1:30pm** - Litchfield GAR Civil War Roundtable -  
*The Bullochs and the Roosevelts: A Study of Two Civil War Families* by Raymond Marshall - Online via Zoom - Free for CWRT Members and \$3/guests

**20th at 3pm** - *With Charity for All: Abraham Lincoln and the US/Dakota War Trials* - Sponsored by Beth and Bob Schnell - Litchfield Opera House - \$10/members and \$15/nonmembers - Tickets go on sale February 20, advanced ticket purchase required.



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

## Gale Sondergaard: Hollywood Villian and Victim

**BY BAYLEY SCHLUTER**

*"Gale Sondergaard, an Academy Award-winning actress who played villainesses in 1930's and 40's movies...With her velvet beauty, high-arched eyebrows and broad-toothed smile, Miss Sondergaard managed, in her dozens of pictures, to threaten, intimidate and terrorize the biggest stars in Hollywood"*

Gale Sondergaard is one of Meeker County's most famous residents. The Academy Award winner was an A-list celebrity with a reputation as a kind woman who could turn herself into a terrible villian on the movie set. Blessed with beauty and talent to spare, she was destined to gain a legacy as grand as Bette Davis or Barbra Stanwick. That is, until the House Committee of Un-American Activities called her name.

Sondergaard was born "Edith Holm" in Litchfield on February 15, 1899 to Hans and Christin (Holm) Sondergaard, both of whom were Danish immigrants. Hans worked at the Litchfield Creamery as a Master Butter Maker until 1912, when he moved the family to Minneapolis to work as a Federal Butter Inspection. In 1926, Hans became a Professor of Agriculture at the University of Minnesota; which may have inspired Gale's decision to become a student of drama there after graduating from Central High School. She moved on to study at the Minneapolis School of Dramatic Arts and got her first professional acting job with the John Keller Shakespeare Company.



**Christin and Hans Sondergaard**  
**Source: Litchfield Independent Review**

While living and performing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, she met Herbert Biberman, a theater director with aspirations in filmmaking. After their marriage in 1930, Biberman spoke to his new wife about taking the leap and moving to Hollywood. Sondergaard was content with her life on the stage, but eventually agreed to move across the country and make the attempt at a film career under the stage name, "Gale Sondergaard" in 1934.



1935 proved to be an exceptional one for both halves of this power couple. Biberman made his Directorial debut with the film *One-Way Ticket* and Sondergaard was cast in her first feature film as the character Faith in *Anthony Adverse*. *Adverse* was released in August 1936 and received 7 nominations from the 9th Annual Academy Awards. At the awards ceremony on March 4, 1937, Gale Sondergaard was the 1st winner of the brand new category: Best Actress in a Supporting Role.



Gale Sondergaard had arrived. Between 1936-1949, she was starring in at least 2 films a year with other A-listers such as Shirley Temple and Bob Hope. She earned a reputation as the perfect actress to portray characters who were "sly, manipulative, dangerously cunning, and sinister." Directors wanted her, critics praised her and audiences adored her. Nothing and no one could get stop the bullet train that was her career. No one, except maybe her husband.

In 1945, the United States Congress established the House Committee of Un-American Activities to investigate real or suspected communists with positions of influence that may attack "the form of government as guaranteed by our Constitution." In 1947, the Committee hosted nine days of hearings with 79 Hollywood screenwriters and directors, one of whom was Herbert Biberman. When he came to the stand, Biberman refused to answer any questions about his political beliefs or affiliations, citing the right to freedom of speech and privacy listed in the First Amendment. Sondergaard was called to testify on behalf of her husband, who used the Fifth Amendment to refuse to answer the majority of questions asked by the committee. Biberman was held in contempt of Congress and sentenced to serve six months in prison. The couple was blacklisted from working in Hollywood, and neither would have their name attached to a Hollywood project until 1969.

The Biberman's sold their home in California and moved to New York City, where Gale supported the family by acting in Broadway and Off-Broadway plays. The couple remained steadfast until Herbert's death of bone cancer in New York City in 1971. Sondergaard had been working in small TV roles around this time and decided to return to film by making the permanent move back to California. She spent the next several years appearing in episodes of television and films made for TV, but was never able to reach the same pedestal that she sat on during the 1940s and 1950s. Her final film was *Echoes* (1982), shortly after it's release, Sondergaard was diagnosed with cerebral vascular thrombosis. She received treatment until her death in August 1985 at the Motion Picture and Television Hospital in California. She was 86 years old.

Edith Holm "Gale" Sondergaard is remembered today as a the perfect movie villian whose career was cut short by a controversial example of government oversight. Her legacy, however, does not include the word, "failure." Instead, her humble beginnings, impression career and loyalty to her husband make her a model Meeker County citizen for all.



# Donations and Memberships

## FINANCIAL DONATIONS

Custom Products (Paper)  
Bernard and Ann Schulte  
Meeker Development Corp  
Custom Products  
Keith Johnson  
Larry Sharpe  
Mike Welbaum

Acton Township Board of Supervisors  
Patricia Fourre-Bajada  
Anthony Lorber  
Dennis Garoutte  
Robert and Beth Schnell  
Meeker County Board of Commissioners

## ARTIFACT DONATIONS

Brenda Hershey  
Butch Schulte  
Frank Lindell

Lyon County Historical Society  
Ron Nicholson  
Barbara Leslie

## NEW & RETURNING MEMBERS

Jim and Roberta Swenson  
Suzanne Braun  
Sid Wilson  
Mike Weber  
Charles Lavallee  
Larry and Marilyn Peterson  
Patrick Campbell  
Richard Carlson

Wanda Urdahl  
Mike Welbaum  
Anthony Lorber  
Mark Swinden  
Linda Atkinson  
Patricia Nelson  
Ken Zachman  
Judy Oestrich

Charlie and Lynette Holmquist  
Judy Oestrich  
Bob and Sheila Bohrer  
Sarah Anderson

Visit  
**[meekercomuseum.com/become-a-member](http://meekercomuseum.com/become-a-member)** to create or renew your MCM  
membership today!



# Spotlight on the Collection

**BY BAYLEY SCHLUTER**

In October, Brenda Hershey drove from her Michigan home to make a donation to our artifact collection. The donation was the Vietnam-era military uniform and medals worn by her late husband, James Dale Hershey II. The collection includes a full dress uniform, the many medals earned during his service, and photos of his internment at Arlington National Cemetery. But one item that couldn't be carefully wrapped and placed in a box are the stories that came with these items. The stories of a young man, fresh out of high school, who jumped into a tumultuous and unpopular war and who lived on to become known as a "Renaissance Man."

Hershey was born and raised in the Litchfield area, a grandson of Judge Reuben Hershey, would donated the land on which the Frank Daggett Post was constructed. He graduated high school and immediately volunteered for the Army in 1969. At this time, those opposed to the Vietnam War were louder than those that supported it, and there was even dissidence among the military. The practice of "sandbagging" began around this time, where units ordered to go on patrol would instead find a site out of view from superiors and radio in false unit reports or coordinates. How Hershey felt about these "sandbaggers" is unknown, but the fact that he was awarded the Good Conduct Medal suggests that he didn't cause much trouble. During a time of war, the GC Medal is given to those who have completed one year of honorable and faithful service without any "non-judicial punishment, disciplinary infractions or court martial offenses."

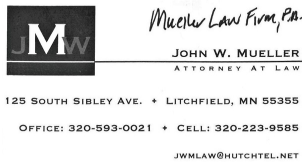


Hershey was stationed with the 11th Armored Cavalry until his honorable discharge as a Sergeant in 1972. Despite struggling with PTSD, Hershey lived with wife Brenda in California; working as a hair stylist, photographer, and interior designer. All while also learning the fine art of French cuisine, raising Newfoundland puppies, writing poetry, fishing and raising two daughters. His sudden death almost one year ago left a hole within his family, but the accomplishments and keepsakes from his life will ensure that his memory remains alive for a long time.

# Business and Nonprofit Memberships

## BUSINESS MEMBERS

### Mueller Law Firm, PA



### Litchfield Family Dental



### Insurance Solutions of Litchfield



### Nelsan-Horton American Legion Post 104



### Admiral Benson Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2818



### Spirit of Ripley RV and Campground



### Conway, Deuth & Schiesing, PLLP



### Stockman's Greenhouse and Garden Center



## NONPROFIT MEMBERS

### Greater Litchfield Opera House Association



### American Legion Post No. 381



Visit  
[meekercomuseum.com  
/business-membership](http://meekercomuseum.com/business-membership)  
to learn about Business  
and Nonprofit  
Membership benefits





The benefits of a membership with the **Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall** include: Free or reduced priced tickets to MCM events, a free copy of the quarterly "Meeker Memories Newsletter" sent to your home or inbox, free admission to MCM exhibits, and the knowledge that you are an active supporter of the preservation of the unique stories from Meeker County.

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](http://www.meekercomuseum.org/become-a-member)**

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

**This is a \_\_\_Renewal \_\_\_New Membership**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_ **City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip Code:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone Number:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Email Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Add Me to the Email List: Y/N**

**I'd Like to Make a Tax-Deductible Donation: \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

**Meeker County Museum Membership Levels**

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

\_\_\_ Senior Single Annual (\$20) \_\_\_ Senior Single One-Time (\$500)

\_\_\_ Senior Family Annual (\$35) \_\_\_ Senior Family One-Time (\$500)

**Litchfield Civil War Roundtable Annual Membership**

\_\_\_ Single (\$30) \_\_\_ Family (\$40)

**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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