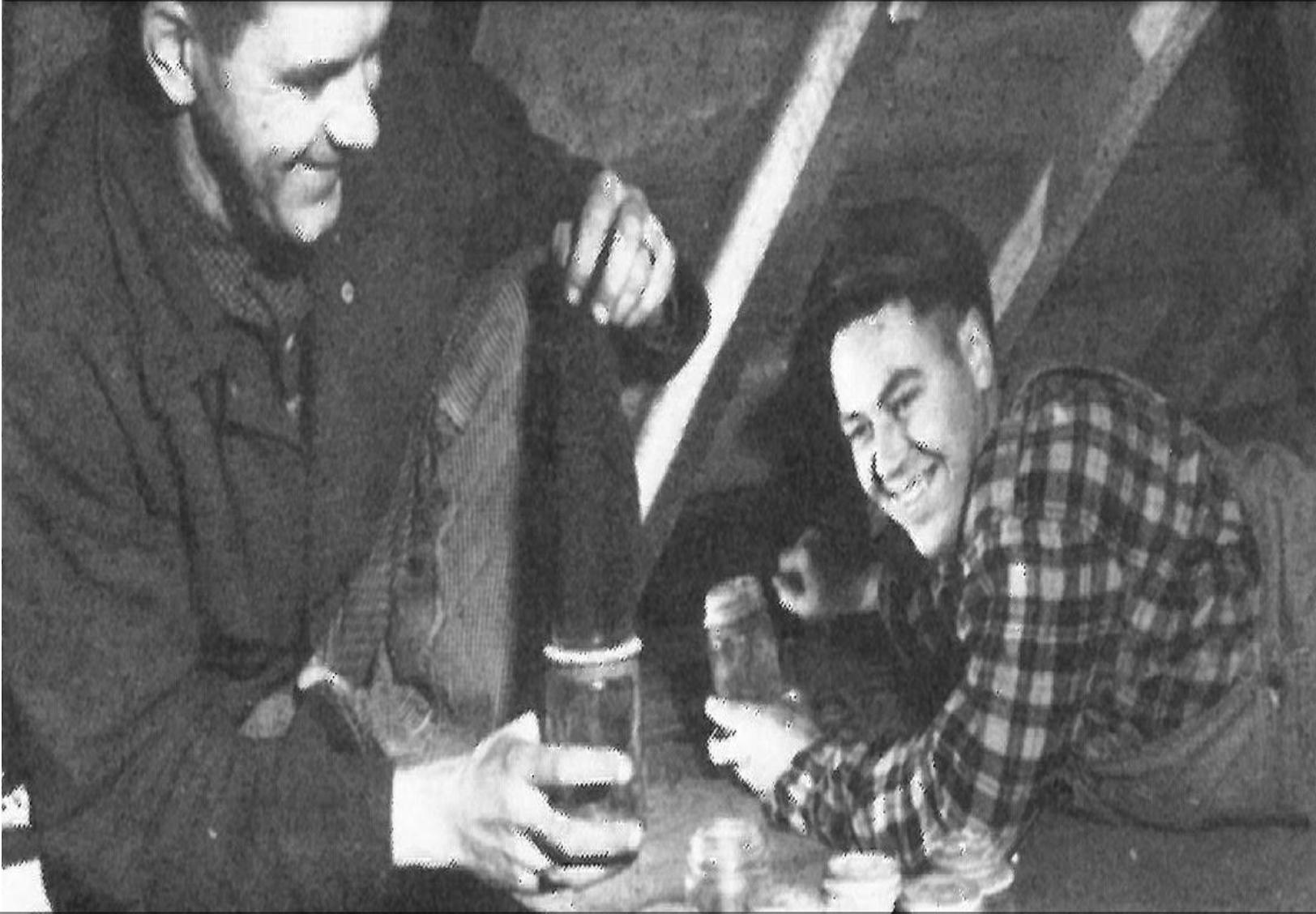


Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall

Spring 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

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

Executive Director

Bayley Schluter

Staff and Volunteers

Sandy Johnson - Mark Cashman - Connie Lies
Auggie Anderson - Ian Maner - Darlene Kotelnicki - Jessica Bondhus

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

The Coronavirus, it's an inescapable topic wherever you look. Students are learning from home, restaurants are only offering curbside service, and everyone is practicing social distancing. I myself am writing this letter from my home office, in compliance with the Governor's Stay-at-Home order. The immediate future is uncertain, no one can say how long this quarantine will last, or how we will feel when it's over. One thing that I do know for sure is that the Meeker County Museum will remain dedicated to sharing and preserving the stories of Meeker County. As many of you know already, the MCM is closed to the public until Friday, May 1st. While we've asked that our volunteers remain at home, our staff and Board of Directors are still working on plans for this Spring and Summer, and will remain available for any questions from you. Sending an email (addresses can be found at <https://www.meekercomuseum.org/staff-and-board-members>) is the best way to reach us, but you can also leave a voicemail at the Museum and someone will call back as soon as they can.

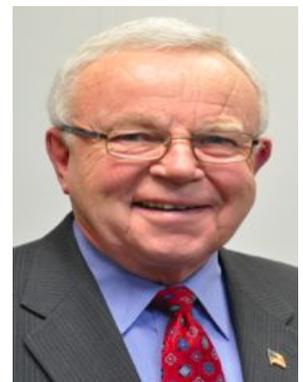


Bruce Nelson, a member of the Legion & MCM, showing off some old toys to EV-W students

In February and March, we were visited by students from Alabama as part of the Annual Peanut Butter & Milk Festival and students from Eden Valley-Watkins High School. The ED-W tour was part of the 36th Annual Boys and Girls County Program, sponsored by various American Legions throughout the county. Reservations have already come in for springtime school tours at the Museum. We are excited to (hopefully!) show off our new field trip activities for 3rd, 5th and 6th grade tours, but need your help to do so. Every school tour requires a minimum of 3 volunteers to lead activities and escort students throughout the building. If you think that you might enjoy introducing students to their local history, mark your calendar for **Tuesday, May 5th at 5pm**. We'll take a tour of the building, explain the new activities, and answer any of your questions. This

date depends entirely on the coronavirus guidelines set by the MN Department of Health. If we have to postpone the training, that announcement will be shared in the newspapers, through email and online. Check our website for any updates.

In the spirit of "things will eventually get back to normal," May is when the MCM has their Annual Meeting and the Memorial Day Picnic. The Featured Speaker for this year's annual meeting is Mayor of Litchfield, Keith Johnson. He'll be speaking about his connections to the Litchfield area, the city's plans for this summer's road construction, and any other upcoming projects that the City government has in development. The Annual Meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, May 14th** and is a potluck dinner. Dinner will begin at 6:30 with a short business meeting set to begin around 7. Per our bylaws, the Annual Meeting is open only to those with an active membership. The **2020 Memorial Day Picnic** will be **Monday, May 25th** with food served at 11am. If you'd like to be involved with, or make a donation to the Picnic, just mark the Membership Form near the rear of this Newsletter.



On a personal note, I (Bayley) am preparing for the delivery of my first baby in early May and will be absent from the Museum for at least 10 weeks. Sandy Johnson, our Research Librarian, will be working full-time during this period and Board Members will be volunteering in the building. If you have any questions regarding MCM business, contact the Museum directly and Sandy will do her best to assist or direct you to the best person who can.

April 2020

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9		11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

By Executive Order issued by Governor Walz, the Meeker County Museum is closed to the public until Monday, May 4th

May 2020

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	<u>14</u>	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

May 5th at 5pm: Training for MCM Field Trip Guides

May 14th at 1:30pm: Litchfield GAR Civil War Roundtable - *The Plummer Brothers in the Civil War* by Darryl Sanners - Free for CWRT Members and \$3/guests - Drinks and Appetizers Served

May 14th at 6:30pm: Meeker County Historical Society Annual Meeting and Potluck - Featuring Mayor of Litchfield Keith Johnson - Open to Members of the MCM Only

May 25th at 11am: Annual Memorial Day Picnic - Litchfield Opera House

June 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				

June 11th at 1:30pm: Litchfield G.A.R Civil War Roundtable - *Infamous Veterans of the Civil War* by Vince Botz - Free for CWRT Members and \$3/guests - Drinks and Appetizers Served

Check our Website for any updates about upcoming events and programs
<https://www.meekercomuseum.org/events-and-announcements>

Meeker County Memories

A Treasure Hunt in Collinwood Township

On a cold February day in 1953 in Collinwood Township, two electricians from the Holm Brothers Dassel store were working on installing new wiring in an old farmhouse originally built in 1910. The house had been owned by the same family for over four decades, but was recently sold and required serious updates. Nothing was out of the ordinary for Elmer Berg and Lawrence Freeman, they had been working for two days before the incredible happened. They were working in the attic when Freeman loosened a floorboard and reached underneath for an opening between the wall. What he found was a glass pint jar with a black sock inside. *“It was that black sock that made us inquisitive,”* Freeman said to the Independent Review. The men broke the jar open with a hammer and found \$1700 in cash. Thrilled by the discovery and curious if there might be more, Berg and Freeman immediately set out on their very own treasure hunt.

Elmer Berg was born in 1919 to Charles and Anne Berg in Atwater. He attended school in Atwater and graduated from the University of Minnesota School of Architecture in 1942, quickly volunteering afterwards for the U.S. Navy (Taking a small break in December to marry Harriet Swan from Litchfield). Between March 1942 and September 1945, Berg was an electrician’s mate on a sub chaser. After his honorable discharge, Elmer and Harriet moved to Dassel and he began working for the Holm Brothers Store. Lawrence Freeman was born in 1925 in Dassel to Gust and Esther (Nelson). Born and raised in the area, he was a member of the St. John’s Lutheran Church and a volunteer for the Dassel Fire Department when he wasn’t working for Holm Bros.



A photo of Lawrence Freeman, taken from his obituary

The glass jar that the two men found had “SW” written on the lid. They thought that “SW” might mean “southwest” and began to search in the remaining three corners of the attic. What they found was twelve more jars and three bundles of envelopes, all filled with cash! The majority of the money was in bills of \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50, \$100 with a small amount of gold certificates dating back to the 1880s. The total sum found in this old farmhouse was more than \$30,000! They took the money to the Dassel State Bank to be re-counted and valued, and then reached out to the new owner of the farmhouse, Oscar D. Olson.

Olson purchased the farmhouse from Fred England, who inherited the property with his brother Oscar England from their parents. After Oscar died in May 1952, Fred continued to live in the home until he decided to move in

with his sister, Mrs. Ed Holmgren in Atwater. When Fred was asked about the money, he said that he had no idea that it was even there and that his brother had always been responsible for their shared finances. Since it was the original Mr. and Mrs. England (who died in 1946 and 1943, respectfully) who built the house, the authorities quickly came to the conclusion that it must have been them who hid the bills and certificates. With that in mind, who did the money belong to now? Did the England family have the sole right to the \$30,345.00, or did it now belong to the new owner? After getting a couple lawyers involved, it was decided that the fortune would be split between Fred England, the estate of Oscar England, and Mrs. Holmgren.



Berg and Freeman sitting in the England attic with their found treasure.

Elmer Berg and Lawrence Freeman ultimately each received a share of this buried treasure as thanks from the England family for finding and returning their family money. Berg used his share for his daughter Kathy, a child with cerebral palsy; the two took a special trip to Chicago so that Kathy could be fit for one-of-a-kind leg braces. While there, Berg appeared on the national TV-Radio program, “Welcome Travelers” and told the story of finding hidden treasure in Collinwood Township. The reason the story was shared in Chicago is because, after being reported on in Meeker County and throughout Minnesota, the story became a national sensation. Berg and Freeman spent the next few months answering questions from newspapers,

radio stations and TV stations all across the country. They received letters from people offering free advice, asking for autographs, or laying claim to the money. There was even a preacher who claimed that the money was his as he had been robbed during a recent evangelistic tour of Minnesota.

Eventually things returned to normal and Berg and Freeman went back to their everyday lives. Lawrence Freeman remained in Dassel until 1961, when he moved his family to Annandale, Minnesota and established the Freeman Electric Company. He operated that company until his retirement in 1994 and spent the rest of his days hunting and spending time with family until his death in November 2004 at the age of 74. Elmer Berg would work for the Holm the Holm Bros for a total of 39 years before establishing Elmer Berg Electric in Dassel. He remained there until his death in 1997 at the age of 77. During his life, Berg served for 20 years on the Dassel School Board and the Dassel-Cokato School Board; was a 20-year member of the Dassel Fire Department and; a 50-year member of the Paul F. Dille American Legion.



Elmer, his wife Harriet, and two daughters, Suzanne and Carol

Spotlight on the Collection

The Meeker County Last Man's Club



James Haugen (left) and his friend Howard Holtz. In 2013, they were 2 of the remaining 4 members of the Last Man's Club. Photo from the Litchfield Independent Review.

In January 2020, the family of James Haugen visited the MCM to make a donation on his behalf. The donation was his collection of materials relating to the Meeker County Last Man's Club, a group of veterans of the Second World War that would remain a club "until the last man." Before James Haugen passed away on January 22, he was that last man.

Haugen was born in his grandparents house in Pinewood, Minnesota on January 12, 1927. He spent his young life working until being drafted into the military on March 19, 1945 at Fort Snelling. He trained at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri and Camp Livingston, Louisiana. After boarding the ship *General Gordon*, he was sent to Hokkaido Island in northern Japan to work with the

QM trucking company. He was then sent to Tokyo to work as a jeep driver with the 1st Cav. Division. On August 15, 1946, he was honorably discharged and returned to the Litchfield area after his father's death in 1947. In August 1968, James married Edith Lanning and the two had seven children during their forty-four years of marriage. When he passed away, James had eleven grandchildren, fifteen great-grandchildren and an uncountable number of friends.

One organization that he was a member of was the Meeker County Last Man's Club. The club was established on June 14, 1967 with the purpose of "*...[giving] us a better opportunity to know our friends and neighbors in Meeker County, Minnesota. To built solid and lasting friendships [throughout] the county.*" The group was "*...absolutely nonpolitical or non-partisan. In the opposite of the armed forces in which you served there will be no distinction of rank among us. We are composed of any race, religion, occupation or political convictions.*" The group's first meeting was on Flag Day, and would meet on every Flag Day in June until 2013 to elect new officers, enjoy each other's company and honor any members who had passed away the previous year. Before sitting down to eat dinner, members gave the deceased a seat at the dinner table and placed a plaque with their name on it at their seat. A chair, tipped up against the table, marked that person's absence. At their peak, club meetings would go well past midnight as members played cards and swapped stories. The final meeting of the Last Man's Club was in 2013, when the group agreed to disband due to dwindling numbers and to donate all funds in their account to a project to construct a veterans memorial at the Litchfield Library.

A few of the the artifacts that James Haugen endowed to the Museum includes a book of the Club's meeting minutes between 1967-2006, the Treasurer's Journal with a list of all 138 original members, and the plaques that were used to honor deceased members. The information that Haugen saved will be instrumental in preserving the stories of the Last Man's Club, the men who belonged to that organization, and of Haugen himself. We'd like to thank Haugen for his service to our country and for his efforts to preserve this small piece of Meeker County history.



Section of a Japanese newspaper that Haugen took back to the States.

Support our Business and Nonprofit Organizational Members!

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 Campground



Conway, Deuth & Schmiesing, PLLP



Stockmen's Greenhouse and Garden Center



Nonprofit Organizational Members

Greater Litchfield Opera House Association



American Legion Post No. 381



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:

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

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 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)

Donation Form

During this unprecedented time, it's important to remember the local organizations and businesses that make your community unique. The Meeker County Museum is set to lose at least 40 days of business during this mandated closure; meaning a loss of income from tours, research requests, programs and rentals of the Hall. If you're able, please consider making a donation to this organization and support our efforts to preserve the unique stories of Meeker County

Donation Amount: \$ _____

Donor Name: _____

Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Email Address: _____

Send Me a Receipt for My Tax-Deductible Donation:

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

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