



HISTORY 21



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Front Cover: Group of people on the island at Lake George. Standing [L to R]: Tom Howard, Alma Kimball, Jim Tierney, [unidentified], [unidentified], Ralph Bruns. Seated: Mrs. A.S. Kimball, Addie Lou Kimball. Object id: 2075.3.4

From the President



I am thrilled to reflect on some remarkable recent city events, and we look forward to the promising ventures that lie ahead for us at the Anoka County Historical Society.

The Nowthen Threshing Show is a testament to our agricultural heritage, reminding us of the ingenuity and dedication that shaped our community. We met people from all over the county and beyond. I talked to a couple from Nebraska.

We spent a beautiful evening at the Fridley Civic Center for the Fridley Music

Series. While there, we talked about local Fridley history and learned even more from the good folks of Fridley.

In the spirit of unity and shared history, let us continue to support the Anoka County Historical Society's mission. Our collective efforts ensure that the stories of Nowthen Threshing Show, Fridley Music Series, and the upcoming Anoka Ghost Tours are not just events but bridges connecting us to our roots. Together, we kindle the flame of knowledge and heritage for future generations to cherish. Thank you for your unwavering dedication, enthusiasm, and monetary support. Here's to a future of preserving our past and fostering community bonds that will endure for years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Oxley".

Richard Oxley, ACHS President

From the Director

The pattern of life and the cycles of a year never fail to intrigue me. We've arrived at the opening end of Ghost Tour season and the rise in energy and anticipation feels palpable. The schedule shifts to accommodate different hours, the phone rings more often, the Eventbrite notifications ding consistently on my phone notifications. All other tasks take a backseat to our largest fundraiser of the year. Then, like a switch, November 1 will arrive and we will take a collective breath, sinking into the winter months. The filing and organizing, the grant writing, the coffee dates, and the back-log of emails become the focus of this season—just in time for spring to arrive and festivals and outreach to demand attention.

In some ways the predictability of this pattern brings reassurance. In others, it feels like the gateway to, "we've always done it that way." What are the rhythms of your lifetime? How have they changed through the years?



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rebecca Ebnet-Desens".

Rebecca Ebnet-Desens,
Executive Director

Coom Rapids, East Bethel, Fridley, Ham Lake, Hilltop, Lexington, Lino Lakes, Linwood, Nowthen, Oak Grove, Ramsey, Spring Lake Park, St. Francis

BEHIND THE SCENES: EXHIBIT DESIGN

When you visit the ACHS exhibit gallery, you may spend a half hour enjoying the displays—maybe an hour if you read everything. It looks polished, logical, and arranged nicely for you to understand the information presented. You might skip something you’re not interested in, spend more time on something that catches your eye, or even look something up on your phone to bring more depth to your experience. You chit-chat with the folks at the front desk, maybe leave a donation (thank you!), and head off to the rest of your day. Hopefully, a tidbit sticks in your mind and it comes up in conversation with someone down the road and you put in a good word for us (also, thank you!)

The staff at ACHS has one goal when creating exhibits: to make the presentation of information pleasant to consume. Contrary to logical thought, a simple display takes far more staff time than a complicated one packed with textual information and items on display. We want to pull the curtain back on the process and how the current exhibit, “Take Your Place in History,” came to exist.

Let’s rewind about two years. The Anoka Chamber of Commerce has a subset of members called “Discover Anoka” that we participate in as a Main Street business. The group purchased billboard space along Highway 169, and we chipped in to have our logo flash to everyone stuck in traffic on a Friday night for several weeks. What else to include besides our logo? Whatever slogan we put on this billboard could be used in our marketing campaign and exhibitions, so it had to be perfect. Inclusive. Thoughtful. Concise. Powerful. Applicable to the wider community. *Insert lots of thinking and maybe some caffeine* SUCCESS.

“Take Your Place in History” is an action phrase that calls us to think about our legacy and how we want to be remembered and that ACHS can help in that journey. What is one thing everyone has that is shared quickly

Thank you to our partner, Benedictine Living Community of Anoka. They purchased a programming package, which earned them reduced pricing on workshops, lectures, films, and behind-the-scenes tours of ACHS. For more information about this opportunity, look at the PDF at anokacountyhistory.org/programs.



Benedictine

LIVING COMMUNITY | ANOKA

and costs negligible money? A story. Every resident in Anoka County has a story, and ACHS can help those tales remain in family groups, organization files, or our collection at the history center. The tricky part? Effectively telling that story and preserving it for the future. That thought led us to hold a storytelling workshop series via Zoom, author presentations to dissect how they organized and translated family information into a readable product and explore other ways of telling stories that didn't involve writing.

Jolanda Dranchak works at School District 11, and over lunch one day, she explained how she would choose a word each month to mull over, do some journal writing, and finally use her skills as a weaver of found objects to process her emotions. This new form of storytelling intrigued us, and soon, Jolanda's 13 weavings representing the death of her husband, COVID-19, and her PTSD from growing up in a Soviet bloc country came roaring back on January 6, 2021, appeared at ACHS. Holding the pieces up to the traditionally white museum wall, Jolanda asked if it could change to blue, as that background was part of the weaving story. (Thanks for supplying the paint and labor!) Next came brainstorming the title, "All That's Weft: Living a Life Interrupted,"—this admittedly took a few pages of scribble and a drive home to create, but it felt perfect when the words came together. A separate conversation brought up the idea of using a Cricut machine to make the conceptual title and labels physically appear on the wall *insert research on the machine* and upon checking the "yes" box for that, we wondered from whom we could borrow one for a test drive (thanks, Jessica!) *fast forward to staff purchasing vinyl, cutting boards, and transfer paper then reading directions and running some tests* After the words adhered to the wall, Jolanda's artist statement needed to appear on floor stands. We stood back and admired the finished product, took some pictures, and began to create the webpage (find it under "What we do" and "exhibit hall"), postcards for the opening reception (a whole separate planning schedule), and social media posts.

While ACHS staff worked through this process, we brainstormed how the rest of the exhibit hall could reflect storytelling differently. We knew our National Register area would feature the Linwood Grange next—a story of place—but in researching the building and location, we realized that it



Installing labels created on the Cricut.

remained inextricably tied to the people of Linwood and their desire to found an agricultural community on education and innovation.

More thinking What if we displayed information about the building and some artifacts



“All That’s Weft” opening reception, 2023.

from the charter members? *Realization dawning* We could connect the Veteran Voice project--stories from our more recent veterans--by displaying the military uniform of one of the charter members. *Excitement builds as the phone rings, and Kay Bauer offers her Vietnam mess dress uniform and oral history. * What about the fan fiction project the eighth graders did using the James Groat diaries from the collection? That is a different way of telling stories and investigating history and legacy (also available on the ACHS website). We have some Civil War artifacts that would complement that, right? Suddenly, the ideas ran freely, and the hall felt alive with activity. The staff made lists and lists of elements necessary to complete the displays—graphics, printing, research, transcription, cleaning cases, writing labels, and publicity.

Concurrently, the Adopt an Artifact program had brought in many donations and exciting conversations with people. As we listened to people describe their families and hobbies to discover a perfect adoption match, it became clear that the artifact selection process told a story about values and perspectives. The Civil War historian felt drawn to a gun of the era. The government-minded chose the County Commissioner table. The granddaughter wanted to support their family artifact. Someone with a sense of humor wanted to adopt the oldest pickle for fun. The exhibit hall now became a place for adopters to explain why they felt drawn to this object and its story—what connection they felt.

Head scratch We decided to leave the desk representing Charles Horn and the first class of Federal Cartridge employees as the story of a corporation surviving into its second century. What about those who didn’t? *Lightbulb flash* A recent donation of labels from the St. Francis Canning Company spurred more research and a dive into our archives to find photos. Perfect. A little mylar around the artifacts and some staples in the wall, print those display panels, buy some more Command Strips, and poof. It is a story

that could quickly disappear from memory if it wasn't preserved in the ACHS collection.

During this past year (seriously, all of this is happening simultaneously), we worked to digitize the Olson Family Collection using a grant from the Legacy Funds. Being from the Ham Lake area, the collection not only filled a geographic void in our collection but also filled the void of women's stories through the generations. It's a story of the location, the ever-changing landscape of ground the family owned, of changing technology and personal artifacts, of homosexuality before it was legal, and the transferability of this story to provide information on other rural Anoka County families. We selected one image of men by a sod house to print on a large fabric wrap as a background for the other text panels and display case. The book *On the Go All the Time: The Unusually Usual Lives of Two Midwestern Women* by Daryl Richard Lawrence, lay on the nearby table as a testament to how to corral "too much" family information into a readable source for the public.

One other big piece of the exhibit puzzle stood in our way before we could open officially in July at Anoka's Riverfest—what we call the "splash wall" had to be designed, printed, and, most importantly, arranged on the wall. We spent some time sitting on the floor sketching ideas using photos, maps, and the billboard design (screaming into the void occasionally). We finally brought a draft layout to our printer (thanks, Church Offset Printing!) and waited to see if what we saw in our mind's eye would work.

It did. After a day of work, the elements clung to the wall with only a few air bubbles that Sara quickly popped with a pin and smoothed down. We popped a slideshow of images into the TV monitors Don had shifted to the right place and clinked cookies to celebrate a job well done.

We welcome everyone to the History Center for research, socializing, volunteering, and, of course, to see the exhibit. We hope our skills have created a professional-looking space for you to enjoy!

Now for the next one...



Installing the "splash wall" in the exhibit hall, 2023.

The ACHS collection acquired a couple of objects that are not only rare but also connected to a family story deeply rooted in Anoka County. Frances Megarry (nee' Grant) and her daughter Heather delivered an early 20th-century wall-mounted telephone and a kerosene lamp complete with its original reflection mirror mounted on the back. Our collections manager, Kassandra, talked with descendants of Linwood's Grant family about the heirlooms they donated. The question in the back of everyone's mind at the museum was how she managed to keep these objects in such pristine condition. She said that her father, Thomas Grant, son of founding Linwood Grange member John Grant, told her to take good care of them — so she did for nearly 50 years!

"My father told me that I'd never find another one like it [the lamp], said Frances. "By the time I inherited it most people had broken the mirror that came with them, so my father told me to treat it with the utmost care. I did this with the telephone to because I had never seen another one in working condition like my own."

This personal and long-lasting connection the family maintained with the items seemed evident, which made their donation to ACHS even more meaningful.

"I wanted to make sure they were in a place where they could be properly taken care of for



*The donated oil lamp with intact mirror
(Object ID: 2023.2018.002)*

generations to come," said Frances.

Frances recalled her family using the lamp in the original farmhouse on the homestead when she was young. Before electricity arrived in rural Linwood in the 1940s, they used the lamp for decades.

Although the reflection mirror on the lamp was the most delicate piece of the items donated, the telephone posed a considerable collection conundrum. The phone came with batteries, which created a storage problem due to the liquid contained within them. We can take high-resolution digital pictures of the telephone with the batteries still nested inside and then safely remove them to store them separately.



The Grant family telephone with batteries. (Object ID: 2023.2018.001)

We have hung both items in the exhibit hall instead of storing them immediately because of their connection to our National Registry Property Exhibit that features the Linwood Grange and the Grant family. The donation of these items had exceptional timing for us to add to the existing display — we are often not that lucky! Not only did this donation fit in perfectly with our exhibit hall themes, but it also filled gaps in our collection. Since our collection is donation-based, smaller communities, like Linwood, Bethel, and East Bethel, are often represented disproportionately. So, we are constantly looking for objects and histories to add to our collection to fill those geographical gaps.



A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words — Maybe More

Many photographs in the ACHS collection show the long-gone details of Anoka County, whether posed portraits or just impromptu moments. But often, the image becomes just the starting point. The story comes with the information you can glean from the photo and the connections you can tease out.

The photograph above shows a “Poverty Party” held at Mary and Irving Caswell’s home (now the Mad Hatter Restaurant) on Ferry St. in Anoka. Poverty Parties were popular in upper-class circles around 1900. Hosts invited their guests to wear their “worst” clothing, rags preferred. The “poorest” costume earned prizes, and the guests played games and received meals of bread or mush and water. Through our lens today, the theme feels insensitive, and it is in poor taste to pretend to live an impoverished life for entertainment.

Society circles considered the Caswells a prominent local family. Irving owned and edited the *Anoka Herald* Newspaper. Mary sat on the City Library board, helped her husband run the paper during his deployment with the National Guard, and was a published author in national children’s magazines. Unsurprisingly, their party was attended by the “who’s who” of Anoka. Unfortunately, the photograph is only partially identified and undated. We can make an educated guess that the image belongs to the early 1900s from the style of the picture and clothing. In 1900, the Caswells lived in the home with Mary’s mother and two brothers, their son, and a 17-year-old servant named Ellen Anderson.

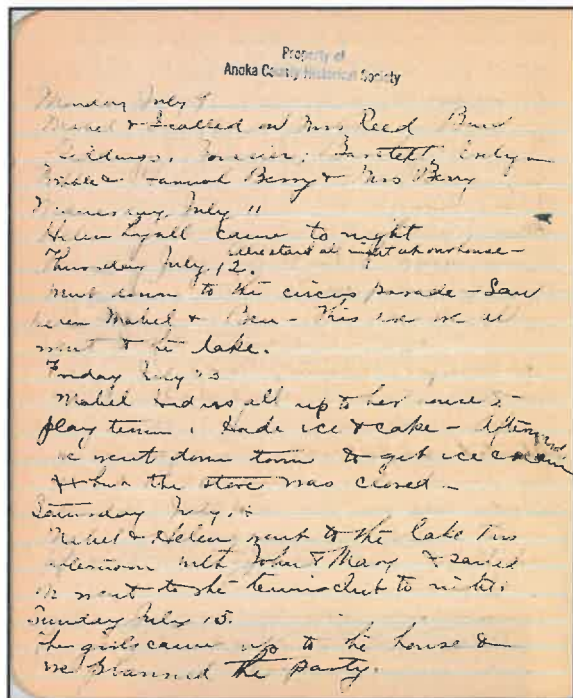
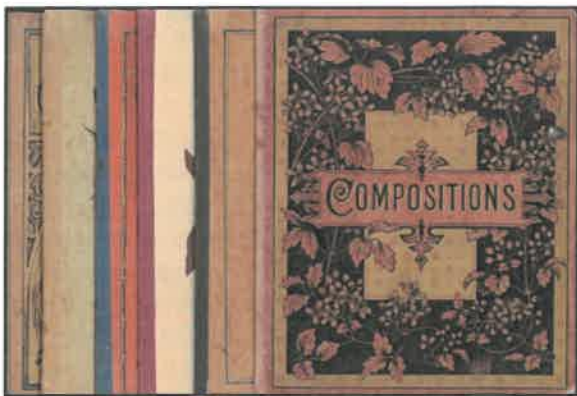
What else can we discover about the photograph and the people in it? Mary Woodbury and another person, Alice Starrett, kept diaries, and we transcribed them for the collection. Unfortunately, the years do not overlap (Alice’s diaries cover 1887-1895, while Mary’s are dated 1914-1918), but the women appear in each other’s writing.

Alice noted that “Irving Caswell took Ed & I boating one day,” while on another day, a group including Mary and Irving played tennis with her before having “ice and cake” on a “lovely day” in June. Her diary also accounts that she attended Mary’s Ghost

Party in July (no more details besides the name) and sometimes just that "Mary Woodbury called." It is a snapshot of the friend's relationship before Mary Woodbury's marriage to Irving, and she became Mrs. Caswell.

On the other side, Mary's diary can tease details about their relationship nearly 20 years later. Both live in the same homes, but Mary has married and had a son, while Alice has remained single. Mary's diary contains notes like "Alice and Carrie Starret...were at dinner with us" or that Alice came to Irving's birthday party. The two ventured to St. Paul together to hear *Rigoletto* and have dinner at the Fredric Hotel -- and even accompanied the family on a trip to Europe in 1914.

Someone can have more than one Alice in their life, and Mary's sister-in-law, who appears in Mary's diary, was also called Alice. So careful reading and context are needed to know whom she is writing about. Thankfully, Mary often uses last names or last initials. In other cases, how she writes the list of those attending gives a clue. Alice Caswell was married to Arthur, and we can assume that any list Mary wrote placing those two together does not refer to Alice Starrett.



Facing page: Poverty Party at the Caswell home with: A. Caswell, T.T. Geddes, Alice Starrett, L. Greenwald, Mrs. S. Bend, Thad Giddings, Dr. Hagaman. Front: Mrs. Warnes, Mrs. Hagaman, Cora Lukkason, Mrs. A. Giddings.

Above: Alice Starrett diaries, outside cover and inside page.

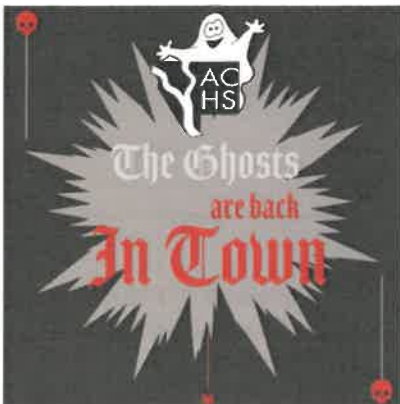
My Internship at the Anoka County Historical Society

By: Kassidy Schwartz-Eckhardt

I remember going to the Minnesota Historical Society in 2nd grade and stumbling upon the WWI exhibit they had open then. I didn't know much about what the signs or plaques said, but I knew I needed to learn more. I think this was the first time my interest in history bloomed; it's been about seven years since I saw that exhibit, and my interest is still as strong as ever. I decided to intern at the Anoka County Historical Society over the summer because I was looking for a summer job or at least something to familiarize me with a work setting. I thought there was no better place to start that part of my life than a historical society! I didn't know what to expect, but I wasn't disappointed in the slightest. On my first day, I helped give a bus tour and held up pictures when the time was right. Soon after, I was taught how the organizing system of artifacts worked and what each number on the boxes meant. It was a very simple first thing, but it felt amazing to be a part of what people with my dream job do daily. I entered objects into the database, helped make videos for social media, and moved many a number of clothes from closet to closet, and I am so glad I applied for this internship. This was my first step in becoming a historian once I'm older, and I hope to come back and intern here again eventually! Thank you to the Anoka County Historical Society for giving me this opportunity; it was such an amazing experience.



COUPON: FOR ACHS MEMBERS ONLY



The Ghosts of Anoka Walking Tour begins September 1 and runs through Halloween. Join the tour and purchase your tickets with a special ACHS members only coupon code for \$5 off your tickets purchased by Sept. 23.

Use Code: History21

Undiscounted Tickets: \$18
AnokaCountyHistory.org

VOLUNTEER WORLD

It has been a whirlwind summer that flew by too quickly. Thank you to all the friends and volunteers who took time out of their day and helped bring ACHS into the world.

Specifically, thank you to interns Leo and Kassidy for spending time weekly throughout the summer doing whatever the collections and museum needed that day.

Not to mention those who sacrificed buckets of sweat at the Anoka County Fair. Special shout-outs to Tammy, Andi, Erin, the other Andy, Jan, Jane, Griffen, Sandy, Orville, Dan, Maddie, Kenny, different Tammy, and Linda. It was lovely to break in the new front porch together.

Finally, the pickle and candy crew at the Nowthen Threshing Show! (see pictures on the right) With your help, we helped satisfy people's sugar and salt cravings as they stepped into the 1920s in our General Store. In total Lotus, Becky, Rich, Jessica, Peyton, Steve, Jamie, James, Andy, Dennis, Riley, Emilia, and Moyo sold a total of 22 HUGE jars of pickles.

If you don't want to miss out on the fun next year, send me a note to get on the list.

If you can't wait until next year for history fun, sign up for a shift to help us with projects around the museum. You'll find available shifts by scanning the QR code below



Sara Given
Volunteer Coordinator
Sara@AnokaCountyHistory.org



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History 21 The Podcast!

Episodes drop the first and third Friday of each month. Subscribe and never miss one!

Here’s the latest:

- Episode 3.14 - Richard Sorenson
- Episode 3.15 - Lynn Klonowski
- Episode 3.16 - Genealogist Jane LaMusga
- Coming October 1: The diaries of Alice Starrett

*Subscribe at: Apple,
 Audible, Amazon, Google,
 Spotify or listen at
 AnokaCountyHistory.org*

History Center Hours—GHOST TOUR SEASON HOURS

Closed Sunday, Monday, Tuesday

Wednesday—10-4 p.m.

Thursday, Friday, Saturday—1-7:30 p.m.

Call us for a research reservation or to schedule shenanigans!

ACHS Board Meetings

Second Thursday of each month. 6:30 p.m. via Zoom

Open to membership and the public. Find the link to attend digitally at AnokaCountyHistory.org on the calendar.

Linwood Family Fun Days

Meet ACHS at Linwood and see the Broadbent coat and mittens from our collection as they return home for this community festival.

When: September 9, 10-5 p.m.

Where: Linwood Senior Center

Cost: free

Using the Story Gathering Form

Anoka County Genealogy Society, featuring Rebecca Ebnet Desens

This hands-on workshop will familiarize you with the contents of the handy tool so you can interview yourself, your family, or a friend.

When: September 28, 6 p.m.

Where: Anoka County History Center

Cost: \$10

Ghost Tours

Hot off the press! Pass the word around so this can be our most successful year.

Book online at AnokaCountyHistory.org or call 612-420-0600

When: September and October, various dates

Where: leaves from the Anoka County History Center

Cost: \$18



Keep up with the Fun at ACHS!



Anoka County Historical Society



AnokaCoHistory



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