

HISTORY 21



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*Front Cover: Interior of "Coach" restaurant on Highway 65 in Cooper's Corner. The restaurant was built inside a retired rail car. L-R: Margaret Bodine, unidentified, Lydia Bodine.
Object ID: 2022.0168.007*



From the President

On August 10th, a lovely Saturday, the Society welcomed the 38th Annual New London to New Brighton Antique Car Run. We had several beautifully restored and maintained pre-1910 automobiles filling our parking lot for a couple of hours while many people, ranging from the curious to the knowledgeable, came to see, talk, and share. We also had a beautiful new exhibit in the museum featuring a made-in-Anoka VEERAC with a long local provenance, which was recently generously donated by a Society member. Many of you were

there to share in the fun. It was good to see you and hear some of your stories, as these old vehicles sparked memories of your earliest automobile experiences.

It means a lot to us to be able to host these kinds of events, and it means even more to see all of you attend and enjoy. As our kids and grandkids go back to school and the weather (hopefully!) cools off a bit, we're gearing up for another great Ghost Tour season – our 20th year of telling spooky stories in Anoka at Halloween.

We've had a great summer at ACHS and hope you have, too. We look forward to seeing you this fall!

Steve Florman, President

From the Director

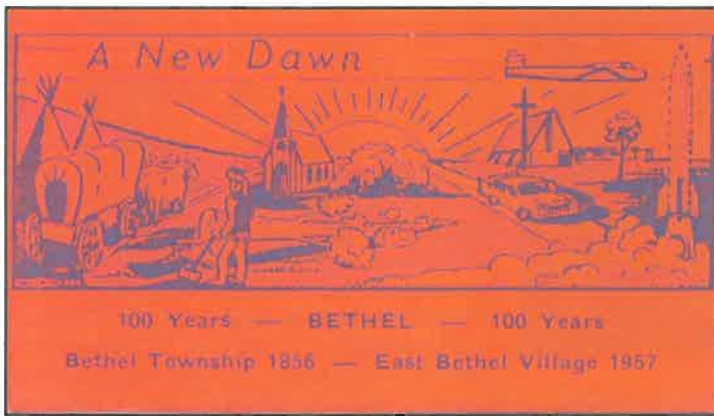
We see the ghosts around the corner, the Vietnam project growing deeper and more complex, and our year-end fundraising goals looking a bit closer than they were in our rear-view mirror. It's suddenly fall!

What can you do to help? I'm so glad you asked, my dear member! Tell your friends about why you're a member and encourage them to support local history by making a financial donation. Bring them on a ghost tour of Anoka (it's our 20th year!) and treat them to a brand new Ghosts of Anoka tee-shirt from our gift shop. The little ghost characters are so cute you'll want to pick up a set of pins or a sticker while you're there. Come to think of it, we could have a naming contest! Host a Story Swap Social like Sandy did (more details inside) or share our podcast with another curious person. Tell the Vietnam era service members and families that we're looking for them (in a good way!) and their stories.

That's just the tip of the iceberg! Thanks for all you do and who you are—ACHS wouldn't be the same without you.



Rebecca Ebnet-Desens,
Executive Director



The East Bethel Air Force Base

By Sara Given

There is no contest if you organize all 21 cities in Anoka County by size--East Bethel is the largest at nearly 48 square miles. It contains 12 lakes, no set "Main Street," and highway 65 cuts through it. But how did it become East Bethel? Originally, the area was named Bethel Township, and it covered the entire Northeast corner of the County. But little by little, pieces of it started organizing and splitting off. In 1871, the Township of Linwood was organized with land from Bethel Township and Columbus Township. Later, in 1913, the small Village of Bethel was incorporated. The new existence of two areas named Bethel creates confusion when researching since there is the Village of Bethel and Bethel Township: same name - two separate places.

But what even is the difference?

The biggest difference between a town and a city is that towns generally provide more limited services. They don't have their own police or fire department and cannot protect their borders. If a town spends time building a nice neighborhood or business district, the neighboring city can take or annex it to add to its tax base with no governmental consequences. The town can't stop it. In 1957, that's exactly what Bethel Township was worried about.

A few things were happening that year. First, the Ham Lake Township-Soderville incorporation committee attempted their bid for incorporation as a Village. The borders of their new proposed Village "included two sections of land from Bethel Township, [which had] valuable highway 65 frontage with a lumber business..." The vote failed, but the action shook residents. They



wanted to preserve their boundaries from encroachment but were also looking to the future and a vast new jet air base that would soon be built there. All of this could more easily be dealt with as a Village than a township.

In February 1957, MN Governor Orville

Freeman started the process to acquire land for a new air base located in Bethel Township. Colonel Leon H. Hagen said of the agreement between the United States and Minnesota, "there never has been any question of where the airport is going to be – only the meets and bounds." While they didn't know exactly what it would look like, Bethel Township was the only location being considered, and residents were told "there will be a concrete runway, operational by late in 1960."

In the grand scheme of things, three years is not a lot of time for this huge construction project. Land purchases were even expected by the middle of 1958. To proceed with the construction, the Air National Guard would move to Bethel "with 200 full time civilian technicians and 1,000 members of the reserve coming there for training." And also "the Naval Reserve Jet Operations would move from Minneapolis to Bethel."

It was estimated that the base would have 49 officers and 536 enlisted men on 24-hour duty. Additionally, the reservists would number 459 officers and 1,702 enlisted men, coming from a five-state area around Minnesota. The base itself could only be home for some of these men and their families; others would need to move and build homes in the surrounding area. Naturally, businesses would grow around the base to serve these families and the soldiers stationed there, creating an economic boom for the area.

Because they saw the reality of a huge airbase coming to Bethel, the area needed to get ready, and members of the self-appointed East Bethel Booster Club were ready to organize it all. First, the Township needed to incorporate and get all the legal ducks in a row before the land was purchased. Plus, there were other details to think about, such as zoning, schools, industry, and taxes.

The process of incorporation went rather quickly at first. After a couple of town meetings and petitions, there was an official vote on June 4, 1957. Out of nearly 400 votes cast, 232 people voted for incorporation, and 161 were against it. They would name the new incorporated Village East Bethel.

After that first election, they needed to vote for a new Mayor and government officials. The booster club also established an official newspaper for the new Village, *The East Bethel Booster*.

But there was an unexpected wrench later that summer when four residents of Coon Lake Beach (a part of the newly formed East Bethel) contested the incorporation's validity. By 1957, Coon Lake Beach was fully established as its

East Bethel Booster

Published by East Bethel Village Boosters Club

Mrs. Lola Reinecke, Editor

Phone Soderville 22F8 — Rte. 1, Wyoming, Minn.

Circulation 500

EAST BETHEL, MINNESOTA, September 28, 1957
MINNESOTA'S LARGEST VILLAGE — 47.75 SQUARE MILES

own micro town. It did not help that with incorporation, they were essentially cut off from the rest of the Village by the lake. They took their grievances and the Village to court. In 1958, after legal delays and the general slowness of legal proceedings, the two groups came before a Judge at a hearing on April 9th and 10th. A judge from Minnesota's 6th Judicial District because an Anoka County judge couldn't be impartial.

People made their case for incorporation again. The Village argued that they had several civic and philanthropic groups with broad support. They noted the outreach the boosters had done to bring development to the city and that building permits doubled in 1957 after incorporation. Other individuals were called to the stand – Colonel Leon H Hagen, acting Minnesota Adjutant General, talked of the Bethel Airbase and that “one million dollars for first acquisition of land...is already appropriated and is available.” Next, George Ashwood, a resident of Coon Lake Beach and a member of the Booster Club, and Mayor Joe Anderson took the stand. E.S. Vevea, Minnesota Highway Engineer, spoke about the expansion plans for Highway 65 and the plans for a connecting bridge across Coon Lake.

After the hearing concluded, parties had to wait until June 30, 1958, for the judge's decision. The *East Bethel Booster* and *Anoka Union* announced, “Judge

Rules Village Incorporation is Invalid.” The fate of the new Village was suddenly in question. In his decision, the judge noted that the incorporation was legal and followed the law, but there were other considerations. His main sticking point was that there wasn't a natural connection between the platted and unplatted areas. “There hasn't been in the past...and is not at present, any sign of rapid growth or urbanization and therefore nullified the incorporation.”

The judge's decision shocked the Booster Club and confused the community. A member of the Booster Club tried to make sense of the decision: “The people of Bethel township ...had faith...they had a vision and they had faith in the integrity of their neighbors. Their intentions were sincere and they wished only to do what was best for all. For those who already lived here and also for those people who would be moving to the community.”

The newspaper's next issue attempted to explain the ruling to their readers. The judge wasn't actively against East Bethel; he saw their merits,

History of Bethel Air Base

February, 1957 Governor Freeman starts action to acquire land for a new air base.

Feb.—Meeting at state capitol to air military airport problems.

May—Bethel airbase bill becomes law.

June — Bethel farmers hear county board at meeting on coming airport.

July—Eventual move seen of all Naval installations to Bethel airfield.

August—Agreement reached on Bethel Air Base; field may be occupied by July, 1959.

September—Bethel area gets Nike Missile Base; start work in spring.

October — Air Force moves ahead on Bethel Airport plans.

November—Property in Bethel Airport area won't be acquired until fall of '58.

East Bethel Booster January 16, 1958

but rather, his decision was tied to past case precedence in which “It is concluded that a village should have a nucleus of population, church, school, stores, and shops.” It was on these points that the judge was forced to rule. The consolidation of public schools hurt the Village by this measure since there were no longer any small districts within the city limits. Rather, students went mainly to schools located in St. Francis. And the potential for growth couldn’t be measured. The same article noted, “Since the July 30th decision officials have been busy interviewing different attorneys and experts on village planning. To a man, they receive the same answer, ‘you were going along nicely, it’s a shame you couldn’t finish what you had planned.’”

The Village asked for amended filings in the decision. It continued as usual with Village business – issuing building permits and holding Village Elections that winter. All the while, the land hadn’t been purchased....or even chosen yet for the Air Force base. East Bethel checked in with the military ... but the answer was always “soon.” Major General Joseph Nelson, Minnesota’s Adjutant General, even declared in February 1958, “The Bethel Airport will definitely be built.” People should expect that land acquisition would happen, and then the construction wouldn’t start until July 1959. The implication was that the citizens of East Bethel were crazy for worrying.

Then, in April 1959, the Booster Club and Village received another blow. The Air Base they had been promised was suddenly not going to happen. The article the *East Bethel Booster* newspaper printed didn’t try to hide their shock: “Did you ever have anyone ask you the advantages of being hit in the head? Well, of course, there is only one – it feels so good when it quits hurting.” It continued: “For two years [we] have been promised Utopia. They have revised their planning and many went without improvements they would otherwise have made. Over night everything changed, but no explanation except that ‘there is a change in requirements the last few days.’”

While the military’s decision to build an Air Base could not be appealed, Village officials and boosters were in the process of appealing the judge’s decision on their incorporation.

The next month, May 1959 the incorporation question was finally solved. Senator Ralph Johnson and Representative John Nordin introduced a bill to the State Legislature to validate the incorporation of East Bethel Village. They “explained that last summer’s decision by Judge Selnes was based on a law governing a few cases in the 1800’s and that therefore it should not be used as a barometer today because conditions have changed so drastically.”

The bill passed the House and Senate with nearly unanimous votes (only one no -vote total). The governor signed, and then the council met in a special session and “voted unanimously to adopt the resolution approving Chapter 666 of the Laws of 1959: “Be it resolved that ...the incorporation of the Village of East Bethel in Anoka County is validated and legalized against the objection that all or part of its territory was not or is not suitably conditioned for village government...”

At last, East Bethel was out of limbo—it could move forward without fear as an official incorporated village—even if it was without an Air Force Base.

A Living Museum: Antiques on Parade

ACHS had the pleasure of hosting the New London-New Brighton Antique Car Run along their 120-mile journey through the state on August 10.

Several hundred people stopped by to view the cars on display, chat with the owners, and talk shop. The perfect weather prevented engines from overheating and drivers from getting rain-soaked.



Tour participants from Elk River (above) shared that the small peddles and confining space of their car makes it easier for women in their group to drive.

The group began their day at 7 a.m. and made five stops along the way before ending in New Brighton to food, fanfare, and fireworks. All vehicles must predate 1908, unless they're 1 or 2 cylinder, then the cutoff is 1915. There's an average of 60 cars that participate each year.

Join us on August 9, 2025 when the cars return to Anoka!



Anoka's own **VEERAC**



Sharon Hastings recently donated her families VEERAC called “Gracie” (or what’s left of her!) to ACHS for preservation and display. This oddly named engine takes its name from how it operates: **Valveless Explosion Every Revolution Air Cooled**. The VEERAC motor was unique in that it had only five moving parts. Gears were shifted in an oil case with no exposed bearings. The engine machinery was located under the seat, and the fan blades used to cool the engine were attached directly to the flywheel. A deflector sent the airflow against the cylinders. The fan used no bearings or belts.

Want to know more? Visit AnokaCountyHistory.org and click “What we Do” then “Exhibit Hall” and finally, “Meet the VEERAC.” On this website you can see Sharon’s presentation, look at blueprints, and daydream with us about how to recreate the missing parts for a permanent exhibit.

STORY SWAP SOCIAL

What has a host, five or six friends, and lots of interesting stories? An ACHS Story Swap Social, of course!

The idea came from hosting a Tupperware party to hosting...well, a HISTORICAL Tupperware party. What if everyone brought a piece from their cupboard and told a story associated with it? Was it the salad bowl? The popcorn bowl? The green one from Grandma where the lid tab broke off years ago but you're fine breaking a nail to get into it?



Big thanks to Sandy Conner and her friends for hosting an event and raising funds for ACHS! The theme was "Baking" and folks brought dishes that cooked potato soup for multiple generations, a bowl that carried potato salad to the state fair, and a dish made to hold a multilayered dessert.

LET'S GRAB A COFFEE...

Host a Story Swap Social!

1

Imagine a theme that matches your passions and pastimes - the options are endless!

2

Choose a moment in time for your bash and rally your crew for some fun!

3

ACHS staff will create invitations for your gathering and guide the narrative of the Story Share. Your part? Bask in the revelry of the festivities!

SUMMER FESTIVALS DONE RIGHT

Over the summer months we head out and bring the museum and love of local history around the county. Often these festivals are the first time someone learns about the Anoka County Historical Society. Board members and volunteers attended the Blaine festival, East Bethel Booster Days, and Lino Lakes Blue Heron Days. The largest festivals we attend are the Anoka County Fair in July and Nowthen Threshing Show in August. With the help of volunteers we laugh, and share ACHS with old and new friends.

Anoka County Fair

Despite the heat, we are adamant that we have the BEST spot at the fair. The cozy farmhouse, complete with porch swing, always has a small breeze coming through the open doors and windows. It even had a facelift with new siding, shutters, and paint job!

The best moments:

- Cup & Ball competitions on the porch
- Finding the Fair's schoolhouse and church on the old plat maps.
- Starting a petition for the return of in-fridge lazy Susan's just like the one in the farmhouse's ice box.

Nowthen Threshing Show

The General Store got a deep clean this year, which helped make all the historic merchandise pop. Kids and adults alike came through to sooth their candy and pickle cravings.

The best moments:

- Zotz candies were a hit with kids and many of the adults sharing said they had them as kids themselves!
- Sold 18 GALLON jars of pickles.
- Confirmed on the old maps that a visitor's grandfather DID have to walk over a mile to school each day.

- Meeting NEW FRIENDS!



Ghost Tours Merch

To celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Ghost Tours, we are unveiling our first ever branded Ghost Tour Merchandise!

ACHS Program Coordinator Vickie Wendel created the very first Ghosts of Anoka Walking Tour as a part of Anoka's Riverfest activities on July 10, 2004. Staff held two tours and both sold out, prompting a second offering in October of the same year. With that, the snowball was set in motion for a consistently successful fundraiser.

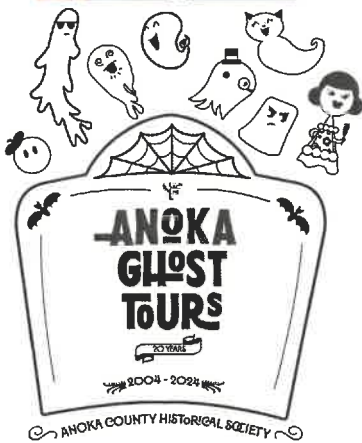
Over the years, nearly 15,000 people have gone on the tour. It is a tradition, and part of Anoka Halloween, that we are honored to be a part of. It also remains our largest single fundraising event of the year. Each ticket sold goes towards keeping the museum open, the lights on, the artifacts accessible, and local history here for new generations.

Show your love and support of our tours by rocking a new t-shirt! Holly Reese, a graphic designer and ACHS volunteer, worked with us to create this fun design to capture the spirit of this Anoka tradition.

We loved the ghosts she created so much, we turned them into stickers and pins.

Find them all in our website's gift shop at AnokaCountyHistory.org/store

PS: we've hidden other fun things there, too. Something for every history lover!



And just like that, the summer is over and volunteers helped us get through at the festivals and fairs out and about in the County. But the work that doesn't always get seen, is the work that volunteers do at the Anoka County History Center each week. Their hands, brains, and care in the variety of projects they work on help us tackle the big job of running a museum.

We wanted to call out some of the amazing finds and projects volunteers have helped us tackle the past few months:

Dave—is a master at deciphering various types of cursive handwriting and slogging through transcribing items in the collection to make them more accessible, including a new transcript of Mary Woodbury Caswell's diary. Her son, Dwight, delightfully added his own commentary.

15 Jan 23 x 37. Dwight's teacher tells him he is doing very well on the violin. (*What an awful prevaricator. I hated the damn instrument.*)

Sade— Created a program about Victorian Etiquette, and built an accompanying exhibit with items in the ACHS collection. Including an 1857 etiquette book owned by Aaron Greenwald of Anoka. See it in the History Center lobby.

Case 0849: The divorce proceedings between Amelia and Joseph Samletzka from St. Francis. Both parties accusing the other of abuse and inhuman treatment.

Jan—is part of a rotating team of volunteers reading through Albert Pratt's lawyer's files. She gives each case a number, and details what the case is about. With her help we have numbered nearly 900 cases...which is finally over half-way through!

Jo— has dove head-long into the Vietnam project we're calling, "Echoes of Bravery." She has reconnected with previous donors, discovered new veterans and encouraged them to tell their story, and arranged for ACHS staff to speak at several events this fall and winter.

Thank you for all your help!



Sara Given
Volunteer Coordinator
Sara@AnokaCountyHistory.org

General Donations

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 Anoka County Veterans Council
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 River City Resumes



History 21 The Podcast!

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

Here are the latest episodes:

- Episode 4.14 Anoka County Fair mini history
- Episode 4.15 Anoka’s Kindness Garden
- Episode 4.16 East Bethel’s Air Force Base

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

MONTHLY

History Center Hours—GHOST TOUR SEASON SEPT & OCT

Closed Saturday, Sunday, Monday

Wednesday: 10-4 p.m. Thursday-Friday-Saturday: 1-7:30p.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.



Fotoplayer with Nate Otto—Felix the Cat

Nate Otto recently completed a year-long restoration of a 1916 American Fotoplayer. It was the perfect instrument for adding melodies to silent films as it combines a player piano, pipe organ, and drum set all in one. Join Nate for a special evening viewing a special showing of a Felix the Cat cartoon, brought to life with Nate's accompaniment. Enjoy also a tour of his workshop and a delectable dessert.

When: Oct 20

Tickets: \$75. Seating is limited to 10, tickets required. Available online at AnokaCountyHistory.org

Ghost Tours

Stories abound in Anoka of odd happenings and eerie encounters. Our costumed tour guides will take you on a walk through historic neighborhoods of Anoka, sharing stories of the past along the way.

Sixty percent history, 40 percent folklore; these stories are just part of the fun you will experience on your Ghosts of Anoka tour!

Tour Details:

- 1-1.5 hours tour running time
- 1 mile walking around town

When: Sept, Oct various dates

Tickets: \$18 online at AnokaCountyHistory.org



Say hi to us at:

- Anoka Vintage Fest, Oct 5

Keep up with the Fun at ACHS!



Anoka County
Historical Society



AnokaCoHistory



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Historical Society
2135 Third Avenue North
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