

# HISTORY 21



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[AnokaCountyHistory.org](http://AnokaCountyHistory.org)

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*Front Cover: "Change is Hard, But it Can be Splendid." October 2021. Mixed media weaving by Jolanda Dranchak*



## From the President

Summertime city events and festivals allow us to visit Anoka County communities and meet many people. At the St. Francis Pioneer Days, people expressed interest in the Rum River Inn (formerly Riverside Inn). The big question, of course, is what will happen to this National Registry property now that it's closed?

According to the City of St. Francis officials, the answer is still up in the air. There have been several inquiries but no resolution to date. To learn more about this historic place, watch the short video on our National Register page at [AnokaCountyHistory.org](http://AnokaCountyHistory.org). We also received a mysterious tool that has caused much curiosity. So here's your task, history sleuths--look at the picture here and tell us what it is with some credible background. We also spent an evening at the Columbia Heights Art and Info fair, talking with many residents about local history. Long-time resident and ACHS board member Lotus Hubbard was on-hand to give insight into local properties, streets, and landmarks. Please watch for us at Anoka Riverfest, the Anoka County Fair, and Nowthen Threshing Show. Stop by and tell some stories with volunteers and board members!



Richard Oxley, ACHS President

## From the Director

Since Rich told you about his escapades at local fairs, I get to chime in with mine! Big thanks to everyone who sponsored a car in our Jell-O derby at the Blaine Festival. You quirky humans raised nearly \$500 for our operating funds! Congratulations to Grand Champion Jill Brown of Jill Brown, PR, who held her own through three heats (in a rainstorm, nonetheless!) to bring home the title. Mary Fitzpatrick, Audra Hulse, Catherine Vesley, and Erin Freitag jockeyed for the next set of bragging rights.



We're open Tuesday evenings until 7, so swing by and see our new displays. If you'd like a sneak peek before you come, look for the Exhibits page on our website under "What We Do."

Rebecca Ebnet-Desens, Executive Director



## WRITING GROAT FAN FICTION:

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### (AKA HOW TO WRITE HISTORICAL FICTION)

An expanded partnership occurred between ACHS and the Anoka Middle School for the Arts this year, which created a surprisingly fun result—fan fiction from a Civil War diary. Or, in more professional terms, helping Creative Writing students explore the historical fiction genre.

To produce a short story based on James Groat, we needed to back up several steps—first, who is this person, and why do we care? James W. Groat is the great-grandson of John Groat, an immigrant to the United States from Germany in the 1700s, who eventually settled in upstate New York. The Groat family remained in that area, with each generation moving further away. When James was four, his parents moved the family to Oneida Lake in Oswego County, New York. He married and had his children by 1854, when he took his family west, landing first in North Prairie, Wisconsin. None of the lands in Wisconsin suited him, so the family pressed on to St. Paul, where his wife Rebecca waited with their children while Groat headed north. He reached Anoka in October and found that “the place suited me better than any section of the country I had struck in the west.” Rebecca and the children joined him on October 17, 1854, and Anoka became the Groat family’s home.

Groat immediately became involved with life in Anoka. A carpenter by trade, he took a job building the first hotel put up in Anoka, which Silas Farnham owned. Shortly after that, Groat and a few other men formed a company to run a ferry between Anoka and Champlin across the Mississippi since there was no bridge or ferry before that time. Groat built the ferry boat itself for this venture. The outbreak of the Civil War didn’t surprise Groat, and he became one of the first Anoka volunteers—the town would eventually contribute over 90 percent of its male population to the cause. Thus began

his three years of journeying which took him far from home.

The students then read snippets of Groat's memoir, which he wrote in 1889 based on the diaries he kept for 30 years. They discussed their first reaction of "there's nobody else named in the story," and how, when they dug a little deeper, they came to see the invisible people—the cooks, the postmaster, the other soldiers, the people on the sidewalks in towns along the way. They practiced building a character sketch using ACHS staff—making assumptions about what they saw in clothing cues, body presentation, or speech patterns—thinking about how that information impacted the story, how a writer could use those elements to guide a reader to a conclusion, and then how the writer could dispel that idea with one tidbit they had held back.

The next step in writing fan fiction about Groat meant selecting one of those unnamed people in his diary to develop into a character. After a few starts and stops, the students chose people like Groat's mother, his best friend, an enslaved person who ran away, or a stranger that just happened upon him. They thought about where in his journey these two people met, what fictionalized story would make sense in that context, and what research they would need to conduct to make (as we said) the best lie they had ever told. Realizing their story could be as fanciful as they liked as long as it was grounded in reality. The rules of the time, suddenly Groat has a brother who went to the Big Leagues to play baseball—a story constricted by which teams existed when, transportation, and the unfortunate event of the brother needing to fight in WWI. Since the story occurred in Minnesota, another student needed to change a mining accident away from a coal mine to a more likely iron ore mine. Edits of these stories included the addition of believable details like the gift of a handkerchief to wipe the sweat away or money donated to help rebuild a bakery after an explosion.

To help the students sort through their ideas and keep control over the research facts, the characters they created interviewed each other. Not only did this allow the student to understand their subject's mind more fully, but it also gave them practice in sitting with a recorder and conducting an interview. Who knows? There may be some budding oral historians in the group! After another edit, the students interviewed each other as authors. Some of them discussed how different historical fiction felt compared to what they usually wrote; others talked about the challenges of needing to remember specific facts that existed in the world that impacted their stories—like when the St. Lawrence Seaway opened to ships passing through the Great Lakes to the ocean. Their runaway enslaved person, aided by Groat, would either need to leave the South 20 years after the Civil War or hop a train for the journey!



The final portion of this project involved ACHS staff sitting down with three students and recording a conversation for our podcast. You can listen to that from our website or your favorite podcast catchers like Apple or Spotify. We sincerely look forward to next school year when the Groat historical fiction unit returns to Creative Writing 2 classrooms with some modifications and improvements. As with any pilot year, trial and error bring successes and learning experiences—and some surprises. The students reported wanting to know more about Groat as a person, not just the quick 20-minute power point tour they took through his life. They also wanted to spend more time with the diary, reading excerpts and thinking more about how his world differed.



We want to thank the middle school for letting us explore new ways of presenting history and connecting with students. Without the next generation coming through either the physical or virtual doors of ACHS, the tradition of preserving the story of Anoka County will quickly cease. Help us connect with the young people in your lives! Visit the website and watch a program, bring them to the museum to see the new exhibits, or climb around your family tree and ask some questions that need answers.

Speaking of the website, visit [AnokaCountyHistory.org/james-groat-journey](http://AnokaCountyHistory.org/james-groat-journey) to read more about Groat and find the link to some student stories! Trust us when we say watching the drafts grow and change to the final product was fun and exciting. We focused on content and ideas rather than grammar, which the students also said freed up their minds to connect with the material more.



***AN EXCERPT OF "FOREVER GRATEFUL" BY A.R.***

...“Margaret Mae! Good morning!” my father said in his always cheery tone.

“Good morning, Father!” I said back in an equally joyful tone.

“Good morning, Margret.” my mother said in a more monotone voice than my father. But I know she's happy to see me.

“Good morning Mother!” I replied, making sure to keep my cheery voice.

“Breakfast is just about ready, Margaret Mae. Oh! I forgot to tell you that James will be coming for dinner tonight for his birthday since we won't be in town for it next Thursday.” said Father.

James W. Groat is my father's childhood best friend. I have known him all of my 15 years of life. He's a kind man. He's a lovely soul with a big heart for others. He was one of the people who helped my father first put up West Bakery. He has helped my family through many struggles. He lent us money when we where low. He gave us blankets when our house got chilly. He was my hero as a child. I know it sounds silly, but he was. He always played with me and gave me gifts. And he was there when my parents were to busy with the bakery to tend for me. I will never forget the day when my parents went out of town and he came and watched me. He gave me new toys to play with and sat me on his lap and read me stories until I fell asleep. He truly is a lovely fellow. My father feels bad since we will be missing his 41st birthday. Since we have been in desperate need of new mixers, we have decided to go to a used equipment show. Because we simply can't afford the most top notch models.

“I look forward to seeing him Father.” I replied.

After breakfast, I began to get ready for a long day of work at the bakery. I threw on some layers and a freshly washed dress...

## COLLECTIONS CORNER: REBEKAH LODGE

The ACHS collection receives many donations throughout any given year. This is why we have an intake form that allows donors to provide as much detail about their artifacts as possible. The more information, the better, but sometimes donors have had items they intended to donate accumulating in a box for an extended period. At times like these, the Gather Committee and I come across gems that complement our existing collection.

This very thing happened early in 2023 when we received a donation of what the individual described as “old newspapers.” We discovered several Independent Order of Odd Fellows documents from the 1940s and 1950s that were not initially indicated. Not only did we not have these items in our collection, but they helped to bolster a portion of our collection. These documents paired well with the artifacts we had from the IOOF’s counterpart, the Rebekah Lodge. More intriguing is that we discovered that a well-known St. Francis’ family’s descendant appeared in the roster. We were delighted to realize how perfectly this complemented our existing plans for our exhibit for our featured National Register Property in the county. This sort of common thread that ties our county’s history together is what makes our past so exciting.



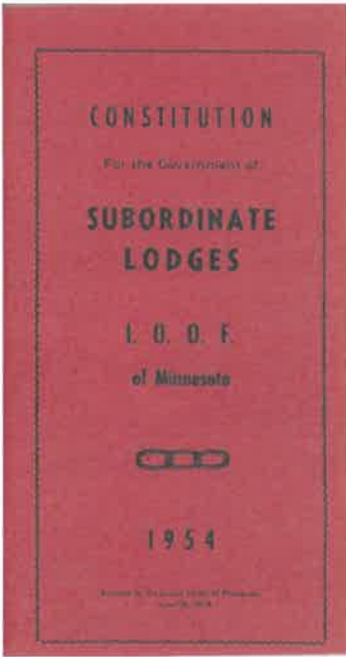
Front

*“To live peaceably, do good unto all, as we have opportunity and especially to obey the Golden Rule, Whatsoever ye would that others should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.” -IOOF Motto*

Fidelity Lodge # 95,- Continued. Jan; 1st; 1955.

- 43,- Ruffcorn, George , - - - 519-Cross St; - Anoka, - - - - - 547-7.
- 44,- Schockweiler, Wm; - - - -Round Lake Road, Route 4, Anoka, - -267-J-3
- 45,- Seaberg, Helge, - - - -701,- Fremont St,- Anoka, - - - - -393-W
- 46,- Senear , Harry W.- - - - Champlin, Minn; - - - - - 379-W
- 47,- Smith , Frank H.- - - - 2632- No Ferry St; Anoka, - - - - - 1051-W
- 48,- Smith , Wm; G.- - - - - Coon Rapids, Route 6, Anoka, - - - - 1548-W-2
- 49,- Springer, Dr; Ray D. N.-- 2309- West Lawn Ave; Madison-5,- Wisconsin.





The independent Order of Odd Fellows started in England in the 17th Century and was brought to the Americas by Thomas Wildley. On April 26, 1819, in Baltimore, Maryland, Wildley founded the first fraternal organization to include women. The Rebekah Degree was adopted on September 20, 1851. "Rebekah" is derived from the biblical character and was initially an honorary award. Since they did not get their own lodges until September 25, 1868, the first Daughters of Rebekah operated in an informal manner that varied based on local groups. Once the Independent Order of Odd Fellows voted to establish lodges for them, the Daughters of Rebekah organized their order much the same way their male counterparts had.

The Daughters of Rebekah wore the Ribbons featured here during meetings (green side) and memorials (black side) for members. Our collection indicated that the dual purpose of the membership ribbons was unique to the Rebekah Lodge.

Besides the dues required for membership, the receipts from the Lodge's Treasurer show the Daughters of Rebekah were expected to donate various items like hand-sewn napkins, cups, and plates to philanthropic organizations like the veteran's hospital. It seems that both the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and The Daughters of Rebekah made concentrated efforts to "do good unto all." Unexpected objects in donations allow us to thoroughly research the history behind what we have in our existing collection, which only forms a more substantial thread of history around our county.



Back

# New Exhibit Alert! New Exhibit Alert!



*Home Through a Bird's Eye,*  
Sept 2021

*All That's Weft: Living a Life Interrupted, by Jolanda Dranchak, an Anoka educator and artist.*

This series of mixed media weavings commenced as a form of self-therapy for Jolanda Dranchak as she dealt with a grief trifecta spanning more than three years: the loss of her spouse, the global pandemic, and PTSD from growing up in the former Soviet Union—triggered by the political unrest in the

US. Each month Dranchak selected a theme to anchor and process her emotions. She observed and recorded her experiences on a loom using materials that allowed her to convey her story as well as a written journal. See more on our website on the Exhibits page, under “What We Do.”

**SAVE THE DATE: AUGUST 3, 2023**

Meet the artist and learn about her material selection, creative process, and how preserving her story in a tactile way brought comfort and insight. Light refreshments served. Event is scheduled from 4:55 to 7:05 p.m. You read that right. Bring your quirky questions, too.



*Beautiful Things, March 2021*

# New Exhibit Alert! New Exhibit Alert!

## *Anoka County Resident Feature: Nyakade Tot, Coon Rapids*

Nyakade Tot arrived in the US from South Sudan in 1998 as part of an arranged marriage to an older man selected by her uncle. While the America she had seen in magazines created a sense of hope for her future, the Iowa winter she encountered quickly dispelled that dream.

After moving to Minnesota and settling into an apartment to raise her twin boys and daughter with her husband, Nyakade realized her hope of attending school and learning English wouldn't happen either. The wheels of fate began to turn the day the eviction notice arrived. A rent payment from the county bought her a little time, but soon Nyakade found herself and the children in a homeless shelter in Minneapolis. She learned English one word (and county department) at a time, while balancing a divorce, GED program, work, and child care.

Now living in Coon Rapids, Nyakade shares her home with other displaced African women who have left abusive relationships. Her story reflects ambition, determination, hardship, and love—all of which will be available in her own words on a future episode of the podcast, *History 21*.



*Display case includes (from top) Basket for sifting flour, Dar used for milking, and beaded necklace and headband.*

# CEMETERY TOUR

## RECAP

The 2023 reboot of the Cemetery Tours is complete. First, Daryl Lawrence led two tours of people through the Glen Cary Cemetery in Ham Lake. He shared stories of those buried there, including a love story between his Great



Grandparents. Sara Given headed to Forest Hill Cemetery in Anoka in July to lead three tours among the stones there. We used golf flags to indicate which stone to visit next to keep everyone together, so the tour guide didn't get lost. The red flags waving throughout the cemetery signaled the way – even though we didn't need the full 18-hole set.

At each cemetery, the stories of the people shone through – some of whose descendants came on the tour. At the beginning of the Forest Hill Cemetery Tour, one patron declared that their Great-Grandfather Jonathan Emerson was buried there. Much to the delight of everyone, Jonathan's grave was on the tour. And it was one of the most memorable, with nearly 1,900 words carved on

the four sides. After hearing more about Jonathan's grave manifesto, it made more sense that his second ex-wife [left] was not buried next to him.

If you missed either tour or want to experience it again, we are working with NorthMetro TV in Coon Rapids to bring you the tour digitally.

A huge thank you to our tour wranglers, Emily, Wes, and Steve! They helped set up flags, organized the group, answered parking questions, and carried a basket of flowers so we could leave a stem on every grave visited.



## Volunteers

You are an integral part of our ACHS community. As a non-profit organization, our entire existence rests on the interest and passion of a Board of [Volunteer] Directors. And then, on top of that, the people who serve on committees, come into the museum to help with the collections or dive into events to share the fun of old stuff with new friends.

## Thank You

The catch-22 regarding being a small organization is that sometimes we don't have time to look up from a project long enough to say, "we need help!"

## For all that you do

So we are raising the bat signal in a moment of quiet at the museum. In a couple of weeks, we will be at the Anoka County Fair and then in August at the Nowthen Threshing Show. These events are a great way to volunteer as a family or group. No worries, all training is provided, and we have a lot of fun along the way. Scan the QR code to view and sign up for shifts or email me directly.

If you have a performing heart, join the Ghost Tour Guide ranks! The walking tours are ACHS's biggest fundraiser of the year. With more guides, we can lead more tours (because we always sell out) and raise more money to keep local history safe and sound at the Anoka History Center.

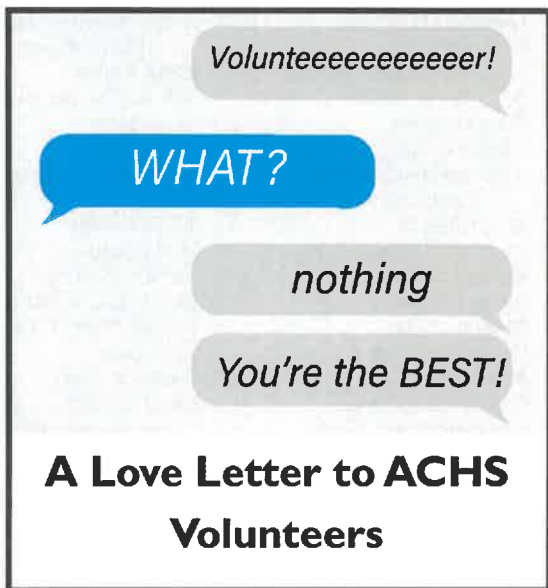
## Remember: YOU'RE THE BEST!

Join the Board of Directors or a committee  
July 25-30: Anoka County Fair  
Aug. 18-20: Nowthen Threshing Show  
Sept-Oct: Ghost Tours!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara Given". Below the signature is a simple line drawing of a smiley face with a wide, open mouth and two dots for eyes.

Sara Given  
Volunteer Coordinator  
Sara@AnokaCountyHistory.org



## THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

All lists are current to July 5, 2023

### General Donations

Lori Allert  
American Legion Edward  
B. Cutter Post 102  
Sara Anderson  
Anoka Women of Today  
Association of Midwest  
Museums  
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Dennis & Darlene Berg  
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Bradley Joseph Le  
Tourneau-Blackbird  
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Mary  
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Dawn Sieber  
Truffles & Tortes  
Maggie Snow  
Al & Dawn Springer  
Catherine Vesley  
Wes & Cheryl Volkenant  
Amy Weber-DeRaad  
Sara Wilcox

### New Members

Benedictine Living  
Community Anoka  
Suzanne A. Betts  
Roger Giroux

### Adopt-An-Artifact

Susanne Kennedy  
Millie Kordiak

Bradley Joseph Le  
Tourneau-Blackbird

### ACHS Sustaining Members

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Lotus & Richard Hubbard  
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Blackbird  
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Northeast Bank  
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Matthew & Shelly Pahl  
Robert Rither  
Rita Warpeha  
Benedictine Living  
Community Anoka  
Elaine M. Alarcon-Totten

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Billy's Bar & Grill  
Fifth Avenue Dental  
KU-MA-IN  
Nowthen Historical  
Power Association  
Nate Otto  
Peterson Shoes  
Bee Memorable Marketing  
LLC



## HISTORY 21 THE PODCAST!

The first and third Friday of each month.  
Subscribe and never miss an episode.

Don't miss the latest episodes of the ACHS Podcast:

- 3.11 Secret Archeologists at ACHS
- 3.12 Hilltop: The Tiny City that Almost Wasn't
- 3.13 Groat Fan Fiction
- Coming July 21: Richard Sorenson Medal of Honor Recipient

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

MONTHLY

**History Center Hours—SUMMER HOURS**

Closed Sunday, Monday

Tuesday—1-7 p.m.

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday—10-4 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.

**CLOSED**

History Center will be closed during the Anoka County Fair

**Anoka County Fair**

Volunteer with or visit ACHS at the Old Farm House.

**When:** July 25-30

**Where:** Anoka County Fair. Tickets provided for all ACHS volunteers

**“All That’s Weft” Exhibit Reception**

Meet Jolanda Dranchak and learn about her material selection, creative process, and how preserving her story in a tactile way brought comfort and insight. Light refreshments served.

**When:** Aug. 3, 4:55 –7:05 p.m.

**Where:** Anoka County History Center

**Nowthen Threshing Show**

Join ACHS at the General Store for penny candy and pickle fun as a volunteer or store visitor before exploring the magic of the Threshing Show.

**When:** August 18-20

**Where:** Nowthen Threshing Show Grounds, Nowthen. Tickets provided for all ACHS volunteers.

**Anoka County in the 1950 Census**

With over 30 years of genealogical experience, Scott Norrick dives into what the 1950 Census can tell us about Anoka County and help in our genealogical research.

**When:** Aug. 22, 5 p.m.

**Where:** Anoka County History Center

**Tickets:** \$5, Free for members.

**Keep up with the Fun at ACHS!**



Anoka County Historical Society



AnokaCoHistory

