

History Notes

Volume 40, Issue 3, September 2018

www.historical.waseca.mn.us / LOOK FORWARD TO OUR PAST



1871
The year
Of
STORMS
And **FIRES**



Inside:

- **Feature Story** "The Year of Storms and Fire"
- **On going Exhibits:**
The City of Waseca, the first 150 years
A Timeline of Unique Stories from Waseca County
- **Annual Meeting October 22, 5-8 p.m.**

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research@historical.waseca.mn.us

Museum Hours

Open Tuesdays-Fridays, 9-5

Bailey-Lewer Library

Open Tuesdays-Fridays, 9-12, 1-5



From the Executive Director by Joan Mooney

Hello Members,

Summer is gone and autumn is upon us.

We have experienced another wonderful season here at the Waseca County Historical Society. You may have noticed we are also referring to WCHS as the Waseca County History Center.

Although we are using "History Center" as our name, we are still officially the Waseca County Historical Society. We feel "History Center" opens our doors wider to cover our other sites like the Bailey Research Library, Hodgson Hall and other possible sites besides just the museum. This name also extends an invitation to the public to visit our facilities and participate in our events. The Chautauqua event held on Saturday, June 30 went on as scheduled, despite the heat and predicted severe weather for the afternoon, but the turn out was poor. Disappointing to say the least. Thank you to those who volunteered and showed up for the event. We appreciate your support. The Waseca County Fair came on the heels of Chautauqua. Having a roof over our heads made all the difference as once again, the heat and severe weather were factors. The overall attendance was good. "The City of Waseca, 150 years" traveling exhibit made its debut at the fair. Thank you to Andrew Breck, Quality Print and the Waseca Area Foundation for making this possible. You can see the exhibit at the museum, Tuesday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. through October. Summer festivities wrapped up with the City of Waseca Sesquicentennial celebration and the All School Reunion held over the Labor Day weekend. We had over 200 visitors to the museum. People were all over this town having fun! We were happy to entertain visitors with their own history! Wishing you all a wonderful fall and a bountiful harvest!

Annual Meeting and catered Dinner, Oct. 22



The Timeline Project has been financed in part with funds provided by the State of Minnesota through the Minnesota Historical Society from the Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund. WCHS is also grateful to the Carl & Verna Schmidt



Foundation, the First National Bank-Waseca, Principal Financial Foundation-John Priebe, and Bill and Patti Hoversten for match support to the Implementation Phase.

At the Museum

September - October 2018

"Waseca County Schools, Revisited"

"City of Waseca, 150 Years"

On going - "Waseca County Timeline of Unique Stories"

At the Bailey Lewer Research Library:

On going - Interpreting your DNA Results

Events: WCHS Annual Meeting,
Monday, October 22, 5 -8 p.m. at the museum.
Paid Reservations must be in by Friday,
October 19, 2018 **Cost per ticket: \$15.00**



From the WCHS Museum Director

Vanessa Zimprich

This fall we are looking forward to the Native American presentations with the Hartley Kindergarten classes and the Immigration presentations with the Hartley third grade classes. We have been making steady progress on processing all of our new artifact donations that came in during the wonderful Sesquicentennial celebration weekend.

Things are continuing to change on the museum main floor display areas. Our E.F. Johnson exhibit is up and looking fantastic. We are eagerly anticipating a visit from you!



E.F. Johnson Exhibit!

WCHS STAFF

Artifact & Library Curator

Pauline Fenelon



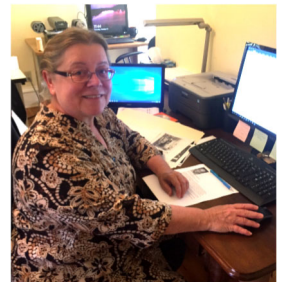
Linda Taylor

Research/
Genealogy



Jan Hunter

Research



Amanda Larkin

Museum Assistant



Andrew Breck

Exhibit Design



Oh No ! Not the 70's!



Afraid so Flower Children! You are History!
2018 minus 50 years =1968! The WCHS Collection needs you! We have next to nothing to tell your story. Photos, clothing, holiday decorations, household and beauty items, etc.!
Help us with our Holiday Exhibit :

Oh No! Not the 70's!

1871, A Year of Storms and Fires

It seems almost daily we are reminded of extreme weather conditions affecting our world: the United States eastern and southern shorelines battered by hurricanes, torrential rain and flooding; our west coast suffering from mudslides; our western states and Canada ravaged by wildfires. Just this summer, 17 tornadoes touched down in Wisconsin in one storm alone! One begins to wonder what Mother Nature has in store for us in seasons to come.

Wildfires are common occurrences. Drought, lightning, wind and human activity all factor into how severe these fire storms can be. Watching the news, we have witnessed the destruction and terror caused by the current fire storms happening across the United States. We most recently experienced hazy skies and air quality warnings caused by the Canadian wildfires. Because of all the recent weather related destruction, we decided to take a look back in our history to see what has been recorded in our past.

The year 1871 has been documented as one of the worst weather years in U.S. history.

In October of 1871 destructive fires erupted across the great plains as far east as Chicago. The Great Chicago fire occurred on October 8, 9 and 10th. Some blame Catherine O’Leary’s cow for the historic fire that led to the loss of 200 lives, 17,450 buildings and

property losses of \$200,000,000. 98,500 people were left homeless. Simultaneously a fire 10 miles wide swept across upper Michigan and northeastern Wisconsin, resulting in another historic fire that came to be known as the **Peshtigo Fire**. At least 1200 people lost their lives that night, 800 in Peshtigo alone.

On October 3, Professor Cleveland Abbe, a U.S. Signal Service meteorologist left this scribbled message in the margin of his weather map:

“Unparalleled fire in north-east Minnesota-great fire in northwest Minnesota. At the same time a prairie fire burned along a 100 mile front from Breckenridge Minnesota to the Big Woods

The first storm to hit Waseca County was only eleven days into the new year. On January 11, 1871 a severe winter storm struck the county. It lasted for two days. The rest of the winter was noted in

James Child’s book *“Child’s History of Waseca County”* as comparatively mild and favorable to farm work. In early summer, however, the Fourth of July festivities, were

interrupted when a large portion of southwestern Minnesota erupted into flames described by James E. Child “as if the Storm God wheeled his chariots into line and devastated a large extent of country along the rich valley of the Minnesota river. The storm swept across a large region of country between Madelia and New Ulm, cross-

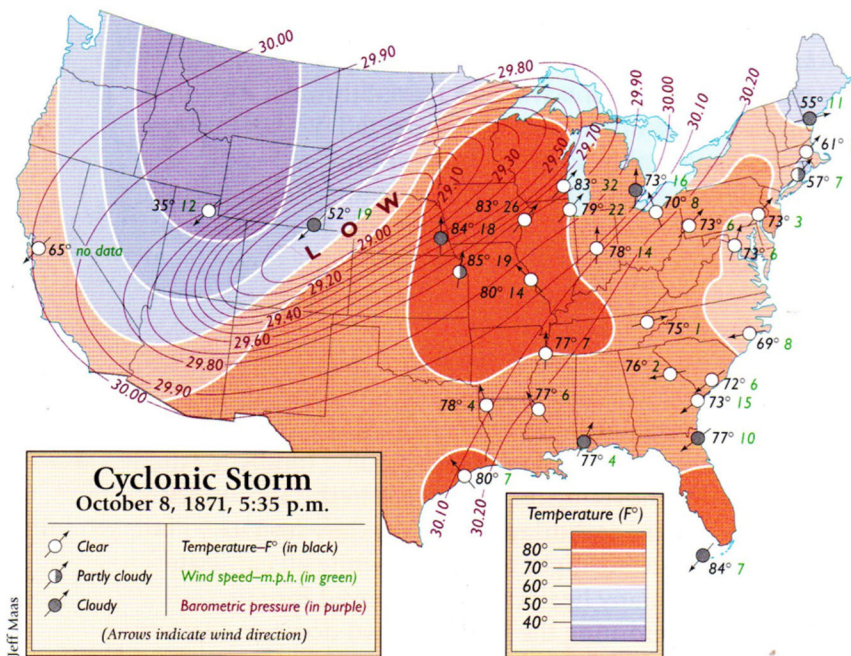
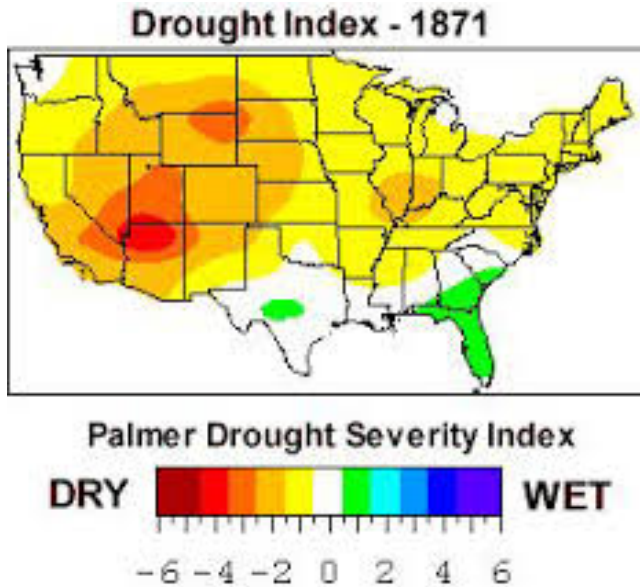


Figure 11: Reconstructed surface weather map for October 8, 1871

October 8, 1871 wildfires



ing into Nicollet county, sweeping in great fury down the Minnesota valley and thence through Mankato, Le Ray and Jamestown.

Three days later, July 7, 1871, thousands of

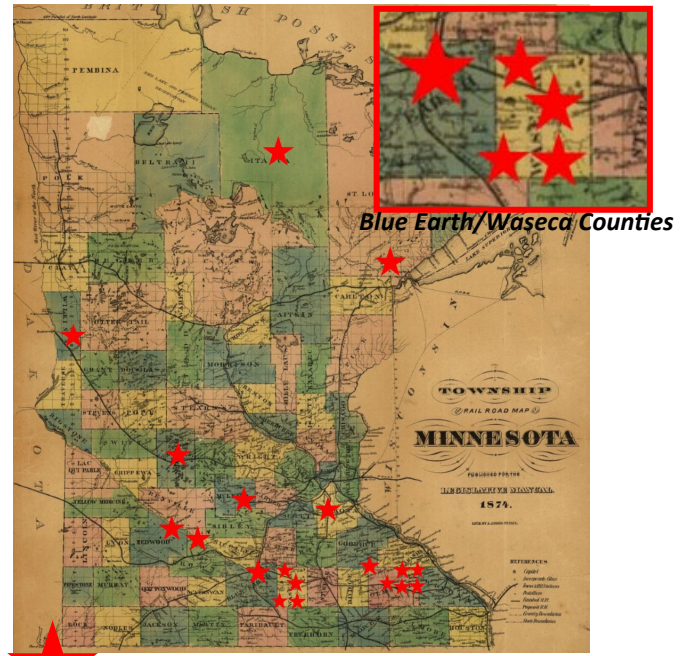
acres were torn up by a fast approaching storm that traveled from west to east, leaving a path of destruction from two to four miles wide across the northern townships of Janesville, Iosco and Blooming Grove in Waseca County. Mr. McDermott of Blooming Grove reported the crops were destroyed and the trees were stripped of their foliage. J.E. Jones of Iosco reported his crops lost for several miles north of his place. The hail was compared to hen's eggs. Also on that day, the barn of Darling Welch of Janesville was struck by lightning killing one of his horses.

The statewide destruction led to legislative action providing a loan of seed grain to those affected by the storms the following spring.

Hon. Warren Smith was appointed state commissioner to assess damage and report to the legislature his findings. Waseca County received \$425 from the state, \$100 from the citizens and \$200 from the commissioners. The total amount of \$725 was distributed among the needy.

Closer to home, on October 4 and 5, a prairie fire swept through Wilton, Vivian, and Byron townships.

In Byron Township, William Smith lost his house, stable, reaper, wagon, and two dogs. Alex Brisbane lost his stable, seeder, and much of his fencing was destroyed. One of the McGraths lost one hundred acres of crops but his house was spared. Other farmers in the path of the fire were Granville Barnes and John Hunter, both lost considerable property. In Vivian township, Mr. Poland, Banker,



October 8, 1871 wildfires in Minnesota

Randall Hadley, Merrill and Hanks suffered losses to their property.

The actual cause of the October 1871 fires was never determined for certain. A meteor or Mrs. O'Leary's lantern kicking cow? The cow was cleared when a reporter admitted fabricating the event, although the story lives on. Most likely, weather conditions across the region during the summer and fall of 1871 produced conditions ripe for wildfires. Prolonged drought, deforestation, ignorance and strong autumn storms provided fuel to feed the rapidly moving fires.

The National Weather Service (NWS) publication "The Great Midwest Wildfires of 1871" states the October 8-10 wildfires of 1871 serves as a wake-up call to many about land use practices of the time. Timber cleared from land was discarded, not realizing this would later become fuel for wildfires. Weather support is now part of fire operations. The NWS provides trained meteorologists to support firefighters fighting wildfires across the United States as well as internationally. Because of these efforts and a raised awareness in the dangers and causes of wildfires, it is hoped that the devastating fires of 1871 will never be repeated.

Acknowledgments, References and Maps; Peshigo Fire Museum, Wisconsin Historical Society, NOAA Earth System Research Laboratory, The National Weather Service Child's History of Waseca County, Waseca Weekly News Oct. 11, 1871, Weather Underground, Waseca Co. Historical Society



Bailey– Lewer Research Library

401 NE 2nd St. Waseca, just across the street from the museum. Tues.—Friday, 9 a.m. to Noon, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. (507) 835-7700

Need help interpreting your DNA data?

We invite you to make an appointment with WCHS researcher Linda Taylor for a personalized 1 hour session. This is free to members, non members fee is \$10 per hour. Linda is here Wednesday-Friday, 9 a.m. to Noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. 507-835-7700.

Waseca County History Center

Annual Meeting

Monday October 22, 2018 WCHS Museum
Social Hour 5 - 6 p.m. Dinner 6 - 7 p.m.
Meeting 7 p.m. Dinner cost \$ 15.00

Paid Reservations must be in by Friday October 19

315 2nd Ave NE | 507-835-7700

6 p.m.Catered Dinner: Turkey and Dressing, Mashed Potatoes and Gravy, Green Beans, Buttered Roll and Pumpkin Pie!

Get your reservations in today!

A Special Donation from Two Special People!

In the last newsletter we told you of the wonderful donation to WCHS from Caryn Wendt. Staff and Board decided to apply the donation towards the purchase of a second digital reader for the Bailey Lewer Library. Since then, one of our other members, Ron Johnson offered a matching donation. We now will be able to purchase the second digital reader for our library. We hope to have the new reader in our library before year's end!

Thank you so much Caryn and Ron!

Joan, Vanessa, Linda, Pauline and the WCHS Board of Directors

Membership and Donations

From June 13, 2018 - September 20, 2018

New Members

Bipes-Timm, Robyn
Claassen, Roxanne
Cleland, Thomas
Hallman, John
Harrington, Karen
Herout, Jackie
Kampen, Wayne
Klinger, Robert
Maher, Gerald
Meyer, Constance

Renewing Members

Allen, Sharon R.
Barbknecht, Rosanne
Bathke, Jon
Bathke, Patricia
Born, Linda and Larry
Byron, John
Dobberstein, Deb & Gary
Evenson, Ellsworth & Karen
Gauger, Barbara
Groskreutz, Lisa
Josephes, Richard
Kugath, LeAnn
Miller, Jean C.
Nelson, Doug
Ofstedahl, Kathleen
Philipson, Karen
Reinecke, Thiel
Rime, Oleeta
Rohde, Laura
Rosenthal, Jeanette
Rosenthal, Kathleen
Rudolph, Marlon and Audrey
Swenson, Lynn and Susan
Tetzloff, James
White, Millie
Wilkus, Marilyn
Wynnemer, Jody
Yamazaki, Stella

Memorials

In memory of Shirley Johnson Anderson
by Judy and Jon Greeney

In memory of May Hoelmer
by Henry and Phyllis Lewer

**In memory of Pearl Hoversten
(For Hofmann Apiary Fund)**
by Marilyn and John Wilkus

In memory of Joyce Josephes
by Richard Josephes

In memory of John Klug (1927-2018)
by Donna Fostveit

In memory of Gloria Larson
by Donna Fostveit

In memory of Delores Doss Lau
by Donna Fostveit

In memory of Jim "Murph" Murphy
by Jody Wynnemer

In memory of Ilene Johnson Phelps
by Donna Fostveit

In memory of Betty Sheeran
by Donna Fostveit

Appropriations

City of Waseca \$2,250.00
Waseca County \$32,500.00

Donations

Northland Trenching
Beckmann, Diane
Born, Larry and Linda
Dunn, Dave
Joecks, Judy
Lucas, Dale
McCarthy, Virginia
Yamazaki, Stella
Zwach, Don

Volunteers

Beckmann, Diane
Buum, Marty
Carlson, Gladys
Caron, Zach
Dunn, Dave
Forsythe, Diane
Fostveit, Donna
Groskreutz, Dale
James, Rachel
Johnson, Gregg
Joecks, Judy
Jones, Karl
Maas, Ivan
McCarthy, Virginia
Morris, Sheila
Weiske, Audrey
Youngberg, Katie

**Don't forget to reserve your spot at the
Annual Meeting and catered Dinner,
Monday, October 22
507-835-7700**



Sesquicentennial Saturday!

WCHS is a recipient of

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With Thrivent Choice®, you can recommend where some of Thrivent Financial's charitable outreach funds go. Since 2010, more than \$370 million has been distributed to churches and nonprofits nationwide. www.thrivent.com

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Membership Renewal Date



WCBS Board Members,
Marty Buum, Dave Zika and Dave Dunn
Paint the Pink School House Pink!



Congratulations to DeeAnn Britton, Judy Joecks, many volunteers,
contributors and sponsors.

**The restoration of the Pink School House
has been completed!**