



# Waseca County Historical Society *History Notes*

Volume 33 Issue 1

[www.historical.waseca.mn.us](http://www.historical.waseca.mn.us)

January 2011

## *From the Co-Directors . . .*

Dear WCHS Members—

**T**hank you for another wonderful year at the Waseca County Historical Society. I do believe Sheila and I have entered our fifth year as directors. We ended 2010 financially sound which reflects our continuous efforts to conserve energy, minimize spending, and control staff time. This same strategy will be applied in 2011. Although we are happy with the results of 2010, the next two years present more challenges.

We find ourselves at a pivotal point in our history. We are calling on the “We Aren’t Old Yet” generation to secure the future of the WCHS Museum and Research Center by investing in the history of their own lives. You might not think you’re old, but you very well may be, and are you fortunate enough to have your parents still living? Have you asked them to share their history? This is important stuff! We will be focusing on gathering and exhibiting newly generated stories and events that haven’t been shared before. Even though we are operating with financial restraints, we are also very excited about discovering mid-century history (1930s-1960s). There are many stories to be collected and shared.

### **NEXT EVENT: Annual Ice Harvest February 9**

It’s that time of the year, when the temperature dips, the snow is uncommonly deep. WCHS, Akorn Productions and FarmAmerica are getting ready to teach area fifth and sixth graders how to score, cut and haul large blocks of ice out of Clear Lake. The fun starts between 9 and 10 a.m. at Clear Lake Park. Dress for the weather!! Volunteers get coffee and doughnuts, hot dogs, brats for lunch, and have a lot of fun with the students. We are proud to provide this living history event for the students and visitors. For more informan-

tion visit our website [www.historical.waseca.mn.us](http://www.historical.waseca.mn.us). For more Sleigh and Cutter events visit [Discoverwaseca.com](http://Discoverwaseca.com)

### **NEXT EXHIBIT: Holiday Exhibit ends in February**

The holiday exhibit, “Under the Christmas Tree, Very Special Toy Collections” has been an enjoyable and meaningful experience for many visitors! But also to many WCHS members and county residents, it provided an opportunity to share their Christmas stories and memories. Thanks to ALL who participated sharing their toys, dolls, trains, trucks, and doll houses—

making it a most meaningful holiday exhibit. *(See list of participants and volunteers on page 7.) We will now focus on displaying more and more Waseca County history with the Timeline. No other exhibits will be planned until August, when we welcome the Stitchers in Time Quilt Club!*

### **High Wheeler gets proper display**

This high wheeler bicycle from early 1900s is one of our favorite artifacts. Sadly, it still needs some restoration, but at least now it is being displayed properly and *vertically*—not leaning against the wall or bookcase somewhere. It’s

hard to believe that someone could ride this vehicle, either wearing knickers or long heavy skirts, but they did. This belonged to John Tabbert who donated it in 1960. It was bought second-hand in 1896! It is called a direct-drive bicycle because it uses no chain. The large front wheel is 52-inches in diameter. Image trying to stop? Tabbert rode this bicycle in many parades over the years into the 1940s. *What a treasure! You’ll find it upstairs on the Museum balcony level.*



(Left) Johnston & Co. hauling ice out of Clear Lake c. 1920s.



(Right) Kids doing the same in 2010.

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Mailing Address: P.O. Box 314, Waseca, MN 56093  
Street Address: 315 Second Avenue N.E.  
Phone: 507-835-7700, Fax: 507-835-7811

[www.historical.waseca.mn.us](http://www.historical.waseca.mn.us)

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**Staff:**

**Joan Mooney** Co-Director/Programs & Research  
program@historical.waseca.mn.us  
**Sheila Morris** Co-Director/Development & Exhibits  
photo@historical.waseca.mn.us  
**Pauline Fenelon** Artifacts/Library  
collection@historical.waseca.mn.us  
**Vanessa Zimprich** Artifacts/Website  
artifact@historical.waseca.mn.us  
**Linda Taylor** Researcher  
research@historical.waseca.mn.us

**WCHS HOURS:**

Museum, Research Library & Gift Shop  
Closed Mondays, Open Tuesdays-Fridays, 9-5

Waseca County Historical Society  
MUSEUM & RESEARCH LIBRARY

**Mission Statement:**

**To discover** and collect all material which may help to establish or illustrate the history of the County or the State.  
**To provide** for the preservation of all historical material and for the appropriate accessibility to such material.  
**To disseminate** historical information and to encourage interest in the past.  
**To maintain** genealogical records.

# Event Calendar

**Visit us:** [www.historical.waseca.mn.us](http://www.historical.waseca.mn.us)  
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## What's Happening in 2011

**February 9:** Annual Ice Harvest at Clear Lake; open to the public; Clear Lake Park, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

**February 11:** "Under the Christmas Tree" exhibit ends.

**Ongoing Exhibit:** "Waseca County Timeline"

**March 13:** Daylight Savings Time

**April 24:** Easter Sunday

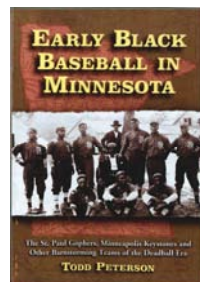
### Spring Luncheon-Lecture Series

Featuring a noted author/speaker and a delicious lunch, 12 noon-1 p.m. at the museum; paid reservations due two days before each event; call 835-7700; WCHS members \$11, non-members \$16

**March 31:** Writer & Gardener, **Bonnie Blodgett**, author of *Losing Smell—A Memoir of Losing and Discovering the Primal Sense*.



**April 28:** Writer **Chad Lewis**, author of *The Minnesota Road Guide to Gangster Hot Spots*  
**May 26:** Historian/Writer **Todd Peterson**, author of *Early Black Baseball in Minnesota*



This activity (Spring Luncheon-Lecture Series) is made possible by a grant provided by the Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council from general funds approved by the Minnesota State Legislature and in part, by the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund as appropriated by the Minnesota State Legislature with money from the vote of the people of Minnesota on November 4, 2008.

We have someone new in the Bailey Research Library—**Linda Schmahl** comes to us courtesy of the Experience Works Training Program. Linda is indexing the Waseca newspapers beginning in 1940. We welcome Linda and greatly appreciate her time spent with us.

# Preservation Efforts in Waseca County

Heritage Preservation Commission: Les Tlougan, Jean Byron, Joan Mooney, Justine Meyer, John Pribble, Robin Terrell.

## The historic Ward house gets an addition

The Waseca Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) received word in the fall of 2010 that a garage was to be built and attached to the historic Ward House on East Elm in Waseca. This house and landscape has remained much as it was with the exception of gardens on the east and west sides of the house. It was difficult to imagine and yet harder to see when the large tree in the east yard came down and the addition erected.

As a community we have admired the stately residence in its original state forever. It will take awhile to accept the change. With guidance from the State Historic Preservation architect, the HPC proposed design recommendations for the exterior of

the addition. We are hoping the recommendations will be incorporated as this construction continues. Since this National Historic Register property is a private residence, and they are not receiving any state or federal grant money, the only option we have is to work with the new owners and anticipate design recommendations will be followed.



In 1896, Roscoe Percy Ward engaged architect and family friend, E. S. Stebbins to design his Elm Avenue residence. The house was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

## Trowbridge Band Shell progress

The Trowbridge Band Shell Evaluation by Thomas Zahn and Bethany Gladhill has been completed. The HPC will meet in February and see what's next! Zahn and Gladhill are historic architectural consultants who assist communities with historic properties all over Minnesota.



Photographs of current exhibit ending on February 11, 2011—Under the Christmas Tree, Very Special Toy Collections. Regular Museum hours are Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Exhibits are still FREE, and the **Museum Shop is open through the noon lunch hour**. For more information call (507) 835-7700.



# What do you know? What crime stories of Waseca County have been told?

History does repeat itself, somewhat. As we step into the 1920s and 30s with our research and gathering of history, we can't help but notice a steep rise in crime and violence in Waseca County. Not that Waseca did not have trouble before. Journalist/author James E. Childs cites many crimes in his writings from 1854-1904 in *The History of Waseca County*.

The first recorded murder occurred on October 13, 1857 in the town of Iosco near the Village of Empire. Two neighbors, thought to be friends, after attending the election at Empire got drunk and "stabbed each other to the heart without any other cause than that they were intoxicated". One died and the other went to jail.

Other crimes found in the index list eight general robberies, five bank robberies, one mail robbery, and one murder/suicide. However, a search of the newspaper index yields many more results.

As our volunteers continue indexing the newspapers into the 1900s, we are able to track more reports of crime in Waseca County. Fast forward to 1925—Louis Minske is found bludgeoned to death in the snow outside his barn; and the Schuch murders in 1929, all victims bludgeoned to death, both crimes occurring in Iosco Township. Both remain unsolved.

To date the newspaper index lists numerous crimes, too many to mention individually. Bootlegging, extortion, larceny, bigamy, forgery, embezzlement, perjury, arson, robbery, burglary, theft, assault and murder. The Waseca Herald 1968 Centennial Edition is a great resource for summarizing the first 100 years in Waseca. Its editors wrote about these crimes committed in 1930:

## STRANGE BODY FOUND . . .

*August 30 C.L. Chase, Hazel Luker and step-son, Junior were gathering ginseng roots in the Tuttle Woods, seven miles east of Waseca. They discovered what looked like a moonshine "plant" and when a new spade was found nearby they started probing. When a human foot protruded from the shallow grave they decided it was time to notify officials.* It seems the body was that of a bank robbery suspect who was shot in the neck while escaping the scene in Willmar on July 15, 1930. Finding the body, seemed to set the stage for another series of Waseca county crimes, which were to carry through to the end of the year.

Other crimes mentioned in the 1930 summary are the hold-ups of the Standard Oil Station on North State, and a lone bandit who robbed the Citizens State Bank in Matawan—he was apprehended but the others got away. This next report is a good one!



**This discarded sign was found in the waters of Loon Lake, Waseca, Minnesota.** The William J. Burns International Detective Agency (IDA, Inc) was founded by Burns after leaving government service where he had served as a detective for the Secret Service. His agency successfully competed with the Pinkerton Detective Agency, his hated rival. According to information in Burns' biography, *William J. Burns and the Detective Profession, 1880-1930*, by William R. Hunt, "no other detective in our national history was more successful or better known than 'America's Sherlock Holmes'." Burns went on to head the Federal Bureau of Investigation (1921-1924) and was the immediate predecessor of J. Edgar Hoover. He was well respected until he was forced to resign because of his role in the Teapot Dome Scandal.

## AGAIN BULLETS WHINE . . .

*On September 22 occurred the most fantastic episode of the year. Ferdinand Sommers, a St. Mary (Township) farmer, was plowing a field which was surrounded on three sides by woods. He had heard shots in the woods, throughout the afternoon but thought, they were fired by hunters. Making one of his plowing rounds, he heard bullets whistle and dust rise from the plowing ahead of him. Looking up he saw four men coming toward him with drawn revolvers. "Give us all you've got," one of them demanded. "I haven't a cent, but I'll give you the five horses and my plow," Sommers replied. This produced a laugh and the men warned Sommers to continue plowing until six o'clock and not to leave the field a minute earlier. To demonstrate that their threats to shoot him would be carried out, one of the men threw five sticks into the air while another hit them with bullets before they reached the ground. Sommers continued his plowing and each time around the men would stop him to talk. On one such occasion one of them said to Sommers, "Give us a match. You have 15 of them and a jack knife in your pocket." Reaching into his pocket, Sommers discovered that he did have 15 matches and the men immediately wanted to tell his fortune, but he talked them out of it. Much of the time the men were engaged in counting money and once they offered Sommers a gold piece, but he refused fearing that if he took it they would follow him to the house to recover it.*

## KEPT SECRET A DAY . . .

*Sommers kept the affair a secret for a day, disclosing it when he learned that the Montgomery bank had been robbed of \$1,300 the morning of the day the men had been at his place. At Montgomery the bank robbers had overlooked \$5,000 in currency in their haste.*

The paper reports the "flare-up of bank robberies that continued into October." On October 14 the Meriden State Bank was held-up. After locking everyone present in the vault, the bandits got away with \$1,689.04.

In Alma City a local man and two men from Iowa were apprehended and confessed to the Meriden robbery. As 1930 drew to a close and things seemed to be settling down . . . “Someone had stolen Hiram Powell’s automobile from the streets of Waseca”. Two nights later observers noted the plate numbers on a car used to haul away \$40 in cash and a quantity of merchandise loot from the Chris Christenson General Store in Matawan. So much for the good old days . . .

Many more stories will be revealed as volunteers Jan Hunter, Donna Fostveit, and staff researcher Linda Taylor read and index more Waseca County newspapers.



The April 28 Spring Luncheon-Lecture will feature author Chad Lewis and his book *The Minnesota Road Guide to Gangster Hot Spots*. Lets hope Waseca isn’t one of them!

**Paid reservations are due April 26.**

### **“Story Harvesting” planned**

Later that evening of April 28 we would like to have a “story harvesting” session and discussion about tales of mobster activity in Waseca County! Do you have a story to share?



Waseca County Sheriff Alfred Wadd and Waseca City Police Chief Simon Connolly, shown in 1931.

## **Rediscovering part of Waseca County’s past**

While processing photos from the Curran collection, we came across a photograph of a house with a little girl and a dog standing out front. We turned the photograph over and discovered a note from the past. It read,

*“Babe and Mae’s dog Snookums. This is Great Ma and Great Pa Anderson’s house. This is where the first ballot vote was done in Waseca, in the west window. Judge Reynolds owned this house for years and then sold it to the Andersons.”*

The photograph was taken in 1911-1912. After some research by our genealogist, Linda Taylor, we learned that “Babe” was Albertine Anderson, born in 1906 to Martin and Helwina (Olson) Anderson. She was a sister of Julia, who married a Curran. We also learned that Judge Reynold’s address was once 246 Hill Street, Waseca, MN and Hill Street was renamed 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue S.E. On a drive around town, we found the house still standing in Waseca on the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue S.E. and 6<sup>th</sup> Street. The front porch has been removed and side porch has been enclosed. The narrow vertical windows are still in place and shutters have been added. The fire hydrant is still out front on the corner. What a treasure to rediscover another part of Waseca County’s history is still alive and well. We are now able to add yet another house to our Then and Now Collection. Thank you to whoever wrote that note on the back of that photograph. Without that note it would have just been another photo with no history. *Thanks for keeping history alive!*



## The Waldorf Café Jukebox is playing!

For several years we have been hoping and advertising (in our newsletter) for someone to fix our Waldorf Café jukebox. In November 2010 someone did come forward—Karl Jones of Champlin, MN. He's been a WCHS member for a few years, has roots in Waseca County, and heeded our request for help. Karl worked for many years for the Hennepin County (DOT) Department of Transportation, maintaining the intersection control lights and other equipment. He's made the trip from Champlin, MN to WCHS many times over the last three months to work on our jukebox. He found the manual for the 1956 Wurlitzer 2000, sent for parts, tested, dissected and put it back together. The jukebox now plays any of the 200 1960s era 45-rpm records housed therein. Thanks to Karl, our most popular and interactive artifact is playing our songs again—The Beach Boys, Neil Sedaka, The Supremes, the Everly Brothers, and a lot more!



## WCHS Board of Directors hold annual retreat

On January 12 the WCHS Board held their annual board retreat over pizza and a lot of discussion. The 2008 Strategic Plan was reviewed and there was consensus that much had been accomplished, but that because of the recession, there is still much to accomplish—mainly growth in WCHS membership online and younger members. The Board praised staff for keeping cost of operations under budget in 2010. Plans are underway for a 2012 fundraiser and membership campaign in 2011. Annual events will continue with grant funding. Exhibits will focus on the Waseca County Timeline. And grants will be written for the Accessibility Project—a Lift and Mainfloor Accessible Bathroom in the Museum building. Volunteer hours increased by about 70% in 2010. Other statistics such as website hits and museum, library and event visitors all increased in 2010. The WCHS Annual Report for 2010 will be available in April.



Above: WCHS Board Members (front to back) Jim Tippy, Scott Roemhildt, Pastor Charles Espe, Henry Lewer, and Donald Wynne-mer. Not pictured were Tom Piche, President Jim King, Rod Searle, and Co-Directors, Joan Mooney and Sheila Morris

# Thanks to Volunteers, Donors & Members!

As of Nov 11 to Dec 31, 2010

## VOLUNTEERS

Don Siems  
Karl Jones  
Rod & Ruth Searle  
Ariel Meister  
LDS Elders  
Jim & Barb King  
Youth Service Leadership

### Research and Indexing

Linda Taylor  
Jean Lundquist  
Karen Lechner  
Jan Hunter  
Donna Fostveit

### Under the Christmas Tree

#### Holiday Exhibit participants:

##### Exhibitors

Justine Meyer, exhibit design/styling  
Eugene Kuhns  
Mark Meyer  
Doris Berger  
Deanna Bendix  
Katie Youngberg  
Lois & Bob Chaffin  
Gwen Buscho  
Roman Koenigs  
Wes Rethwill  
Erin & Sheila Morris  
Anita Hildebrandt  
Ole & Jean Lundquist  
Jim & Lois Fox  
Norma & Louis Marzinske  
Jim & Edy Barber  
Pauline Fenelon  
Kathy Rosenthal  
Joan Mooney  
Cindy Piche  
Angie Kaelberer  
Craig & Kathy Miller  
Jerry Rutledge

##### Open House Hosts

Neta Oelke  
Tom Piche  
Jean & Ole Lundquist  
Jim & Moira Tippy  
Ruth & Roman Koenigs  
Rod & Ruth Searle  
Jim & Barb King  
Scott Roemhildt  
Jim & Edy Barber

Jerry & Linda Rutledge  
Charles & Kathy Espe

### Cookie Bakers

Bev Wildgrube  
Ruth Searle  
Edy Barber  
Mary Allen  
Sheila Morris  
Carol Rosenthal  
Doris Berger  
Neta Oelke  
Phyllis Lewer

## DONATIONS

### Un-restricted Donations

Mary Allen  
Robert & Lois Chaffin  
Sigi Hecht  
Michael Hecht

### Give-to-the-Max Day Donations

Jim King  
Jerry Rutledge  
Joanne L. Hintz  
Carolyn M. Waldron  
Robert D. Hunter  
Ralph B. Wick  
Laurie Velett  
Anonymous  
Janet R. Welch  
Barbara L. Kiesler  
Evelyn E. Linde  
James W. Tippy  
Barbara Friedl  
Linda Taylor  
Debra J. Collum  
Anonymous  
Mike Finley  
Anonymous  
Mel Strand  
Doris Berger  
Donna Fostveit  
Thomas L. Ryan

### Memorials

**In memory of Grace Rudlang**  
by Donna Fostveit  
**In memory of Donald Zimmerman**  
by Peter & Annette Zimmerman  
by Carol Wobschall  
**In memory of Beverly Wadd**  
By Donna Fostveit  
**In memory of Keith Phelps**  
By Donna Fostveit

**In memory of Esther Eustice**  
by Rebecca Bruner

### Honorariums

**In honor of Don & Margaret Wynnemer** by Suzanne Born

### Grants, Restricted

Prairie Lakes Regional Arts Council  
\$3200 for Chautauqua 2011  
E.F. Johnson Foundation,  
\$6,000 for Chautauqua 2011

### Appropriations Rec'd

New Richland Township  
Blooming Grove All-In-One Fund  
City of Waseca  
Waseca County

## MEMBERSHIP

### New Members

Susan Danna  
Brad Wendland

### Renewing Members

Family Search-Library Rights  
Smila Erickson  
Don & Fran Zwach  
Karl Jones  
John R. Matz  
Tom & Francie West  
Lora Devereaux  
Vanessa Zimprich  
Sheila Morris  
Gary & Linda Taylor  
Sarah Behrms Miller  
Janet Rudolph  
Roberta Walker  
Barbara Lamson  
Martin Smith  
John Teskey  
Gene & Fauniece Witt  
Bill Burns  
Jane Guggisberg  
Michael Hecht  
Barbara Herme  
Rebecca & Thomas Bruner  
Myrwood & Helen Bagne  
Warren Krienke  
Gyles Randall

## OUR LIFETIME MEMBERS

Mary Allen  
Joe & Marjorie Britton  
Brown Printing  
Wayne "Bumps" Brown  
Gladys Brynildson  
Gus Cooper  
Liz Corchran  
Robert M. Dahl  
Leo J. & Shirley Fette  
First National Bank  
Francis M. Fitzsimmons  
Donna Fostveit  
Marjorie L. Gores  
Sharon L. Haley  
Sigi Hecht  
Margaret "Peggy" (Hodgson) Horner  
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Waseca Area Tourism & Visitor Board

# Waseca County Historical Society

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## CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



**ICE HARVEST 2011**  
**WED, FEBRUARY 9**  
**CLEAR LAKE PARK**



Membership Renewal Date



**How can you support WCHS? Visit our website, [www.historical.waseca.mn.us](http://www.historical.waseca.mn.us)**

**Click on Donate Now! You can donate any time, any day ONLINE!**

With support for WCHS Operations shrinking from the City of Waseca, your support through membership, donations and volunteerism will be needed. Staff size and hours have been frozen for the last two years. The only way to keep the museum viable is through support for Operations through appropriations, donations and membership. The Operations budget maintains the buildings that house the entire WCHS collections of artifacts, archives, papers, photographs, microfilm books, computers, readers, etc., keeping Waseca County history safe! We are happy to answer any questions you may have about how WCHS is funded. We do not get funding from the Minnesota State Historical Society. *We pay them* a membership fee. We do not get operational funding from the Legacy Amendment. That is reserved for NEW programming and some capital projects. We do intend to request funding for an Accessibility Project, i.e., installation for a Lift and Mainfloor Bathroom for the museum in 2011.



**The Waseca County Historical Society—**

**Join. Visit. Learn.**