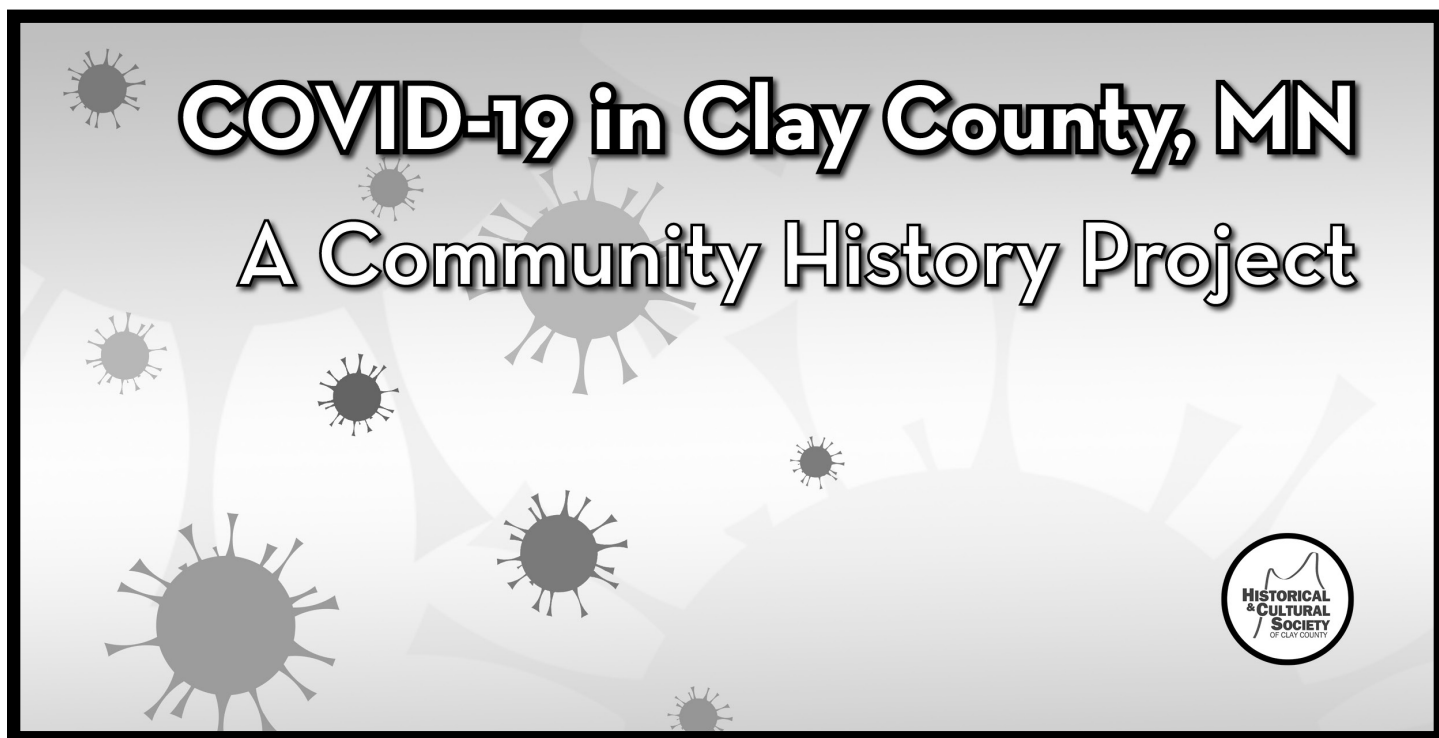


— The Hourglass —



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HCSCC Seeks Your Help Documenting Local Pandemic History

The COVID-19 pandemic represents one of the major disruptions of American life in our community's history. As the research for our current exhibition, *War, Flu, & Fear: World War I and Clay County*, required a significant look at the H1N1 "Spanish Flu" pandemic, we've been contemplating historical parallels and considering how the histories of this moment will be shared in the future. Given the opportunity, what would we ask Louise Christensen, the heroic Red Cross nurse in Dilworth charged with the sole care of 24 patients in October of

1918? *When* would we ask her? What advice would Johan Arnd Aasgaard, Concordia's president and chairman of the county's American Red Cross, offer the leaders of today? Would we interview Jens Larson, the Hawley farmer who lost a wife, daughter, and son in the span of four months? What was the actual mood of Halloween or Thanksgiving or Armistice? And, of course, how could we capture and share all this, so folks in the future might adopt and support wiser, better-informed decisions?

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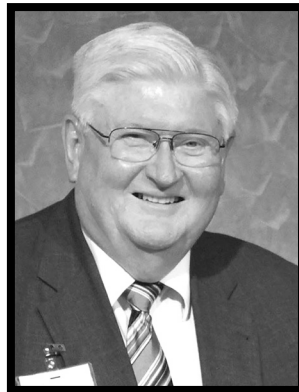
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Our thanks to the Moorhead City Council and the Clay County Commission for their support of local history and culture at HCSCC.

President's Message

from Jon Evert



The staff at HCSCC has started in earnest to prepare for Clay County's sesquicentennial (150 years!). The county was organized in 1872, making 2022 the year to celebrate our county's rich heritage. The exhibition the staff creates will be interesting and powerful, if their past creations are any indication, and they've already made some important decisions about how to focus this history. As part of the exhibition will detail life here before the railroad – especially as it was lived by Ojibwe, Dakota, and Métis locals – our exhibit team traveled to St. Paul to explore Native American exhibitions and artifacts at the Minnesota History Center and the Science Museum of Minnesota. Since their return they've also assembled an advisory committee of Native American scholars who will help them navigate the subject.

Some of us on an ex-official board committee are working on a much smaller project. Georgetown's Gloria Lee, Rollag's Dennis Herbranson, Barnesville's John Dobmeier, and myself (Comstock) are working to improve the history of Clay County schools with an exhibition of photos and text in the one-room schoolhouse located on the grounds of the Clay County Fair in Barnesville.

HCSCC owns another one-room schoolhouse, District #3, located just east of Rollag. This school has historical significance in that it was the first rural school in the county and the last one to close. It's being maintained and preserved by the Society. However, it is only available to visit by special request. The Clay County Fair Schoolhouse is open each day of the fair, making it much more accessible to the public.

We are seeking your help in improving the display, because we believe the 100+ schools that once dotted the landscape of Clay County deserve to have their stories told. For some of these schools, we have no photographic evidence, even though we're sure that records of those students, teachers, and buildings are out there somewhere. Maybe in your old albums or tucked into boxes in the attic.

We hope you will do some searching for us to help tell these stories and connect our fair-going locals with their community's history. If you have these materials, please reach out.

-Jon Evert



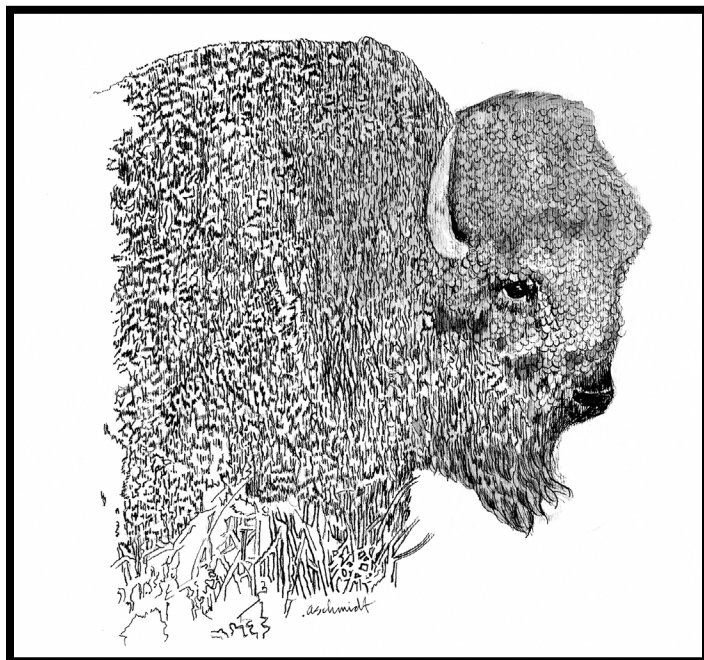
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Amy Schmidt's "Buffer Low" (watercolor, ink),
an FMVA BIG Art Exhibition entry.

FMVA BIG Art Exhibition Goes Online

Every spring, the Fargo Moorhead Visual Artists fill the Hjemkomst Center's 4th Floor Gallery with one of the largest, local multimedia art shows in the region: the FMVA Big Art Exhibition (formerly the BIG Show). Each year brings new themes and media and a fun peek into the creative minds of our talented local artists. The exhibition offers thousands of students, tourists, and local art hounds a comprehensive look at hyper-local art during the museum's busiest season. With the museum closed, we still want to share the wonderful work of the FMVA so we've taken that exhibition online.

Explore the FMVA BIG Art (Online) Exhibition on our website at the following URL:

www.hcscconline.org/fmva

A landing page will explain the history of the exhibition and a link will lead you to the online gallery, which may also be accessed at the following URL:

www.hcscconline.org/fmva2020

Our thanks to the Fargo Moorhead Visual Artists and sponsors The Arts Partnership, North Dakota Council on the Arts, and the Alex Stern Family Foundation.

Scandinavian Hjemkomst & Midwest Viking Festival 2020 Canceled

Scandinavian Hjemkomst & Midwest Viking Festival and Viking Connection's Fiber and Flame workshops have been canceled this summer. We look forward to hosting these fun events next summer with our friends at Nordic Culture Clubs and the River Ravens.

Please reach out if you'd like to take part in next year's festival as a vendor, performer, or volunteer!

HCSCC/CCHS Newsletters Indexed and Accessible on HCSCC's Website

The recent museum closure and shelter-in-place orders have presented real challenges at HCSCC. However, the situation also offers us the opportunity to pursue several long-awaited projects, including a new index and accessible catalog of past newsletters. The collection currently includes CCHS newsletters from 1987 to the 2008 merger and HCSCC issues of *The Hourglass* from that point to 2015. The project will continue with issues of *Red River Valley Historian* and the *Red River Heritage Press*. Upon completion, we'll host another important collection of free and accessible local history.

Explore it yourself at the following URL:

www.hcscconline.org/newsletters

HCSCC Releasing New Blog Posts

Have you checked out our blog? You could read short histories of Clay County's 1872 horse flu pandemic or the Moorhead waterfront. Find it at the following URL:

www.hcscconline.org/blog

Heritage Gift Shop Offering Online Sales

Heritage Gift Shop items are available online and can be shipped to you! Click on "Shop" from our homepage for books, souvenirs, DVDs, heritage foods, and more.

For more information contact Heritage Gift Shop Manager Jenna Collins at jenna.collins@hcsmuseum.org.



Letter from the Executive Director

Maureen Kelly Jonason

We are making history during this Covid-19 pandemic. On Tuesday, March 17, we received word from Minnesota Governor Walz that museums would close until March 27. Fortunately our staff was able to come into the office to continue working. Then on March 26 we received the order to shelter-in-place from March 28 until April 10. We've adapted and we continue to work from home.

This moment is a clear reminder that we make new history every single day. And it reminds us that preserving history is as important now as it ever has been. By looking back at the novel flu pandemic of 1918, for instance, we can learn valuable lessons. In that horrific global catastrophe, between 50 million and 100 million people died. Our present threat is different, but containment and social distancing efforts seem to be working.

In Clay County, the Spanish Flu hit in October of 1918. By the spring of 1920, our flu threat had returned to its usual, seasonal nature. There will be an end to this challenge. During those dark days a century ago, our communities closed schools and cancelled events and quarantined too. That's how we know what worked. If no one had bothered to document and preserve these histories, we would have only the oral tradition.

As you will see in this newsletter, HCSCC events have been postponed or cancelled through June. Following discussion with Nordic Culture Clubs, this list includes the summer's Scandinavian Hjemkomst & Midwest Viking Festival. Our staff and board are discussing how to best move forward with other events, including our annual meeting – and it's possible our museum will open in June. Let's keep our fingers crossed and in the interim, let's keep social distancing and washing our hands!

-MJK

At a special meeting of the city council and the school board of the city held in the City of Moorhead on Tuesday evening, October 8, 1918, the said bodies having in mind the welfare of the residents of the city and the combating of the influenza epidemic that is fast spreading over this community, ordered that until further notice, all public gatherings of whatsoever kind and nature are prohibited within the city, the schools of the city to suspend all operations, theaters to remain closed and the residents of the city requested to keep away from crowds so far as business permits.

Now, therefore, I. N. N. Melvey,

On October 8, 1918, the City of Moorhead took emergency measures in response to the "Spanish" influenza pandemic. Mayor N.N. Melvey's proclamation prohibiting public meetings, ordering business and school closures, and compelling children to stay indoors was published the next day on the front page of the Moorhead *Daily News* (above).

COVID-19 is frequently compared to the 1918-1920 H1N1 "Spanish" influenza pandemic. Current projections suggest COVID-19 will be a dangerous, but far less lethal pandemic compared to the three waves of Spanish flu that swept the planet at the end of World War I.



Consider the Gift of Membership with HCSCC

Are you a member of the Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County? Do you have family or friends interested in museums, festivals, and local history? HCSCC membership makes a great gift, and we have several membership levels to choose from:

- Basic (Individual) – \$40
- Booster – \$85
- Patron – \$250
- Basic+ (Household) – \$60
- Heritage – \$125
- Benefactor – \$500

To sign up or to learn more about what each membership level offers, visit our website (www.hcscconline.org) and click on the "Join & Support" tab at the top menu or give us a call: (218) 299-5511.

(continued from front page)

So we have launched a COVID-19 community history project, and we're asking for your help. We are seeking digital materials, documents, and artifacts that will help future historians, and our future community, understand our present situation. We've added a page to our website to accept digital materials at the following URL:

www.hcscconline.org/covid19

Feel free to attach photos, audio recordings, or other files that help demonstrate your experiences during this pandemic. Please leave your phone number and email, as our archivist or collections manager may reach out to you for further information.

If you would like to take part in this community history project but you're not quite sure where to start, consider some of the prompts we posted online. How have you spent your days in isolation? If you've already been infected, what were your symptoms? Has this pandemic changed your political engagement? Have you, friends,

or family lost your job? Have you worn, or sewn, a mask? Have you "howled" in Moorhead? How have you stayed physically active? How have parents adapted to e-learning? Who should we interview for this project?

If you'd like to donate documents or artifacts to the county archives, please contact collections manager Lisa Vedaa or senior archivist Mark Peihl at the following addresses:

mark.peihl@hscsmuseum.org

lisa.vedaa@hscsmuseum.org

If you're not sure what might constitute a historically significant document or artifact, consider the items we've included in *War, Flu, Fear* – or better yet, the great items we couldn't include in *War, Flu, & Fear*! Or just send us a photo or some details. If we can't accept your item, please don't take offense! We have to carefully consider many factors when we accept an item into the county collection and archive. We still want you to reach out, as we may want to document the item and your story.



(Above) A Glyndon Parks & Rec sign at Glyndon's City Park on April 30, 2020, urges residents to help flatten the COVID-19 curve. A list of three rules and recommendations includes the following: "Safely maintain a 6-foot distance from others; Avoid crowded areas and contact sports; Stay off of all playground equipment (HCSCC).



A Red River Jazz Story

Professor Gordon, Frank's Son Frank, and Dexter

• *By Davin Wait*

On November 6, 2018, the United States held a historic midterm election that brought the highest turnout among eligible voters since 1914. Here in Moorhead our own historic election counted to an unprecedented slate of wins by local women and the election of attorney Johnathan Judd as mayor.

In the months leading up to election day, HCSCC fielded questions from roughly half a dozen members and local journalists who were curious if Judd would be the city's first black mayor. Like those who asked, we thought this was the case, assuming our region's *political* histories were just as full of Scandinavians, Germans, and Yankees. But we didn't know for sure and thought we should.

So we looked into it, and eventually the search brought

me to two photographs showing the aftermath of the Fargo Fire. Most readers here will remember the Fire destroyed much of the city's north side during the windy summer afternoon of June 7, 1893. CCHS contributor Jim Nelson wrote an article about its consequences for Moorhead in the May/June 1992 newsletter [now available on our website].

I'd seen these photos before. One was taken by Moorhead photographer O.E. Flaten and the other by Hans Hanson of Fargo studio Logan & Hanson. The photos are almost identical, taken from the same north window of Crane's Hotel, offering a view of the destruction almost directly from its source. They both show a lone canvas tent standing across Front Street in a city of ash and ruin. "F.L. Gordon. Barber Shop" is painted on the tent's side.



(Opposite) An O.E. Flaten photograph of “Professor” Frank Gordon’s barber tent in the aftermath of the June 7, 1983, Fargo Fire. The view is to the north from Crane’s Hotel on Front Street and Broadway, where Fargo photographer Hans Hanson took a similar photo (above) (Flaten-Wange, HCSCC; IRS NDSU 51.30.21).

I was curious why Flaten had altered his print, inking “F.L. Gordon. Barber Shop” onto the top of the tent. His photograph had left the barber’s name out of frame, but Flaten thought the name was important. One hundred and twenty-five years later I did, too, because it was the closest thing I could find to a photograph of Frank Leslie Gordon. After reaching out to his grandson’s widow, Maxine Gordon, I learned that this might be the closest thing anyone has to a photograph of Frank Leslie Gordon.

I had dug up the photograph again after learning about Gordon’s 1900 campaign for city alderman in Fargo’s First Ward, an election he ultimately lost to the incumbent, boilermaker A.J. Craig, by a count of 169-89. As a black political campaign in the region, Gordon’s run was rare, but not unprecedented. If we look upriver into Fergus Falls, we find the 1896 mayoral campaign of Prince Honeycutt, whom researcher Melissa Hermes of the Otter Tail County Historical Society believes

to be the first black man to have run for mayor in the entire state of Minnesota. Here in Fargo-Moorhead, Gordon seems to have been the only black candidate to run for major local office before Ahmed Haji’s 2010 challenge to incumbent Fargo Mayor Dennis Walaker, and 2018, when Judd won the same seat in Moorhead. So not unprecedented, but rare.

A few historians have written briefly about Frank Gordon’s campaign, which offers a useful look at the historical intersections of race and politics in our community. Some have highlighted a moving endorsement Gordon received from Fargo friend W. S. Harris. The *Forum* printed it two days before the election under the headline, “Colored Man’s Plea.” However, regional newspapers at the time also point to a rare instance of racially motivated political terror. Roughly three weeks before the election, Gordon received a letter threatening an explosive death if he didn’t drop out of the race. The *Jamestown Weekly*

Alert called it a “cruel, practical joke,” and J.J. Jordan at the *Fargo Morning Call* seems to have openly implicated Fargo Mayor J. A. Johnson, who had served with the Confederate Army during the Civil War.

My research didn’t stop here, though, because I’d started it not long before the publication of Maxine Gordon’s book, *Sophisticated Giant: The Life and Legacy of Dexter Gordon*. So in my search for Frank Leslie Gordon, I soon learned that his son Frank Alexander Gordon had become a doctor in Los Angeles, and that Frank Alexander’s son became one of the most revered jazz figures in American history: the saxophonist, Dexter Gordon. I owned his records!

So now I wanted to know how the Red River Valley might have shaped those later bebop sounds.

COLORED MAN’S PLEA.
To The Forum: I wish to say a word to the voters of the First Ward in behalf of the colored citizens. There is an opportunity now for you to show your appreciation of the colored people of Fargo, who have never before asked anything. F. L. Gordon is a popular colored man. He is now running for the office of alderman in the First Ward. He is a man of irreproachable character and integrity and if you elect him he will fulfill his duties in behalf of the First Ward and the city in a fearless and creditable manner. We beg of you to give him your support. We, as citizens, ask our white brothers to support him at the ballot Monday. He will work for the best interests of the city in an intelligent manner. The colored republicans of the ward have worked faithfully for the candidates in the past, always content with the white men being the candidates. This time they ask recognition and put up a candidate against whom nothing can be said. When you come to vote Monday remember F. L. Gordon and give him a vote for alderman.
W. S. Harris.

(Above) W. S. Harris’s 1900 endorsement of Frank Gordon for 1st Ward Alderman (March 31, 1900, *Forum*).
(Right) A Bismarck *Tribune* brief reporting the threat to Gordon’s life during the campaign (March 17, 1900)

Black History In & Around the Red River Valley

Now, it’s clear that local black history is generally lacking, even though a handful of historians have made valuable contributions. My colleague Mark Peihl’s research on Felix Battles – a Moorhead Civil War veteran who was born into slavery – and my other colleague Markus Krueger’s efforts documenting St. John the Divine’s history and building a Felix Battles monument are important on this front. So is the work of Angela Smith and NDSU Public History on Melvina Massey, a Fargo madame who operated a brothel called the “Crystal Palace” in the burgeoning frontier city. Historians David Vassar Taylor, Stephanie Abbot Roper, Thomas Newgard, William C. Sherman, John Guerrero, Playford Thorson, and Earl Lewis have also traced some of the larger threads of black migration and experience in Minnesota and the Dakotas, and folks interested in the subject should read their work.

But in spite of this valuable research, it’s still no surprise that Carroll Engelhardt’s wonderful ethnic history of Fargo-Moorhead, the chapter “Old and New Americans” in *Gateway to the Northern Plains*, is accompanied by a photo of two anonymous black children watching the installation of cedar pavement on Moorhead’s streets in 1894. The July 2005 CCHS newsletter includes the same photo, asking readers for any information about the boys’ identities.

The simple fact is that there’s a lot we don’t know about historical black lives in the Red River Valley. As Dr. Barbara Handy-Marchello phrases the same basic problem in a 2015 *North Dakota Studies* article, “The historic record tells us that the population of blacks in North Dakota was never large, but the actual numbers of black residents and their names and occupations have often gone unrecorded.”

The campaign down in Fargo has become so heated that Prof. Gordon, the colored barber and candidate for alderman, has received a letter telling him to beware of the ides of March, as it were, for then he is to be blown high into the air with dynamite, a devilish plot having been hatched to assassinate. And the Fargo Call is dropping a few chunks of dynamite every day at Mayor Johnson’s feet.

Black history in the region begins in our territorial years with the names of the Bongas, York, and Joseph Godfrey. The Bongas descended from slaves kept on Mackinac Island and found work in the fur trade as freemen following Pierre Bonga's manumission. Pierre is believed to have been the first black man in North Dakota, trading and trapping on the Red River with Alexander Henry for the North West Company. In fact, Pierre's child Blanche was born in Pembina to an Ojibwe woman on March 12, 1802, making her the Red River Valley's first black daughter. Henry recorded the event in his diary: "Pierre's wife was delivered of a daughter – the first fruit at this fort, and a very black one." Pierre's son George was born the following year, found work with the American Fur Company, and later ran a resort on Leech Lake with his family. He reportedly identified as both "the first black man born in this part of the country" and "one of the first two white men that ever came into this country." Like his polyglot brother Stephen, George's education and experience were put to use during treaty negotiations. Their names appear, respectively, on the 1837 Treaty of the Sioux and the 1867 Treaty with the Chippewa of the Mississippi – the latter of which established White Earth Indian Reservation.

York, of course, was enslaved by William Clark and crossed the continent with the Corps of Discovery. He proved popular with natives on the journey, including the Mandan and Arikara as the Corps moved through the northern reaches of the District of Louisiana in the fall and winter of 1804. York's Dakota experience included buffalo hunting and an unfortunate bout of frostbite. His return to slavery following the journey is one of the bitter footnotes to the Corps' efforts.

Joseph Godfrey was born into slavery in Mendota around 1830 and later hired out to Henry Sibley. After escaping to live with the Dakota and marrying at Lower Sioux Agency in 1857, Godfrey was pulled into the U.S. - Dakota War of 1862. Along with a thousand others, Godfrey surrendered at the Battle of Lone Tree Lake (the Battle of Wood Lake) on September 26, 1862, near what would become Granite Falls, Minnesota. In an attempt to escape execution, he testified against several Dakota warriors and served a reduced sentence of three years at Camp McClellan in Davenport, Iowa. He settled on the Santee Reservation in Nebraska after he was released.

As the second half of the nineteenth century brought

statehood, homesteads, and railroads, it also brought new black midwesterners. Some of these settlers migrated directly from the Deep South, "voting with their feet," as many historians have phrased it, in response to the final years of slavery, the ensuing breakdown of Reconstruction, and a growing wave of violent racial terror. As the 1880s and '90s gave way to the 20th century, the region's black settlers more frequently traveled here from other midwestern or upland states like Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky. Some homesteaded, like Richland County farmer William Thornton Montgomery, and some traveled to the region with the military, including the Buffalo Soldier units at Fort Buford in the 1890s and various scouts and servants employed elsewhere, like Isaiah Dorman at Forts Rice and Abraham Lincoln.

However, most black settlers followed the steamboats and railroads into service and labor jobs, including barbers, cooks, porters, bootblacks, domestic servants, and prostitutes. This group includes folks like Moorhead's Kate and Felix Battles, Fargo's Julius Taylor, Fergus Falls' Prince Honeycutt, and Bismarck's Steward and Mary Thompson. The group also includes "Professor" Frank L. Gordon.

"Professor" Frank Leslie Gordon

Frank Leslie Gordon was born in Tennessee in 1856, when it was still a slave state. His future wife Fannie Louise King was born in Kentucky in 1861. Kentucky, too, was a slave state at the time of her birth. A 1900 federal census record suggests they were married in Kentucky in 1880 and gave birth to son John the following year. By 1885 they were in Fargo; and by 1900 they'd have four more sons: Richard, Frank Alexander, Osceola, and Clifford. They made their homes at various locations in Fargo between Front Street and 2nd Avenue North. Following the loss of both business and home to the Farge Fire in 1893, the Gordons eventually landed at 205 5th Street North. Their home stood where the Radisson Hotel now looms over downtown Fargo today.

Like other barbers in the community, Gordon was popular and well-liked. His profession afforded him a level of visibility and public engagement that even many white settlers would have lacked. His shops operated multiple chairs, including one by his son John, and advertisements in the local papers indicate he served men and women from all walks of frontier

life: shaves, massages, tonics, and dandruff cures included. The locals called him “Professor,” and later profiles of him point to a sense of humor. One story claims that Gordon, who’s also reported to have spoken Norsk with an accent to match, would tease his curious Scandinavian clients about life on the prairie. When they asked how he came to possess such dark skin, Gordon replied that they’d be black, too, if they stayed in North Dakota as long as he had. According to Ben Innis in *The Wonder of Williams: A History of Williams County, North Dakota*, “that statement never failed to draw suspicious, hooded glances.

Many of the historians who have dug into Fargo-Moorhead’s black history regularly make the same two points on the subject. First, black settlement has been omnipresent in the Upper Midwest, even if in small numbers; and second, rural black settlement in the Upper Midwest has primarily been a transient affair, meaning few black settlers have stayed in any one place more than a decade or two. These realities have been attributed to a few correlating factors, including 1) the relative homogeneity of German and Scandinavian immigrants in the region’s population centers; 2) these immigrant groups’ close relationships to the railroads, bonanza farms, and rapid homesteading which precluded later black settlement; and 3) the sustained urban, industrial, and coastal migrations that brought rural folks to U.S. cities throughout the 20th century.

A look at the numbers fleshes out these points. According to the 1880 census, eight black settlers lived in Clay County: six in Moorhead and two in Glyndon (with roughly 5,000 total people in Fargo-Moorhead). Cass County in the same decade recorded 11 black or mulatto residents, including five in Fargo. In 1900, Clay County again counted eight; and in Cass County this number had grown to 77 (roughly 14,000 total people in Fargo-Moorhead). Then in 1910 (roughly 20,000 total people in Fargo-Moorhead), Clay County counted 16 residents who identified as black or mulatto, while Cass County counted 133 residents who identified as black or mulatto. The decades following 1910 witnessed a steady decline in these populations, who were displaced by urban migrations and World War I until the post-WWII boom brought several black professionals and students back into the Red River Valley.

These disproportionate demographics presented a few problems, including occasional racial hostilities

for blacks on the Red River frontier. The Gordons, for example, would have likely learned of a prominent 1882 lynching in Grand Forks soon after they arrived in Fargo in 1885, and they would have been regularly reminded of their precarious standing in Fargo-Moorhead’s social hierarchies at the time, even before Gordon ran for office. Minstrel shows were commonplace; strict vagrancy laws presented a recurring threat of arrest and violence for blacks traveling in the city; and, as Carroll Engelhardt has pointed out, roughly half of the stories in Fargo-Moorhead newspapers about black lives at the end of the 19th century “reported their crimes ... and applauded their punishments.”

These challenges prevented strong community roots from forming among black citizens in early Fargo-Moorhead. First and foremost, their numbers never grew large or stable enough to establish their own place to worship and gather, as was common among the various immigrant denominations at the time. Instead black church groups met in First Baptist and later Fargo First Presbyterian, and black social groups planned gatherings like picnics and concerts.

As a result, maybe it’s not surprising that the Gordons turned their attention to more family-oriented endeavors like the success of Frank’s barbershop and the children’s education. Eldest son John followed his father’s footsteps and contributed to the family’s finances. He worked as a barber in several of Frank’s Fargo barbershops and then moved with the family to Williams County, where father and son filed homestead claims near Williston. Osceola, too, found work as a barber, later opening his own shop in Seattle after serving in the infantry during World War I.

The family excelled at school, music, and sports, too. Fargo Public School records at the Institute for Regional Studies show the Gordon children earned high marks during their years at Central High and Lincoln, McKinley (First Ward), and Washington Elementaries. An event organized through Fargo’s Colored Knights of Pythias on April 9, 1896, points to a family of considerable music talent. Fannie sang “Sweetest Story Ever Told” and performed several pieces titled “Jubilee” with a chorus; Osceola performed “Paradise Alley”; John sang with a quartet; and the “Gordon Boys” performed acrobatic feats.

Their intellectual and physical pursuits continued after the family left Fargo for Williston in 1903, as

well. In Williston the four youngest graduated at or near the top of their class. Clifford led Williston's football team to a state championship in 1917. Richard played trombone. Frank played basketball, mandolin, and clarinet, and graduated salutatorian of his class. He played "Boston Ideal March" as a mandolin solo during his high school graduation on June 1, 1906. In October of 1907, during his first year at the University of Minnesota, he tried out for the school's mandolin club and made the papers. The news reported that his try-out was a resounding success and that the committee believed Gordon to be one of the finest mandolin players at the entire school. Unfortunately, the committee was uncomfortable with the thought of unilaterally integrating the club. They asked the members and a majority voted against Frank taking part, as "their organization [was] a sort of social affair."

Frank and Dexter Do Jazz

The Gordons eventually ran into trouble. Frank was charged with gambling and "blindpigging," or running an illegal saloon, in the summer of 1913, just before Cliff began high school. Then Frank and Fannie's homestead fell into foreclosure. They presumably moved back into town and navigated their legal affairs for the next two years, when Gordon appeared before North Dakota's Supreme Court on the alcohol charges.

Frank Alexander Gordon found work as a railroad porter while he put himself through college: first Fisk University in Nashville, then the University of Minnesota, and finally Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he graduated with a medical degree in 1914. He maintained his musical interests throughout these years, and his son Dexter would frequently speak of his father's love for music.

Frank and younger brother Clifford were two of the first black physicians in Los Angeles. Frank moved to Los Angeles in 1916, married Gwendolyn Baker in 1919, and they gave birth to their only child Dexter in 1923. Gordon's office in Eastside L.A. primarily served black residents who had been crowded into the neighborhood by racially restrictive real estate covenants. However, he also served several celebrities, reportedly including movie stars and jazz musicians like Duke Ellington and Lionel Hampton. After Frank died of a heart attack on Christmas Eve of 1937 and missed a drink date with his good friend the following morning, Ellington noted his heartbreak in his book,

Music is my Mistress: "That completely ruined my chances of a happy Christmas celebration." When Ellington stopped in Fargo to perform at the Crystal Ballroom three years later – the recording of which won a Grammy Award for Best Large Jazz Ensemble album forty years later in 1980 – he was visiting his good friend's birthplace and childhood home.

Much has been written about his son Dexter's life. He joined Lionel Hampton's band as a teenager and established himself as one of the forebears of the bebop sound that pulled jazz away from swing and into more experimental spaces. His experiences touring the Deep South in the 1940s and '50s were formative. He was one of the American jazz expatriates who moved to Europe in 1962, citing among other issues the racial bigotry he regularly encountered on tour and in the press. He settled in Copenhagen, Denmark, and helped export American jazz to European audiences. After his return to the United States he starred in a movie loosely modeled after his own life, called *Round Midnight*. On March 24, 1987, he attended the Academy Awards as a nominee for Best Actor (but lost to Paul Newman). Then on March 2, 1988, he won a Grammy Award for his performance on the soundtrack.

The roots of his story stretch back here through a small barbershop in the Red River Valley.



A photograph of Dexter "Sophisticated Giant" Gordon (Francis Wolff, 1962).



Lee Smalt's photograph of a Hjemkomst Center sunset (HCSCC, 2018).

What is “Capacity Building”?

• *By Maureen Kelly Jonason*

In 2019 we launched a new initiative to help us become a better organization and a stronger non-profit. We call it our Capacity-Building Project. The National Council of Nonprofits says this about it: “Capacity building is not just about the capacity of a nonprofit today -- it’s about the nonprofit’s ability to deliver its mission effectively now, and in the future. Capacity building is an investment in the effectiveness and future sustainability of a nonprofit.”

Specifically, we are taking a look at several areas of improvement. First, we are looking at the visitor’s experience and seeing what we can learn about it so that we can then improve upon it. To that end, we are participating in a national assessment program called Visitors Count! through the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH). The AASLH has helped us design an evaluation for students and teachers so that we can better understand how our school groups are learning from their museum visits. AASLH will also help us design a tourist evaluation for us to use this summer during our busy out-of-town visitor season. Together, these sets of data should give us a pretty strong picture of how people of all ages experience our museum.

The second component is board training. We are bringing in consultant Russ White, who has a lot of experience in this field, to help our board self-assess and learn more about its role and how to become an even stronger and more viable group of leaders for our organization. Russ will make four visits over the next two years.

The third component is to develop a Comprehensive Interpretive Plan (CIP). This written blueprint will be based on deep conversations between staff and board and consultant Jim Clark, who will help us to shape a vision for the future that brings out the best in our strengths and sets a course for improving upon our weaknesses. Jim will also be making four visits over two years to develop the CIP.

The final component is to give our exhibitions a bit of a facelift with a new modular wall system. We are currently looking at our options in this area.

Together, these efforts will make HCSCC stronger.

The Capacity-Building Project is made possible through a grant from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies.

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The following individuals and organizations supported HCSCC during the 2019 calendar year with donations. We are so grateful for their generosity! These are not members – to whom we are also incredibly grateful for their generosity – but donors. Thank you all for supporting history by supporting HCSCC!

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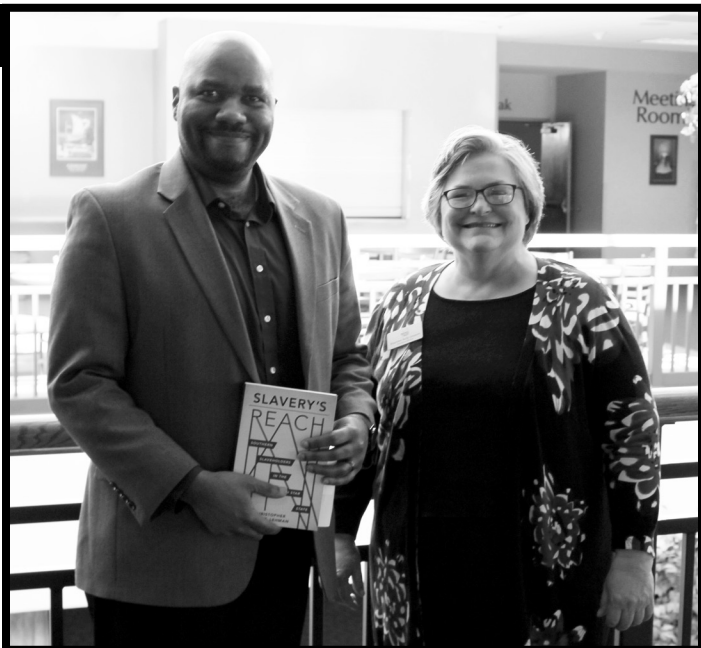
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Chris Lehman's Book Talk a Resounding Hit!

We had a packed house at the Hjemkomst Center on Saturday, February 22, when Dr. Christopher Lehmann joined us to discuss his new book, *Slavery's Reach: Southern Slaveholders in the North Star State*. Almost 125 members and visitors filled the auditorium for his presentation!

Lehman is chair and professor of Ethnic Studies at St. Cloud State University. His recent research explores the relationships between slaveowners and the formation of early Minnesota. Shortly before his presentation to HCSCC members and visitors, he learned that *Slavery's Reach* was nominated for a Minnesota Book Award! For those interested in checking out his book, the Heritage Gift Shop currently has several copies!



Historical & Cultural Society of Clay County

PO Box 157 • 202 1st Avenue North

Moorhead, MN 56561-0157



To collect, preserve, interpret, and share the history and culture of Clay County, Minnesota.



Stay tuned.... We'll be opening soon!

P.S. The Hourglass, Summer 2020, will be out in July!