

# — The Hourglass —



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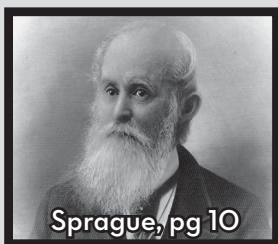


## HCSCC Reopens the Hjemkomst Center

HCSCC launched a soft reopening of our museum at the Hjemkomst Center on Monday, June 15, with updated museum hours and safety guidelines. The museum is now open every day from noon (12:00pm) to 5:00pm and Saturdays from 9:00am to 5:00pm. The move

accompanies new, limited museum and gallery capacities and new visitor conduct guidelines requiring masks and the recommended 6' social distance between individuals or household groups (or "pods").

*(continued on page 7)*



Sprague, pg 10

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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



HCSCC must be constantly reviewing and sorting through data to determine what time, place, or events are worthy of presentation in exhibitions and articles. This is an arduous process, because it leaves a lot on the cutting room floor, as they say. Stories must be historically significant *and* of interest to members and museum visitors.

Writing *interesting* histories is its own challenge, but what is *historically significant*? I think we might consider a few criteria:

- The event must be out of the ordinary and not an everyday occurrence.
- The event should have affected a large number of people.
- The event should have deeply affected a specific group of people.

Then came 2020, when a multitude of historically significant events seem to be forced upon us. It isn't difficult to see how this year will have many stories for future generations.

The most significant story will be COVID-19. The pandemic has affected so many of us in powerful ways. It's changed our relationships with technology and with each other in ways we could not have imagined back in February. It's damaged our economy and livelihoods faster than anything we could have predicted. We've lost more than 125,000 people in just a few months.

Or maybe it is the growth of Black Lives Matter, a call for justice that is making many of us examine the biases present in our own thoughts and behavior. This story calls for change and a clearer recognition that all people are created equal and deserve equal justice under the law. This is a monumental moment and surely historically significant.

Or maybe the defining issue of the year is our current political situation: a unique President and the coming elections that will certainly make history, no matter the outcome.

I think these stories will be told in articles and books and museum exhibitions for many years to come – and they're unfolding before our eyes. We must be diligent in gathering these moments for the local historians of our community's future.

We are living in interesting times.

- Jon Evert



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# HCSCC News & Events

## HCSCC & RRWS Open the *National Juried Watermedia Exhibition*

Our annual partnership with the Red River Watercolor Society, the *National Juried Watermedia Exhibition*, opened to the public on Monday, June 15. The show continues to amaze – and RRWS continues to produce one of the finest art shows in the region.

On **Tuesday, July 28**, we will host a public reception in the 3rd Floor Gallery of the Hjemkomst Center from 5:00PM - 8:00PM. The reception will be limited to the first 42 guests to register online – from an individual seat (1) up to a group or “pod” size of six (6) – and visitors are required to wear masks and accommodate both the recommended 6’ social distance and our new gallery capacities. A 7:00PM program will be broadcast online.

Full event details can be found on **page 9**.

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## Terry Shoptaugh Digs into the NPL with *Sons of the Wild Jackass*

Former MSUM historian and archivist Terry Shoptaugh joins us online for a history of the Nonpartisan League on **Tuesday, August 18**, at 6:00PM. Shoptaugh recently published with the North Dakota State University Press. He’ll discuss the birth of the insurgent movement and its influence on both the nation’s agriculture policies and local political attitudes. The event will be broadcast via Facebook.

Copies of Shoptaugh’s book, *Sons of the Wildjackass: The Nonpartisan League in North Dakota*, are available for purchase in Heritage Gift Shop.

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## Annual Meeting Goes Digital

HCSCC’s 2020 Annual Meeting will be conducted online via Zoom on **Wednesday, September 16**, at 4:00PM. HCSCC Executive Director will give an update on HCSCC operations, HCSCC Senior Archivist Mark Peihl will deliver a 30-minute presentation called “Free Land!” about the various ways Clay County settlers acquired land that had been appropriated from local Native Americans, and HCSCC members will vote on this year’s board elections.

## Talks, Films Mark Women’s Suffrage Centennial in Fargo-Moorhead

Join us and the League of Women Voters of the Red River Valley throughout August as we commemorate and celebrate the August 18, 1920, ratification of the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote in the United States.

On **Wednesday, August 5**, we’ll screen a short documentary produced by NDSU public history students and the Fargo History Project called *I Plan to Vote with My Daughters: The Story of Women’s Suffrage in North Dakota*. The event will be broadcast via Facebook beginning at 6:00PM.

On **Wednesday, August 12**, NDSU professor and curator of the Emily Reynolds Historic Costume Collection Ann Braaten joins us online to deliver a lecture titled, “Extending the Home to Gain the Vote: Women’s Clubs Work for the Vote.” The event will be broadcast via Facebook beginning at 6:00PM.

On **Wednesday, August 19**, we’ll screen a lecture from MSUM professor and Moorhead Councilwoman Deb White titled, “Nelliw Griswold Francis & Everywoman Suffrage Club: Celebrating Minnesota’s Black Women Suffragists.” The event will be broadcast via Facebook beginning at 6:00PM.

On **Wednesday, August 26**, join us for a free screening of *Iron Jawed Angels* at the Fargo Theater. A short introduction will begin at 7:00PM and the film will follow at 7:15PM. The event is sponsored by the FM Women’s Fund Foundation.

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## HCSCC Releasing New Digital Content

Find us online to enjoy the local history and art you enjoy. You can find local history articles on our blog and in our newsletter archive, including a new article from Senior Archivist Mark Peihl on local Birdsfoot Trefoil; videos on our YouTube channel; and plenty of online exhibitions. We’ll soon release a new walking tour celebrating the local history of the women’s suffrage movement.

Visit us at **WWW.HCSCCONLINE.ORG** to get started!





# Letter from the Executive Director

Maureen Kelly Jonason

## How have we been doing through the pandemic?

We are holding our own.

We have sought out and received help from several different sources. The City of Moorhead continues to be our biggest supporter with its in-kind donation of space and utilities. A Clay County appropriation helps us with payroll each month. Usually we have admissions, gift shop, and special event income to rely on, but for these three months of closure and for some months to come, we will not have those sources. While we opened Monday, June 15, to the public, as you can imagine, we have not been over-run with crowds of people. We were fortunate to be awarded a Paycheck Protection Program loan through the Small Business Administration for two and a half months of salary in order to keep our full-time staff gainfully employed. If we do everything right, we will not have to pay that back. Moreover, Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies is supporting the museum by offering greater flexibility with the use of grant funds so we can still pursue our overall program and organizational goals. This will help us address any unexpected issues with business operations that might arise during the life of the grant.

In addition, the Fargo-Moorhead Convention and Visitors Bureau has offered to match any Covid-related donations we receive between now and **Saturday, August 1** up to \$50,000. Most importantly, you, our members and donors, answered the call I sent out in our Covid-19 distress letter and you sent in many donations that have been matched dollar for dollar by the FMCVB. If you have not yet donated OR if you would like to donate again, please know that every matched dollar will go toward sustaining us through this highly unusual time.

## What have we been doing during the pandemic?

The eight full-time staff members have been working mostly from home with occasional forays into the office as needed. We wear face masks and practice social distancing to stay safe as we continue to do our jobs in operating the museum and preparing for future programming. While we were forced to cancel all programming between March 17 and June 14, we did have exhibitions that needed to be taken down, walls that needed to be patched and painted, spaces that needed to be cleaned and reorganized, and administrative details for upcoming exhibitions to be dealt with. Director of Museum Operations Emily Kulzer took care of these responsibilities and more. In her spare time, she also made over 250 reusable cloth masks to be used in shelters. The extra masks are now for sale in the Heritage Gift Shop.

Communications Manager Davin Wait continued to promote our existence and develop content for our many audiences. He published our regular communications (e-newsletters, social media, *The Hourglass*), built new acrylic museum signs, continued research and writing projects, and expanded our online offerings with a better research library and several online exhibitions, videos, and blogs. Administrative Assistant Lynelle Martin spent most of her time processing memberships and donations and keeping the memberships coming in by sending out reminder letters and making calls to lapsed members. Your renewals have kept us going through this crisis, and we can't thank you enough for the support! Gift Shop Manager/Volunteer Coordinator/Collections Assistant Jenna Collins stayed in touch with volunteers and part-time staff who were laid off, helped Lisa finish the artifact inventory, and wrote artifact blogs.



## 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](http://www.hcscconline.org)) and click on the "Join & Support" tab at the top menu or give us a call: (218) 299-5511.



Programming Director Markus Krueger offered presentations via Zoom to area service clubs and the Mendota Historical Society, researched and wrote about the Native American history of Clay County prior to settlement for our upcoming 150th anniversary exhibition, created a Historical Moorhead tour for school classes and a suffrage walking tour for the public, wrote articles for the *Extra* newspaper and even scraped and painted the porches of the Comstock House when the weather got nice. He also built acrylic barriers for opening admissions and gift shop safely to the public. Collections Manager Lisa Vedaa spent a lot of time working on a new collections database called Collective Access and finishing the inventory as well as researching artifacts for the GAR and sesquicentennial exhibitions. Archivist Mark Piehl fielded research questions, conducted exhibition research, wrote local components for the GAR and sesquicentennial exhibitions, and continued regular archival projects. Executive Director Maureen Kelly Jonason focused a lot on raising funds in a variety of ways and doing administrative tasks such as negotiating health insurance, writing contracts, and creating a Preparedness Plan for reopening the museum. Some staff also took advantage of the plethora of webinars available online throughout the three months as opportunities to learn new things and network with museum colleagues around the world.

We definitely stayed busy through the Minnesota shelter-in-place order.

## What's to come?

Writing this late-June I acknowledge the phrase “the new normal” applies to our museum as well as to any other business. While the Governor opened museums June 10 in Minnesota, capacity is limited, six-foot distancing is required, masks are important for safety, cases in Minnesota are still on the rise, and we anticipate not being able to gather by the thousands for at least the rest of the year. That calls for creativity in programming as well as operations. We must operate at 25% capacity, but at this point, we would be thrilled to have 50 people in the museum at one time! June-September are usually our big tourist traffic months and who can say we'll raise the 50% of our admissions and gift shop revenue that we normally do in that time this year? I am betting not. Will schools go back into operation in the fall and bring classroom groups back in to the museum? Who can say? At this point, we are brainstorming ways to create more programming online using the website, Facebook, and Zoom for live presentations and performances. We want to stay viable and relevant. We want to serve the public and our members and donors by fulfilling our mission. And so we will find a way.

History always provides valuable lessons – this much we know is true. All that we have to learn from this pandemic is yet to be revealed.

-MJK

## CALL TO ACTION

The Covid-19 shut-down for three months meant that we missed out on three months of museum admissions and gift shop revenue during our busiest seasons of the year. We also lost any special event income, including the funds generated by the Scandinavian Hjemkomst and Midwest Viking Festival and Sam Wai's wonderful wine and culture classes, all of which had to be cancelled.

Now we have an opportunity to match every donation that comes in to HCSCC between now and August 1 through a special grant from the Fargo-Moorhead Convention and Visitors Bureau (FMCVB). FMCVB will match up to \$50,000 in Covid-19-related donations. So far we have surpassed \$40,000 (thank you so much for your support!). That means there is still time to make a big difference for the future of HCSCC. Please consider giving a tax-free donation to HCSCC today or before **Saturday, August 1**, that will be matched by the FMCVB.

Please send your donation to us at HCSCC, 202 1st Avenue North, Moorhead, MN 56560-1985.

We are so grateful for your support!

# HCSCC Exhibitions

## The Red River Watercolor Society's 2020 National Juried Watermedia Exhibition

4th Floor Gallery  
through Saturday, August 8

For 27 years our friends at the Red River Watercolor Society have produced one of the finest art exhibitions in the region, the *National Juried Watermedia Exhibition*. Fifty-four artists from around the country – including a strong contingent of local art talent – offer a gorgeous showcase of watercolor, acrylics, and gouache. This year the *National Juried Watermedia Exhibition* continues to amaze with a collection juried by renowned watermedia artist Ken Call.

The exhibition is sponsored by The Arts Partnership, the North Dakota Council on the Arts, the Alex Stern Family Foundation, and Industrial Builders.

## Black and White in Black and White Images of Dignity, Hope, & Diversity in America

4th Floor Gallery  
Saturday, August 15 through Sunday, September 27

*Black and White in Black and White* features striking photographs attributed to African American photographer John Johnson. Using his Lincoln neighborhood as his canvas, Johnson crafted these empowering images of his friends and family between 1910 and 1925. Equally as important as Johnson's depictions of African Americans are his images of blacks, whites, and other racial groups together, an occurrence that was almost unheard of at the time

*Black and White in Black and White: Images of Dignity, Hope, and Diversity in America* is curated by Douglas Keister, presented with support from California State University, Chico, and traveled by Exhibit Envoy.

## War, Flu, & Fear: World War I and Clay County

Heritage Hall  
through Thursday, December 31

The local front of World War I: casualties, paranoia, armistice, and a global flu pandemic.

*War, Flu, & Fear* is sponsored by the BNSF Railway Foundation.



## Quilt National '19

Heritage Hall  
Thursday, July 30 through Wednesday, September 30

The Dairy Barn Art Center's biennial juried exhibition of innovative art quilts returns to the Hjemkomst Center this summer. Featuring 31 beautiful pieces from an eclectic, multicultural collection of international fiber artists, *Quilt National '19* continues an impressive legacy of proving to the larger world that quilting is an art form on a level with traditional fine art media.

*Quilt National '19* is funded in part by a grant from the Lake Region Arts Council through a Minnesota State Legislative appropriation. *Quilt National '19* is also sponsored by Minnesota Quilters, Quilters' Guild of North Dakota, and The Arts Partnership, with support from the cities of Fargo, Moorhead, and West Fargo.

## The Boys in Blue: The Grand Army of the Republic

3rd Floor Atrium  
through Sunday, May 2, 2021

A year after the Civil War ended, a fraternal organization for Union veterans was established as the Grand Army of the Republic (or G.A.R.). The Men of the G.A.R. left a lasting legacy, establishing veteran pensions, building soldiers' homes, and lobbying for major legislation. This exhibition, organized by the Siouxland Heritage Museum in Sioux Falls, SD, highlights that legacy.

The exhibition is supplemented with HCSCC panels and artifacts detailing Clay County's own Civil War histories, featuring profiles of local veterans like Luther Osborne, Felix Battles, and George Lamphere.

(Reopens, continued from front page)

The museum reopening follows a three-month closure prompted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and Governor Tim Walz's Stay Safe MN orders that went into effect on Tuesday, March 17. During the hiatus, full-time staff worked at home or in isolation to continue various archival, research, and maintenance projects – from digitizing local history articles to painting our galleries and the Comstock House porch – and to develop a safe reopening strategy and Covid Preparedness Plan.

As outlined in this plan [available online], HCSCC staff report health checks every day and wear cloth facemasks or plastic faceshields in common office areas and galleries. Most spend at least some portion of the week working at home to mitigate health risks, and they've also replaced our beloved volunteers as tour guides and gallery docents to mitigate those volunteers' own health risks. Staff were included in this decision-making process and they're comfortable making these adjustments to safely resume museum operations amidst the pandemic.

Like HCSCC staff, the Hjemkomst Center itself looks a little different these days – as well as more regularly disinfected. Sanitizing stations are available throughout

the museum for visitor use. Touchable and tactile exhibition features have been removed. Extra theater chairs have been removed, water fountains have been disconnected (and posted as such), and bathroom doors remain open at all times to minimize high-touch surfaces. Acrylic shields have been installed in high traffic areas like the gift shop and admissions desk to prevent COVID transmission. New acrylic signs outline new visitor conduct requirements, reminding visitors to wear their masks and maintain the recommended 6' social distance. They also highlight our new, limited room capacities: Heritage Gift Shop (6 people), 4th Floor Gallery (10 people), Heritage Theater (12 people), Hopperstad Stave Church (12 people), Hjemkomst Ship Gallery (15), and Heritage Hall (15 people). Total museum visitor capacity at the Hjemkomst Center is now 52 people.

In the weeks since we reopened with these new safety guidelines, we've hosted hundreds of visitors, including members, the usual summer tourists (from as far as California, Maryland, and Florida), and local families and friends rediscovering the many attractions right here in Fargo-Moorhead. We remain confident in our ability to provide a safe space to enjoy local art and history.

We hope you'll join us soon to explore the museum!

## COVID-19 SAFETY GUIDELINES

# MASKS

must be worn in the museum



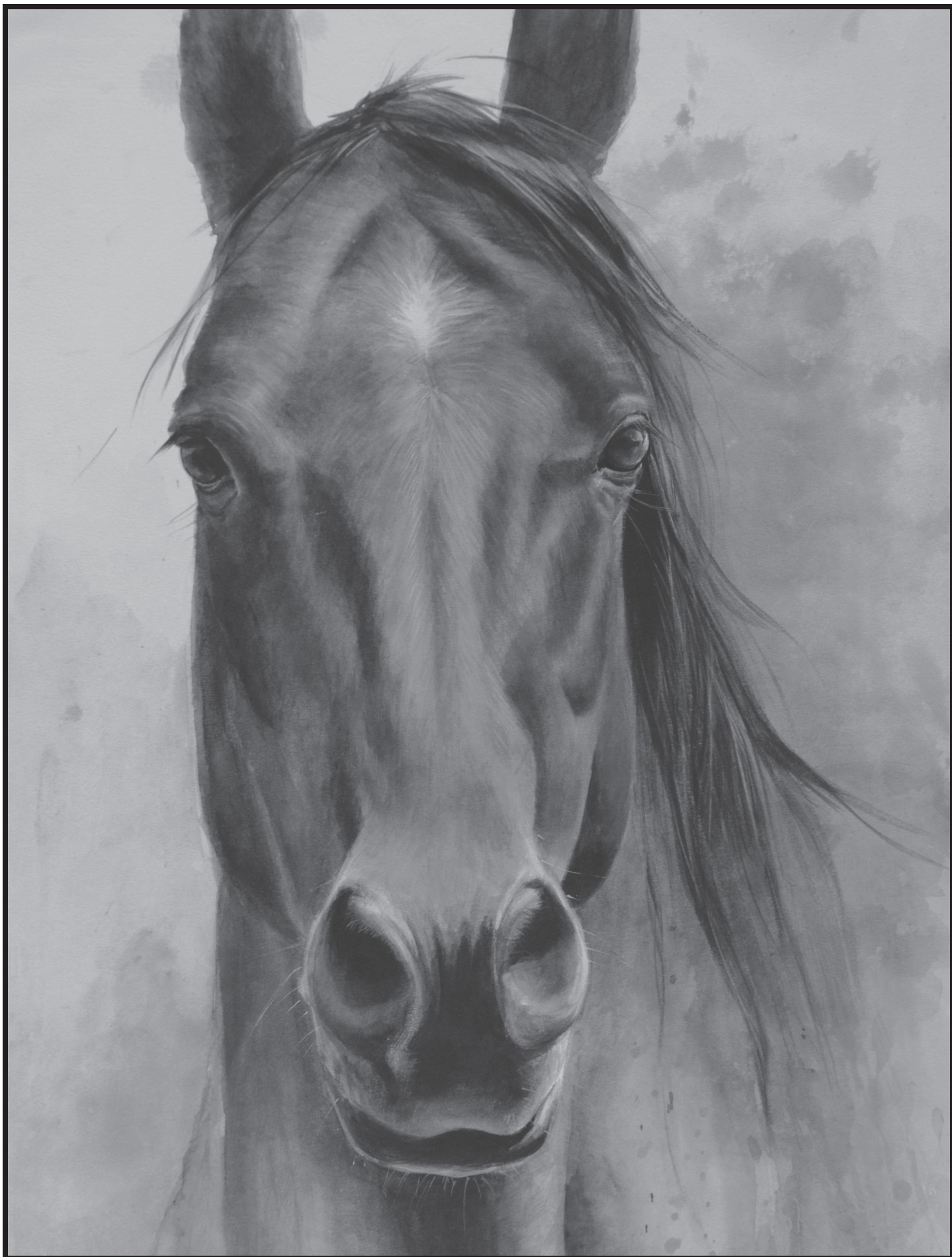
Masks are available in Heritage Gift Shop.





(Left) Signs at the Hjemkomst Center prompt visitors to wear masks in the museum. (Above) HCSCC Collections Assistant and Gift Shop Manager Jenna Collins shows off our staff's new faceshields. The clear plastic better accommodates public interactions (like tours) without compromising safety.









The Red River Watercolor Society opened the 2020 *National Juried Watermedia Exhibition* on June 15. The exhibition features work from 54 talented artists, including a strong offering from local artists, like Karen Bakke's "Breathe You In" (left).

When we reopened our doors to the public on Monday, June 15, we also opened them to the Red River Watercolor Society's 2020 *National Juried Watermedia Exhibition*. Local art lovers know that the Red River Watercolor Society consistently produces one of the strongest art exhibitions you'll find in the Red River Valley. It's been a summer feature at the Hjemkomst Center for years, introducing thousands of museum visitors to the tremendous artistic talent of our community. This year's impressive exhibition continues that tradition: a showcase of beautiful art from local and international talent and a colorful, collective celebration of watercolor, acrylic, and gouache.

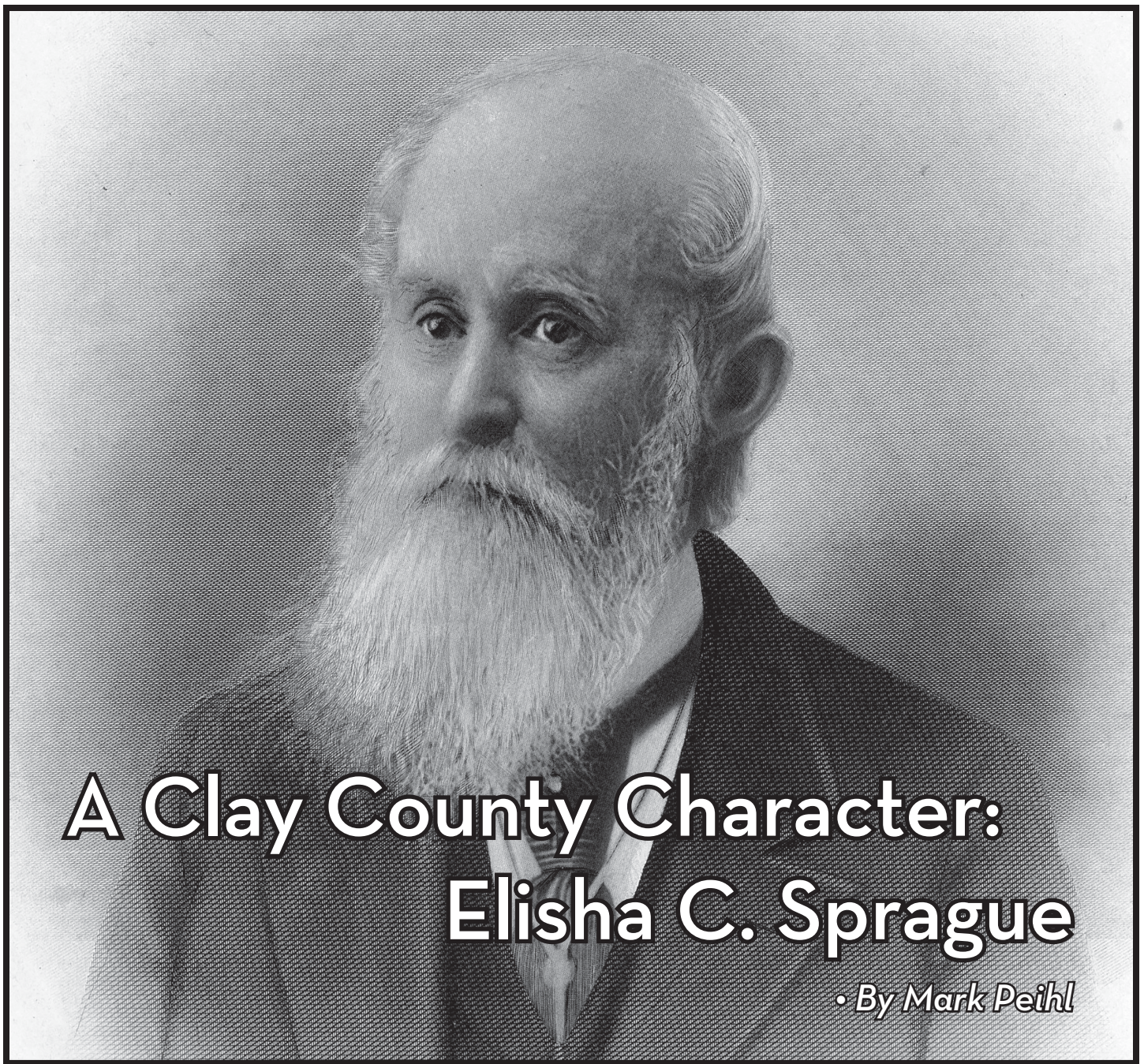
Now in its 27th year, the *National Juried Watermedia Exhibition* includes work by 54 artists from around the country, including three pieces from exhibition juror Ken Call and exhibition leadership at the Red River Watercolor Society: Falan Hehr-Miller and Lisa Burns. Visitors to the gallery will find a wide range of subject and tone as it's media which ultimately unites the collection. Portraits, abstractions, rural landscapes, urban scenes. American wilderness, cluttered streets, childhood memories. Lighthouses, flowers, and farms.

COVID-19 pandemic, the *National Juried Watermedia Exhibition* has also been made available online this year (remember to vote for the People's Choice Award!) and the reception will look decidedly different. On **Tuesday, July 28**, we will host a public reception in the 3rd Floor Gallery of the Hjemkomst Center from 5:00PM - 8:00PM. The reception will be limited to the first 42 guests to register online – from an individual seat (1) up to a group or "pod" size of six (6) – and guests will be required to wear masks and maintain a 6' social distance from others outside of their group. Guests will be ushered through the exhibition in intervals of 20 minutes to accommodate new gallery capacities, but the entire museum will be available to explore. A 7:00PM program including remarks and awards will be broadcast on Facebook. Light refreshments will be provided.

The 2020 *National Juried Watermedia Exhibition* is sponsored by The Arts Partnership, with support from the cities of Fargo, Moorhead, and West Fargo; the North Dakota Council on the Arts, which receives funding from the state legislature and the National Endowment for the Arts; the Alex Stern Family Foundation; and Industrial Builders.

Due to complications associated with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the exhibition closes Saturday, August 8, 2020.





A few years ago, the Montana Historical Society launched a successful lecture and book series titled, “Great Jerks in Montana History.” I’ve long thought that we could do something similar in Clay County, though in keeping with Minnesota Nice, perhaps “Great Characters in Clay County History” might be a more appropriate title. With that in mind, what follows is a sketch of a notorious Clay County character, Elisha C. Sprague. He was arguably the largest land owner in Clay County in the 1880s, a coast-to-coast headline maker and supposedly extremely wealthy. He was also a jerk.

Sprague was born in Ohio in 1814. At seventeen years of age, he started working in a real estate office. While still

a teenager, he began buying and selling land on his own. About 1860, the forty-six-year-old met a young woman named Amanda Craig. She was a 23-year-old school teacher from an upper-middle-class Cincinnati family. They began a long correspondence. Over five years, romance blossomed. In several of his letters, Sprague promised to move to Cincinnati and marry her once the Civil War ended.

All through the War, Sprague lived in Nashville. Details about his activities during this time are sketchy. One newspaper account claimed “he made money from the pockets of soldiers during the war.” He claimed to have organized and managed a popular minstrel show



("Sprague's Minstrel Show," was a big hit throughout the late 19th century). Whatever he did, he seems to have made some money.

When the war ended in spring 1865, Sprague moved to Chicago and resumed land speculating. Despite Amanda's numerous appeals, Sprague kept putting off the marriage through the fall. That winter, his letters became increasingly cool and in summer 1866, he called off the wedding and dumped her. Incensed, she sued him for "breach of promise," seeking \$100,000 in damages. That's more like \$1.6 million today. After a series of delays, the case went to trial in June 1869 in a Chicago suburb.

Scandal sells and newspapers across the country covered the trial in all its juicy details. Many of the couple's letters were introduced as evidence and reproduced in the papers. Readers ate up the gushing, saccharin missives and were entertained by Sprague's clumsy writing and appalling spelling. As an example, in April 1866, Sprague wrote Amanda claiming he was too ill to travel to Cincinnati:

*Theas few Lines are to inform you that I have nott Benn out of the house sence I have Been hear Util To day. I feel some Better or at Least I think I would iff my Business were I a diferent shape. I feel so Bad in my head I cant write mutch for sum time. I think and Do nott know to what I am thinking so as I feal Beter I will write a Long Letaer, My Love."*

You get the idea.

In his instructions to the jury, the judge said that if the jury found that Sprague had promised to marry Amanda and backed out, they had to find for the plaintiff, unless they found that the evidence showed that she had been "guilty of unchastity." As to the first part, the letters were pretty damning evidence, so Sprague mounted a desperate defense on the second part. He stunned the courtroom by testifying that Amanda had confided in him that she had become pregnant with another man's child and had had an abortion. Subsequent testimony and a witness's later statements to newspaper reporters revealed that Sprague had hired two female detectives from the Pinkerton Detective Agency to pose as Amanda and visit Cincinnati doctors requesting a prescription for a compound that would terminate a pregnancy. They wore heavy veils to conceal their real identities.

Two of these doctors were called to testify. One denied

that he could identify the woman who visited him as Amanda. The other refused to answer questions at all and spent a few days in jail for contempt of court. The jury deliberated for five minutes before finding for the plaintiff and awarding her the full \$100,000. Sprague appealed to the Illinois Supreme Court and lost. As late as 1877, he was still in court trying to avoid paying up. I have not been able to determine whether Amanda ever received any money from the settlement.

Sprague apparently did well in Chicago after the war. He later claimed to have bought and sold over three million acres of land in Illinois alone and that he owned \$500,000 worth of Chicago properties including a huge business block and a ritzy hotel.

In summer 1871, he turned his attention north to the Red River Valley. The Northern Pacific Railway was building west from Duluth headed for the west coast. Though the precise route was not yet known, it was obvious that the railroad would cross the Red River somewhere in Clay County. The US General Land Office had surveyed the western tier of Clay County townships in 1859 and 1860. Those lands lay mostly untouched and available. That summer, speculators swept in and bought up large tracts of government land. Some bought the land from the government through direct cash sales. Others, like Sprague, took a cheaper route. The US had long offered soldiers free land as an enlistment inducement or as a reward for their service. They received this in the form of a piece of paper called scrip that could be turned in at a Land Office in exchange for 80 or 160 acres of land. The vast majority of these veterans had no interest in moving to the west. Eastern brokerages bought up huge amounts of these military warrants from vets for pennies on the dollar. They hired agents out west to locate desirable land or resold the scrip to speculators.

On September 1, 1871, Sprague acquired a whopping 11,220 acres of government land, most of it with military scrip. This included over 5800 acres in Clay County, 2200 in Wilkin and 1500 each in Norman and Otter Tail Counties. Five weeks later, fire ripped through Chicago, killing 300 people and destroying thousands of buildings, including Sprague's hotel and business block. He later claimed he lost a million dollars in the blaze. It forced him to cancel a contract for 200 oxen to break the Red River Valley virgin prairie he'd just acquired.

Sprague spent the 1870s in Chicago rebuilding his fortune. Newspapers regularly reported on him, usually

regarding his participation in questionable real estate transactions. He may have married. We can't find a record, but he did have a daughter in Chicago, Louise, born about 1868.

He continued to acquire Red River Valley land. The 1878 Clay County Property Tax List shows him owning over 12,000 acres in Clay County, almost all of it in what is now Kurtz and Holy Cross Townships, south of Moorhead. Most speculators held on to their land for a while, then sold it when demand drove up its price. Other large land owners tried farming it. None of Sprague's land was listed as "improved," in other words, plowed for cultivation. And he rarely sold any property. Instead he mortgaged the land over and over for increasingly larger amounts. In 1879, Sprague moved to Moorhead. His household included his daughter Louise, his widowed sister Emily Jewell and a young Swedish woman, Louisa Carlson, who was often referred to as "Mrs. Sprague." Again, I can't find evidence that they were married, but they had at least eight children together. The family lived quietly in a large home on the corner of 8th Street and 5th Avenue South, directly across 8th Street from the S. G. Comstock house.

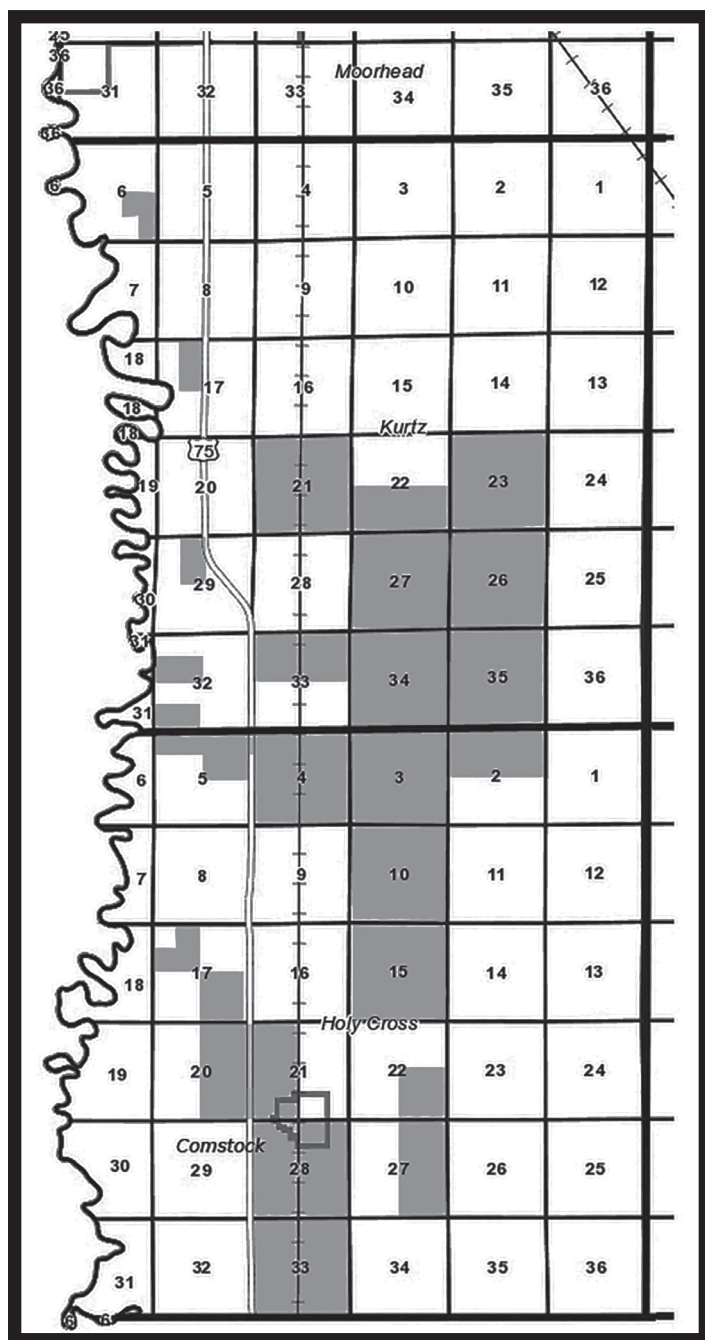
In early 1882, Sprague claimed in an interview with the *Fargo Argus*, that he owned over 500,000 acres of land across the country, making him "probably one of the largest land owners in the world." This included 200,000 acres in Texas, 30,000 in Mississippi and 56,000 in Minnesota. He also announced plans to begin farming his Red River Valley land on a large scale. He hoped to have 20,000 acres in wheat, "a larger tract of land in wheat than any other private individual." (This was a bit of bragging: a number of North Dakota and California Bonanza farms exceed this size. Newspapers around the country repeated this "largest landowner" story regularly.) A reoccurring problem with paralysis in his right arm kept the sixty-eight-year-old from fulfilling his bold plan but he did begin farming operations that spring. He also began to cheese off his neighbors.

Sprague put 3000 acres into production in 1882. That September, one of his employees took him to court for non-payment of wages. In January 1883, two men beat Sprague brutally for mysterious reasons. They escaped to Fargo.

Rumors also began circulating about Sprague's treatment of his daughter. Some thought she was being held against her will in a corner bedroom. Others suggested that she

had had a baby and that Sprague was the father.

On February 7, 1883, on the complaint of a former domestic in the household, Sprague and his sister were arrested for illegal restraint of Louisa. While policemen took the pair to jail, others interviewed the girl. According to the *Moorhead Daily News*, "She had been apprised of the arrest of her father and for a long time was too agitated and frightened to speak. The room which she occupied bore evidence of the fact that she had not been absent from it for a long while.... Her child,



In 1878, Sprague owned nearly half the land in what is now Kurtz and Holy Cross Townships, south of Moorhead. His lands are shaded gray on the map above (HCSCC).

a bright, playful girl of about 10 months old, was with her. When she overcame her feeling so as to speak, she said her father was not the father of the child but would say nothing in regard to her confinement. She said she wished she knew more about the law, and when told that the law would protect her, she asked if it would allow her to go free and marry Mr. Steele. Here then seems to be a clue to the mystery, and it looks highly probable that the Steele referred to is the father of the child and that the girl is kept in close confinement by her father to keep her from communicating with the said [Steele] and procuring a clandestine marriage."

Over the next two days, crowds packed the courtroom to hear two of Sprague's former housekeepers testify. Though they claimed Louise's room was always locked and that she never ate with other family members, neither produced compelling evidence that she was held against her will. Then Louise took the stand. The fifteen-year-old quietly testified that she was not confined, that she simply preferred to stay in her room and that she had a key and could come and go as she chose. Emily Jewell also swore that Louise was not restrained. Then Sprague took the stand. He testified in a similar vein. His attorney asked Sprague if he would like to "make a statement for the purpose of gratifying the public mind... [and] state in his own language the cause of the seclusion of the young woman."

Overcome with emotion, Sprague was unable to continue for several minutes. Then Sprague said that when she was thirteen, his daughter had been sexually assaulted by one of his farm hands, Frederick Steele. Sprague bought a revolver intending to kill Steele. Steele came to his house and stated he had come to marry Louise. Enraged, Sprague threw him out of the house and hurried to get his gun. Steele ran away and never returned.

Sprague claimed he had protected his daughter from a villain and that he had tried time and again to get her to go live with his friends in the East where "she could be better protected from [the] public disgrace that has now been brought upon her." But that she refused to leave his home and "begged him to let her live with him in seclusion, and has chosen against his wishes and influence to live a more secluded life than he thought necessary." His object was "to shield his daughter from public odium and disgrace." Though the charges against Sprague and his sister were promptly dropped, many in Moorhead still harbored resentment against him.

No one is completely bad and undeserving of sympathy. Sprague and Louisa Carlson lost at least three children as infants. She died at age 32 in 1891. Sprague suffered from vision problems and paralysis. In early 1882, he platted an area of south Moorhead as Sprague's First Addition and "offered to donate as much of it to church and school purposes as is wanted." (Of course, having a school or church amongst his residential lots might increase their value.) The fledgling Bishop Whipple School took him up on the offer and acquired two blocks on which they built Bishop Whipple Hall. The school closed after four years and in 1891 Concordia College purchased the site.

In fall 1883, Sprague again stiffed his farm hands when they came for their pay. He claimed that low river levels blocked steamboats from hauling his crop to market. Unconvinced, the men got a rope, placed a noose around his neck and got Sprague to pay up. Newspapers described him as "a mighty poor pay," "a miser" and "phenomenally frugal."

The next year, he stiffed them again. Early in 1883, Sprague had quietly transferred over 9000 acres of land to his sister, Emily Jewell. When fifty farmhands demanded their pay, he claimed that "he had not hired them at all, but they were hired by his sister through her foreman." The men sued and won a judgement but never received a dime. The men hung around all winter issuing threats and demanding satisfaction. Someone stacked hay next to Sprague's house and set it afire, but it was too wet to burn. Another shot at his house with a shotgun.

On February 3, 1885, a barn and unoccupied house on Sprague's farm was torched by arsonists. Newspapers suggested it was the work of the disgruntled workmen but offered little sympathy for Sprague. In a letter to the Moorhead *Daily News*, the former foreman of Sprague's farm pointed out that the buildings, four miles south of town, were ignited about 9:00 pm and "that from the time of the discovery of the fire, Sprague had time to send to Fargo...for teams, and drive them thence to the fire, and save oats and machinery, upon which there was no insurance, while the buildings burned were heavily insured... seems fair evidence that of the fact that it was not unexpected... [and that the arsonist was not] somebody seeking revenge but notoriety and sympathy, which they stand in sore need of."

The foreman also said of Sprague's supposed land holdings "that an examination of the records will disclose the fact that he has never owned but very few acres that



were not mortgaged for their full value.”

He was right in this. Soon after Sprague transferred his land to his sister, she took out a series of mortgages on most of the property.

The 1880s were not a good time to be farming wheat. Overproduction caused the price to drop, and the weather was bad. The Clay County Delinquent Tax List for 1885 indicates Sprague owed back taxes on over 12,400 acres of farm land and nearly half of the lots in Sprague’s First Addition. Over the next five years or so, Sprague lost over 12,800 acres to tax and foreclosure

sales.

Sprague died in Moorhead in 1896. The Coronavirus has closed the Clay County Courthouse and Minnesota Historical Society precluding me from looking into his probate records. They would be interesting reading. Certainly, he was not penniless, but his wealth had to have been reduced to a shell of what he had claimed in the 1870s. He’s buried along with Louisa Carlson and several of their children in Moorhead’s Prairie Home Cemetery.

None of the graves are marked.

## Measuring Tapes

HCSCC member Loren Ingebretsen submitted this poem as a contribution to our COVID-19 Community History project. Share your stories, photos, or videos with us at [WWW.HCSCCONLINE.ORG/COVID19](http://WWW.HCSCCONLINE.ORG/COVID19) if you’d like to help us document the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic for future historians!

In many drawers, out in my shop,  
A common tool I find hanging around.  
Some are longer, some are wider,  
But the same use for each is found!

One bears the name of Stanley,  
While Lufkin marks another,  
And they are used by all the family,  
Dad, Son, Daughter and Mother.

They are: The trusty steel tape,  
And measuring is the reason they are there.  
And when they are used properly,  
They help people cut things square.

This is a season of quarantine,  
And in my shop I have the time  
To turn the mess I find in there,  
Into a workplace quite sublime!

But this quarantine has also given me time to measure,  
This place that I call Home!  
Because our Governor has told us to hunker down  
And not to other places roam!

I think about my neighbors  
Because they are hunkering too,  
And I wonder how they are coping  
With what they can and cannot do.

I write letters to some of them  
To let them know I count their friendship as a gift,  
And I wonder who it benefits most, them or me,  
But in thinking of them, I feel my spirits lift!

One called me on the phone one day,  
Just to say hello,  
And it seemed that the receiver  
Took on a brand new glow!

The news shows husbands blowing kisses,  
To a wife on the other side of the glass,  
And the love between them shows in the teary eyes,  
Like dewdrops on the grass!

And I wonder how my tape  
Out in my shop would fare  
At trying to measure the love  
That was passing through the air!

The seriousness of this pandemic  
I cannot minimize,  
But the quality of our communities  
Cannot be measured by a tape of any size!

I hear people say that together,  
We will see this ordeal through,  
But the measure of how we grow in all of this  
Indeed depends on me, as well as you!

May God’s tape measure find us standing tall.

# Pestilence Rides to the Valley: The Horse Flu of 1872 in Clay County

• *By Davin Wait*



A cartoon from the November 16, 1872, issue of *Harper's Weekly* depicting a horse ailing from the "Great Epizootic." The epizootic (like "epidemic," but in reference to nonhuman animals) was a novel strain of equine influenza that swept through the horse, mule, and donkey populations of North America in 1872-73.

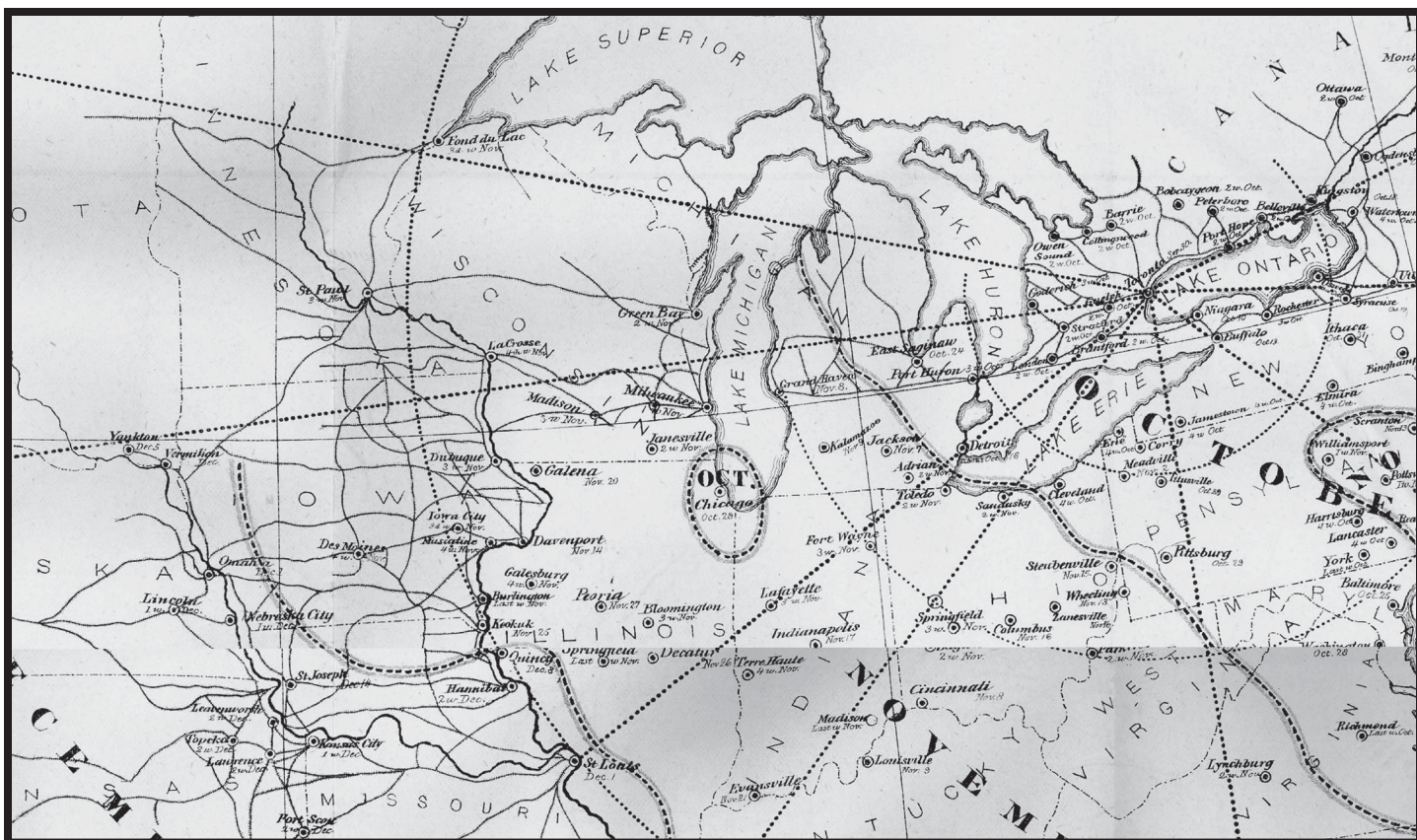
Life in the early years of Clay County, Minnesota, was far more dangerous than it is today. The limitations of public health, sanitation, and science literacy in the 19th century confronted a regular onslaught of typhoid fever, tuberculosis, cholera, and influenza. From 1872 to 1900, that spelled out a life expectancy of roughly 48 years and local cemeteries where half of the graves were filled with children younger than 13. A quarter of those graves belonged to children who hadn't lasted a year, giving Clay County families in the 19th century an infant mortality rate of 160.4 (infant deaths per 1,000 live births). The global high today is Afghanistan's 110.6, followed by Somalia's 94.8. In the United States it's 5.8, and life expectancy here has hovered around 78 years for decades, including a high in 2013. Along with much of Minnesota, Clay County slightly exceeds these outcomes.

Like today, these averages belied numerous disparities. When we consider the destruction of Native American populations that accompanied the expansion of Europe and the United States into the Americas, we get an even more sobering look at the matter. Many historians today estimate that Native Americans lost at least 90%

of their pre-Columbian population and reached a nadir of roughly 250,000 people in 1900 – following another estimated count of 600,000 in 1800. This tremendous loss of life was driven in the Upper Midwest in some part by recorded epidemics of smallpox in 1780 and 1836, tuberculosis in 1800, measles in the direct aftermath of the U.S. - Dakota War in 1862, scarlet fever in 1865, and another vicious bout of smallpox in 1867.

But the first substantial wave of pestilence in Clay County's history wasn't even an epidemic. It was a novel flu virus that local residents suffered indirectly. They called it the Great Epizootic. For weeks at a time, the disease effectively ground America's local, horse-driven economies to a halt. Here in the fledgling Clay County, at the edge of a Northern Pacific Railroad that had crossed the Red River into Fargo only five months and eighty miles earlier, things were no different.

Horses experience influenza much like humans, so the Great Epizootic brought some varying combination and degree of exhaustion, fever and inflammation, coughing, sneezing, nasal discharge, loss of appetite, muscle aches,



Adoniram Judson produced this map charting the direction and speed of the 1872-73 epizootic's transmission across North America for an 1873 report to the American Public Health Association.

and atrophy to nearly all of the horses, donkeys, and mules in North America. Cornell veterinarian Dr. James Law estimated that 99% of the animals had been struck by the disease in an 1874 report to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. Most of the animals suffered for two to three weeks and then returned to work, but approximately 1-2% of the animals died. In some communities mortality rates reached 10%. Dr. Adoniram B. Judson, a New York City sanitary inspector, showed in an 1873 report to the American Public Health Association that stage and railroad horses were especially at risk of death. In New York City, these animals faced a mortality rate of 3.7%.

The epidemic was first identified near Toronto at the end of September. Professor Andrew Smith of the Ontario Veterinary College reported that horses pastured fifteen miles north of the city had simultaneously fallen ill. By Tuesday, October 1, the disease landed in Toronto and by Friday almost every horse in the city's streetcar and livery stables was sick. Smith's report included a straightforward example of the flu's transmission:

*Several Canadian horses were introduced into Detroit on October 10 or 11 suffering from what*

*was supposed to be a catarrh. On arrival they were at once placed in a large stable in the city, but almost immediately transferred to a smaller one to guard against the possibility of contagion. Two days later the disease showed itself in the horses occupying the larger stable, and in three days all of these were attacked. Meanwhile it had appeared in the smaller stable as well. No other cases are known to have occurred in the city until October 20, and soon after this it became general. Two of the imported horses were well enough to work from the first, and were constantly on the streets in the business part of the town.*

Two and a half weeks after the disease appeared in Toronto, it reached Boston and New York City, heavily disrupting stage and streetcar travel. The *New York Times* called it a plague and an epidemic. On Thursday, October 24, it was in Chicago, and by the end of November it was reported in St. Paul, Des Moines, New Orleans, Atlanta, and most of the cities between. An ill-timed shipment of horses destined for Governor Francisco Ceballos y Vargas brought the disease to Cuba. The rugged, isolated landscape of Nicaragua finally stopped it just short of



South America in September of 1873, a year after the outbreak erupted on the banks of Lake Ontario.

News of the disease spread by telegraph, local newspapers, and national magazines like *The Atlantic* and *Harper's Weekly*. The *Red River Gazette* in Glyndon ran its first dispatch about the disease on October 10: "Seven hundred horses in Toronto, Canada, are sick of nasal cattarrh, including nearly all those belonging to streetcar companies and livery stables." The stories continued for months, highlighting the epizootic's damage as it moved through eastern American cities. They were accompanied by speculations about the disease's origins and advertisements for supposed cures, ranging from turpentine linaments to various solutions of potassium acetate. A dispatch sent Saturday, October 26, from Rochester, New York, was published in several Minnesota newspapers and warned of the virulence:

*More fatal cases of the horse disease are reported this morning than during the whole time since the disease first appeared. The streets are deserted of horses, but wagons and carts drawn by men are plenty. The express companies announce that no more goods will be received. The railroad companies cannot deliver freight. Reports from the Erie Canal, particularly between this city and Buffalo, are very discouraging. Many boats have been tied up, nearly all having sick horses. Many have arrived with dead horses on board. The towing companies advertise that they will furnish horses as far as possible, but will not be responsible for any lack of service from them. One of the baggage delivery companies are using a hand car on the street railway track.*

On Thursday, December 5, *Gazette* publisher E. B. Chambers printed the lyrics of a sentimental lamentation called "Poor Old Horse" and prefaced it with a note that the tune "may prove of benefit and soften the heart of some abusive and tyrannical owner of that noble animal, the horse." Rev. Oscar Elmer, whose diary remains one of the few primary sources we have from these days, makes no mention of the epizootic, but he may have taken notice: he spent two days the following week improving his stable. On December 12 the *Gazette* ran a story titled "A City without Horses," noting that business around the country was at a standstill, "for want of horses to draw vehicles and to transport merchandise."

Horse flu struck the Red River Valley around Christmas. On Thursday, December 26, the *Red River Star* in

Moorhead resumed publication following a 10-week hiatus and reported on the disease:

*The Epi Horze Zoo first put in an appearance at this place about two weeks ago and now all, or nearly all, of the horses are under treatment. The stages on the Breckenridge line have been withdrawn in consequence and those running north are hauled by oxen.*

The *Gazette* published an issue the same day, providing greater details about the stage line, which had been running daily between Breckenridge and Moorhead:

*The horse disease has finally reached this place and Moorhead. So many of the stage horses on the line between Fort Garry and Breckenridge are sick, that the stages between Moorhead and Breckenridge have been taken off entirely, and from Moorhead to Fort Garry fiery untamed oxen career over the prairie with the mail at the rate of a mile and half an hour. The McDonald brothers, of Glyndon, started last Tuesday from Moorhead with five teams loaded with tea for Fort Garry, but their teams were taken sick on the road, and after getting as far as Frog Point, they were compelled to give up the trip, and put their horses under treatment. One of the brothers remained to take care of the teams, and the other two took Foot and Walker's line back to Glyndon. The only case of epizootic we have heard of yet in Glyndon is that of one of Hendrick's ponies, which now exhibits all the symptoms, but in a mild form.*

Clay County had railroads, steam engines, steamboats, telegraph lines, and even a bridge into Dakota Territory by this time. Clay County was the Industrial Revolution, but it still ran on old-fashioned horsepower. The Northern Pacific had brought the power of the machine, but horses and mules unloaded it. They were vital to just about every operation in the Red River Valley, and they would be for several more decades, before tractors and trucks started to lighten their load. In 1870, the U.S. Census of Agriculture tallied 46 horses and seven mules for the 132 people in the county. In 1880, that count jumped to 1356 horses and 251 mules for a human population that had grown to 5896. This amounts to roughly one horse or mule for every three people during Clay County's earliest years. Each of these horses was an investment, too. Tax rolls for 1872 show healthy horses in Moorhead regularly assessed at \$100. So when this new strain of horse influenza came to town, it posed a major threat

— if even only a shortlived threat — to just about every operation in the Red River Valley.

Some of the disease's damage in Clay County may have been mitigated by the timing of the epizootic's arrival, as residents had already hunkered down for a winter of subzero temperatures by the time the disease arrived. Rural isolation would have helped, as well. An 1873 report from the Minnesota Statistics Bureau concluded that Minnesota horses fared better than those in the eastern cities and states.

However, an influenza epizootic of this magnitude still had a tremendous effect that's been measured a few different ways — beyond the clear weeks-long disruptions to commerce, communication, and convenience for most Americans. Some point to voter turnout on Tuesday, November 5, in the 1872 presidential election between Ulysses S. Grant and Horace Greeley. According to the American Presidency Project at UC - Santa Barbara, turnout among the voting age population that year reached a 20-year low. Counted at 71%, turnout in 1872 was dwarfed by that in 1868 (78%) and 1876 (82%).

Even more historians highlight the epizootic's role in the Great Boston Fire, which laid bare the inadequacy of human power compared to real, actual horsepower.

**CANADIAN HORSE DISEASE!**  
**FURGUSON'S WONDERFUL OIL WILL CURE IT.**

This disease is an Influenza more resembling Diphtheria than Catarrh. It affects the throat and glands, and, if neglected, passes to the lungs, producing death. Apply the Oil to the throat and neck immediately upon the appearance of the disease, and it will cure by preventing it going to the lungs.

This Oil is now used by the CHICAGO Street Railway Companies, Omnibus Lines, Express, Livery and Sale Stables. Also, by the Street Railways and Livery Stables of CLEVELAND, DETROIT, TOLEDO, TORONTO, MONTREAL, NEW YORK and in the NEW ENGLAND STATES with more efficiency, and greater success than any other remedy known to

An advertisement for Furguson's Wonderful Oil, a supposed cure for the 1872 influenza epizootic published in the Red River Gazette on Thursday, December 19, 1872.

The massive, two-day fire began on Saturday, November 9, and took form in the middle of Boston's epizootic outbreak. Unfortunately, heavy fire engines need heavy horses. The city reportedly lost 776 buildings over 65 acres of land and around \$75 million in property value. Louis Sullivan, a student at MIT at the time of the fire, recalled a fire engine arriving too late to a burning warehouse: "The people at curbside waited, but still no firemen came. Fire engulfed the warehouse, then its roof and floors collapsed. Finally a fire engine arrived, too late. Men, not horses, pulled the apparatus." The Gazette ran a dispatch a few days later on Thursday, November 14, illustrating the city's continued woes:

*Many of the street cars in Boston, since the appearance of the horse disease, have been drawn by employees of the company and are very appropriately denominated Pullman cars.*

The outbreak's greatest influence, however, might have been felt in the arenas of professional and popular science. The epizootic invited great speculation about the technology of steam carriages. Of course, it also invited hucksters to sell various oils and vinegar bitters to desperate Americans and overconfident locals to share their own personal diagnoses and prescriptions. It was on this point, the era's ongoing debates about the transmission of disease, that the epizootic took a central role. Biology at this time was undergoing several radical transformations, including a prominent shift from various miasma theories (supposing that atmospheric pressure, poisonous vapors, or otherwise bad air were to blame for human illnesses) and toward the various germ theories popularized by folks like chemist and microbiologist Louis Pasteur. As Columbia College president F. A. P. Barnard noted in another 1873 report to the American Public Health Association, "The Germ Theory of Disease and its Relation to Hygiene," germ theories weren't necessarily new at this time (at least among the world's small circle of professional scientists), but recent work in the field still had major and controversial implications for medicine and the origins of life — and, thus, the very nature of Humans, Earth, and God. Medical reports on the epizootic from Law and Judson acknowledged these competing hypotheses and ultimately pointed to communicable germs as the plague's culprit, and quarantine as the defense.

Folks outside of those small circles of professional scientists, like the residents of Clay County and a huge majority of the planet, were still decades — maybe centuries — from reaching a similar conclusion.

# HCSCC Summer 2020 Calendar

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## FILM

### ***I Plan to Vote with My Daughters: The Story of Women's Suffrage in North Dakota***

Wednesday, August 5, 6:00PM  
Online (Free)

## EXHIBITION CLOSING

### **The Red River Watercolor Society's National Juried Watermedia Exhibition**

4th Floor Gallery  
Saturday, August 8  
Hjemkomst Center (Admission)

## TALK

### **Ann Braaten, *Extending the Home to Gain the Vote: Women's Clubs Work for the Vote***

Wednesday, August 12, 6:00PM  
Online (Free)

## EXHIBITION OPENING

### **Black and White in Black and White: Images of Dignity, Hope, and Diversity in America**

4th Floor Gallery  
Saturday, August 15  
Hjemkomst Center (Admission)

## TALK

### **Terry Shoptaugh, *Sons of the Wild Jackass: The Nonpartisan League in North Dakota***

Tuesday, August 18, 6:00PM  
Online (Free)

## BOARD MEETING

Wednesday, August 19, 4:00PM  
Online (Free)

## TALK

### **Deb White, *Nellie Griswold Francis & Everywoman Suffrage Club: Celebrating Minnesota's Black Women Suffragists***

Wednesday, August 19, 6:00PM  
Online (Free)

## FILM

### ***Iron Jawed Angels***

Wednesday, August 26, 7:00PM  
Fargo Theater (Free)

## ANNUAL MEETING

Wednesday, September 16, 4:00PM  
Online (Free)

## EXHIBITION OPENING

### **HCSCC Collections Showcase: Medical Artifacts**

3rd Floor Hall  
Saturday, September 26  
Hjemkomst Center (Admission)

## EXHIBITION CLOSING

### **Black & White in Black & White**

4th Floor Gallery  
Sunday, September 27  
Hjemkomst Center (Admission)

## EXHIBITION CLOSING

### **Quilt National '19**

Heritage Hall  
Wednesday, September 30  
Hjemkomst Center (Admission)

## EXHIBITION OPENING

### **Red River Girl: From Telemark to the Buffalo**

Heritage Hall  
Saturday, October 10  
Hjemkomst Center (Admission)

## EXHIBITION OPENING

### **A Century of Civic Engagement: League of Women Voters Minnesota**

Heritage Hall  
Saturday, October 10  
Hjemkomst Center (Admission)

## Joining Us Online?

Perfect! Go to [WWW.HCSCCONLINE.ORG/EVENTS](http://WWW.HCSCCONLINE.ORG/EVENTS) or click on EVENTS at the top of our homepage. You'll find links to event broadcasts via Zoom and Facebook – and don't forget to follow us on Facebook and Instagram!



**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.



**We've Reopened the Museum!**

**Saturdays: 9-5 | Sunday - Friday: 12-5**