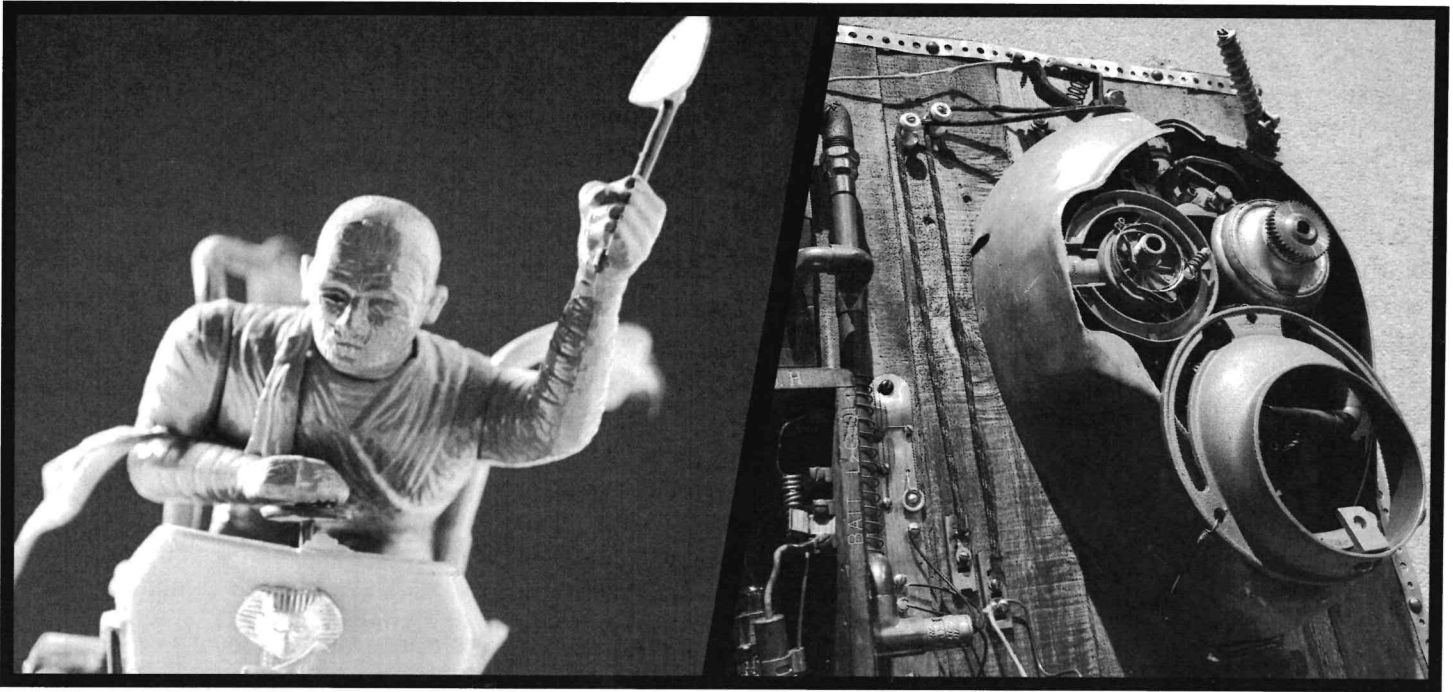


— The Hourglass —



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(Left) An Aurora 1964 model of the Mummy Chariot, now on display in HCSCC's *America's Monsters* (Steven Zerby);
(Right) Michael Lalibertine's *I, Frankenstein*, now on display in the FMVA's *Monsters, Marvels, & Memorabilia* (HCSCC).

Monsters Invade the Hjemkomst

HCSCC's exhibition of *America's Monsters, Superheroes, and Villains: Our Culture at Play* has brought a fun energy to the Hjemkomst Center since it opened on Tuesday, October 1. Now, after hosting the Hjemkomst Monster Ball, dozens of school tours, and Pangea, we are quite certain that our museum visitors — of all ages — love this deep dive into the pop culture world of horror movies, comic books, and action figures.

Now we've added a local look at that same material with the new Fargo Moorhead Visual Artists' (FMVA) Constraint Art Show, *Monsters, Marvels, & Memorabilia*. The FMVA put this show together with our exhibition of *America's Monsters* in mind, and we are so happy with the result: a fun multimedia art exhibition showcasing local art, local artists, and local talent. Join us this winter to take a look...if you dare!



Slough Apes, pg 16

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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



It is a pleasure serving HCSCC as president. We have a fine Board of Directors and a wonderful staff. The individual members of both bring together many talents to make for a knowledgeable and effective organization. As a member, you too can be proud of HCSCC.

HCSCC's Board of Directors is currently working on two studies with two different consultants. One is developing a long-term plan and the other is working to identify our board's strengths and weaknesses — in the hopes of improving.

As the board works through these projects, I think of the privilege I've had to serve on many boards, both governmental and nonprofit. Most of these experiences have been exciting and meaningful, though others have been painful. I've learned a few lessons from these experiences.

- 1) Group decisions are usually better than individual decisions. The preferences you bring to the discussion are often tempered and enlightened by other points of view. The wisdom of the whole group will make for a better decision.
- 2) Board loyalty is important. All members must be loyal to the decisions made by the group even if it differs from their own preference. Members should advocate for their preferred positions, but it is vital to stand loyal to the ultimate decision.
- 3) Boards set goals and parameters. The executive director and staff carry out the organization goals as they choose, though they must adhere to board directives. The board directs the executive director, and the executive director directs staff.
- 4) Board diversity enhances effectiveness. The more diverse the board — in relation to gender, race, background, wealth, etc. — the more effective the board will be. Diversity may decrease efficiency, but it will increase the board's effectiveness. In other words, meetings and decisions may take more time, but broader input builds better outcomes.
- 5) All boards can benefit from training. No matter how effective, boards improve with training, including self-evaluation and group reflection carried out on a regular basis.

-Jon Evert



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HCSCC News & Events

World War I Nurses of Clay County

On **Tuesday, December 17**, HCSCC programming director Markus Krueger digs into the lives and times of Clay County's World War I nurses, women who served both abroad in European field hospitals and at home on the local front of the 1918 flu pandemic. Krueger will draw from his research for our current exhibition of *War, Flu, & Fear: World War I and Clay County*.

Admission is free and the lecture begins at 6:00PM in Heritage Theater. We encourage visitors to plan enough time to explore *War, Flu, & Fear: World War I and Clay County*.

Northern Prairie Fiber Artists to Gather for Rok Day on January 4

Our friends at the Northern Prairie Fiber Arts will be back at the Hjemkomst Center this winter to observe Rok, or St. Distaff's, Day. This pre-industrial custom called for women to return to work after the 12 days of Christmas (just before men were to return to work on Plough Monday). St. Distaff, of course, does not exist; and the holiday is more often marked by play than work.

Join our textile artists with your sewing, knitting, and other textile projects (or just to watch and ask questions) on **Saturday, January 4**, from 10:00AM to 3:00PM.

Dr. Christopher Lehman on Slaveholders in Minnesota – Saturday, February 22

From the 1840s through the end of the Civil War, Minnesota leaders invited slaveholders and their wealth into Minnesota. This group included men like Henry Sibley, Henry Rice, and Sylvanus Lowry, and their efforts were encouraged by far more Minnesotans, including six hundred residents who petitioned the legislature to legalize slavery for vacationing southerners.

On **Saturday, February 22**, we host Dr. Christopher Lehman for a history of slavery and slaveholders in Minnesota. Lehman is a professor of Ethnic Studies at St. Cloud State University and the author of both *Slavery's Reach: Southern Slaveholders in the North Star State* and *Slavery in the Upper Mississippi Valley*.

Admission is free and the lecture begins at 1:00PM.

A "Ralph's Corner Bar" History Harvest at Rustica on Tuesday, January 28

Please join us at Rustica on **Tuesday, January 28**, from 5:00PM to 7:00PM to share stories, photos, and artifacts from your experiences at Ralph's Corner Bar. We are preparing for a future exhibition on the Moorhead icon and we need your help! Rustica is offering free appetizers, and HCSCC staff will be available with cameras, recorders, and scanners to document your materials — some of which will be included in our exhibition.

Slough Apes & Hairy Men: A History of Bigfoot in the Red River Valley

Since the late-1960s, dozens of Bigfoot sightings have been reported on the eastern edges of the Red River Valley, most frequently clustered around the Vergas Trails near Maplewood State Park. On **Tuesday, January 21**, HCSCC communications manager Davin Wait shares his research on these creatures — focusing on the Vergas Hairy Man and Ulen Slough Ape — placing them in the larger context of the Bigfoot-Yeti legend.

Admission is free and the lecture begins at 6:00PM.

Supporting HCSCC on Giving Hearts Day

On **Thursday, February 13**, we're taking part in the Giving Hearts Day fundraiser. Please support our work at HCSCC with a donation — online or in the museum!

HCSCC Wine Classes Continue to Thrive

In collaboration with HCSCC member/donors Sam Wai, Ron Ellingson, and Randy Lewis, we're continuing our popular wine class series through the winter and spring. Consider joining us **Thursday, February 13**, for "Wines of Portugal" or **Thursday, April 2**, for "Wines of Austria."

Admission for both events is \$50, reservations are required, and registration details are included in our semi-monthly eNewsletter.

Put the Annual Meeting on Your Calendar

On **Thursday, May 7**, we host our annual meeting, featuring Ann Braaten's keynote. Mark your calendars!



Letter from the Executive Director

Maureen Kelly Jonason

I've been in a particularly festive mood lately. I don't know if it's the sparkling wine class and Comstock House Victorian Christmas decorations or the McDonald's commercials, but I have a hankerin' to make Christmas cookies and put up some mistletoe! Maybe it's because it will be the last holiday season in our house of 25 years before we downsize to a condo. Maybe it's the later Thanksgiving that has kept gratitude in my heart that much longer. Maybe it's the coffee visits with members I've been enjoying, hearing about what they like about HCSCC and what they'd like to see us do in the future.

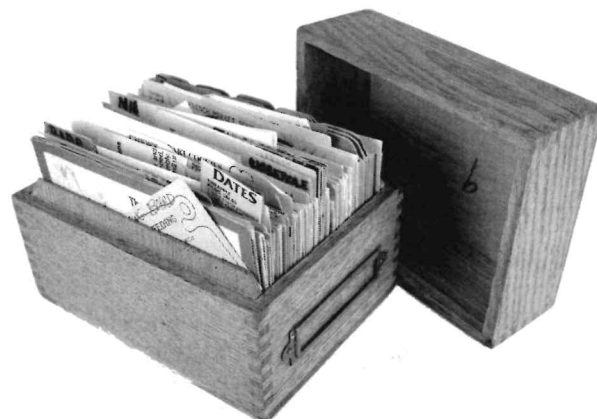
I recently went looking for our famous Kelly family cookie recipe, the one we believed all our lives was a family secret, the ones my mom called BonBons, round balls of cream and sugar cookies filled with chocolate chips and frosted with creamy red and green frosting with a chocolate chip on top like a jaunty cap. The ones my mother would only make one batch at a time so as not to upset the delicate balance of chemistry and magic. We didn't know they were a Betty Crocker standard until decades into adulthood. But that did not diminish the fun of finding the recipe on the back of an envelope in my mother's beautiful handwriting. I haven't seen her handwriting in the two years since she passed and I found I missed it.

Handwriting is soon to be a thing of the past, or so they tell me, those that know. Some children are no longer taught to read cursive. "I don't read cursive," a youngster told me one day, as if it were a foreign language or calligraphy – which it is in a way – a decorative way of communicating in writing that goes beyond the utilitarian printing. Another casualty of computers – like restraint – or sanity. Let's hope cookies don't fall out of style the way cursive has.

Hold on to those hand-written letters, notes, and recipes of old because they are a treasure trove of past stories. They are, in some cases, the only window into the past that we have to solve the mysteries of what happened "over there" and "back then." Historians rely on the hand-written accounts of the major and minor events in life to tell us today what happened 100 years ago. True, what happens today is apparently being recorded as we speak on computer chips some place, but what occurred in the hearts and minds of human beings even fifty years ago is written down in letters and diaries, some yet to be discovered or rediscovered so that the stories they hold can be told and held dear by another generation. I am feeling particularly fortunate to be in the history business these days because what we do matters to those who came before, those we serve today, and those we will leave behind some day.

Enjoy your cookies and the cursive in your holiday season's cards.

-MKJ



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.

HCSCC Exhibitions

The FMVA Constraint Show: Monsters, Marvels, & Memorabilia *Heritage Hall (through March 8)*

Each year, members of the Fargo-Moorhead Visual Artists (FMVA) challenge themselves to exhibit work created within specific parameters, or constraints. The resulting annual Constraint Art Show offers a focused, multimedia statement showcasing the tremendous talent and creativity of Fargo-Moorhead artists. In the recent past this show has taken shape as *Touchable*, a 2016 interactive art show, and *Time Warp*, an historical art show exhibited in the Comstock House in 2017.

This year's theme was inspired by our exhibition of *America's Monsters, Superheroes and Villains: Our Culture At Play*, so this fall our members and visitors are invited to explore a world of terrors, superpowers, and pop culture nostalgia as seen through the minds and talents of the FMVA. Immerse yourself in local art and see what's lurking in the shadows of Fargo-Moorhead!

This year's Constraint Art Show is sponsored by The Arts Partnership and the North Dakota Council on the Arts.

America's Monsters, Superheroes, & Villains: Our Culture at Play *4th Floor Gallery (through January 31)*

An award-winning exhibition by Minneapolis-based collectors SuperMonsterCity!, *America's Monsters, Superheroes and Villains: Our Culture At Play* offers a wonderfully monstrous survey of America's pop culture supernatural in vintage toys, models, and posters.

The exhibition features over 350 vintage original toys, posters, advertising materials, television commercials and movie trailers in this comprehensive exhibition telling the stories of six decades of America's cultural icons. *America's Monsters* playfully illustrates how the playtime icons of American culture reflect our country's changing ideals and serve as historical documentation of our nation's emerging creativity and evolving norms and conventions. Museum-goers will come face-to-face with vintage objects and artifacts that illuminate the changes in toy design, children's play, and social mores across 60 years.

Artist First *4th Floor Gallery (February 8 through March 31)*

On **Saturday, February 8**, we open a collaborative art exhibition with Arts Access for All called *Artist First*. The exhibition was developed with Arts Access for All accessibility advocates Jesse & Sherry Shirek as an opportunity to highlight the talents of Fargo-Moorhead artists who identify as having a disability. Those talents are showcased here in a multimedia art exhibition.

Also, please join us for the *Artist First* opening reception from 1:00PM to 4:00PM on **Saturday, February 8**. HCSCC and Arts Access for All will be joined by participating artists, and a program will feature remarks and awards.

Artist First was made possible in part by a grant from the Lake Region Arts Council, made available through a Minnesota State Legislative appropriation.

Grand Army of the Republic: The Boys in Blue *Heritage Hall (March 31 through June 21)*

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.

Also, please join us at the Hjemkomst Center for an opening reception held **Tuesday, March 31**, from 5:00PM to 8:00PM. We'll enjoy live music, refreshments, and a history of Felix Battles from HCSCC's Markus Krueger.

War, Flu, & Fear: World War I and Clay County *Heritage Hall (through December, 2020)*

In 1917 Americans were thrust into a brutal global war. The eighteen months that followed brought casualties, armistice, and a global flu pandemic that only subsided in the spring of 1920. Clay County responded with courage, sacrifice, fear, and disillusionment.

War, Flu, and Fear: World War I and Clay County is sponsored by BNSF Railway Foundation.

Donations & Accessions to HCSCC's Collection, 2019

Donations

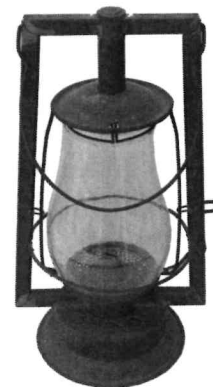
1961 wedding dress and going-away outfit; Ojibway jingle dress used in North American tribal dances; Greater Moorhead Days gavel; autobiographical stories from ELL and ESL students; Junkyard Brewery "Mainline: Hoppy Collaboration" pint can; men's suit and everyday clothing, Agsco cotton feed sack, Martinson Jewelry silverware cloth storage bags; L. Milo Matson Furriers women's fur coat; oak dresser from Comstock Hotel, one volume *The Bernhardson Saga*, print of woodcut image of Bernhardson Cabin by Stephanie Chase; embroidered pillowcases and dresser scarf, crocheted apron, stationery envelope, wooden art easel, Comstock Hotel paper coaster; Ulen area photo postcards and Norwegian-language pamphlets and magazines; (3) photoprints, James and Marguerita Garrity; (4) photoprints, GN train derailment south of Moorhead, 5-28-1931; 4-H Scrapbook; canvas army rucksack; Moorhead souvenirs, business tokens and ephemera, WWII papers and memorabilia; copies of photos and documents re: Buffalo River State Park; plaques and flags, gifts from Moorhead's international sister cities; women's suffrage materials; posters from bands that played at Ralph's Corner Bar in late 1990s, black t-shirt from Les Dirty French Men, band that played at Ralph's Corner Bar in late 1990s; wicker wheelchair, used in Tansem Twp; scrapbook and material from Highland Grove Church, diplomas from Hitterdal School, photos re: Hitterdal/Ulen, "Saving Up for my Mink" cardboard bank, rolling pin from 1938 Felton Senior Class; photos and ephemera from Aamodt store, Barnesville; photos, archival material, art and artifacts from Thortvedt farm, Glyndon; metal "chicken catcher" hook, used in rural Moorhead; correspondence with Bergquist family re: Bergquist Log Cabin; papers, magazines, newspapers and pinback buttons re: local and national political figures and presidential visits to Moorhead and Fargo; painting of hunting dog "Susie" by Orabel Thortvedt; *The Volume Library*, 1954 and *Library of Health*, 1926, tabletop pinball game, Gilbert Big-Boy Tool Chest, and X-acto kit in wooden box; photo print, panoramic photo of St. Ansgar's Hospital and Clay County Courthouse,

early 1900s; Moorhead High School and Concordia College diplomas of Harris Christianson and telegrams sent to Christianson's parents re: his death in WWII; photographs of Roeschmann, Johnk, Koepke family members from Sabin, MN area; copies of genealogical info re: Roeschmann family; ephemera from Balmer Motor Co., Moorhead and C400 Club plaque; Norwegian *Bible*, 1890 and mechanical scrolling book, *Illustrated Life of Christ*, 1896; "Americanize Your Home" flag kits, sold at Johnson store in Hawley, papers re: Bring the Hjemkomst Home proposal, and photo prints: parade in Hawley, Johnson store parade float, Hawley American Legion band, group of men ca1955, and Johnson store interior, ca1940s; two bricks from Ralph's Corner Bar

Donors

Al Aamodt, Horace, ND; Kathleen Andrews, Fargo; Bob Belsly, Moorhead; Buffalo River State Park, Glyndon; Kathryn Carlson, Moorhead; Larry Carlson, Moorhead; City of Moorhead; Rodney Curtis, Fargo; Delores Gabbard; Cheryl Gamel, Mapleton, ND; In Memory of Ray & Pearl Grover; Sharon Haberlach, Moorhead; Connie Hauger, Oro Valley, AZ; Hedstrom Family, Anoka, MN; Deb Hoekstra, Apple Valley, MN; Gary E. Johnson, Hawley; James M. Kaplan, Fargo; René Parke & Laura Knoll, In Memory of Basil D. Walker; Markus Krueger, Moorhead; Gloria Lee, Georgetown; Jack Lind, Dent, MN; Gwen McCausland, Brookings, SD; Donna McMaster, Moorhead; Barbara Martin, New Vienna, OH; Jane Matthees, Fargo; Craig and Liz Nelson, Moorhead; Lyle Nelson, Saint Paul, MN; Donna Olson, Moorhead; Joanne Reitan, Moorhead; In Memory of Rachel Rustad; Shirley Rustad, Fargo; Cathy Selberg Bridwell, Silver Spring, MD; Rhoda Viker, Moorhead; Kelly Wambach, Sabin; Nancy Wiggs, Huntsville, AL

(Right) A lantern donated to the Clay County Historical Society in 1955 by Ulen's Mrs. William Bjerke (HCSCC).



Remembering Hitterdal's 1919 Plane Crash

• *By Markus Krueger*

CLA

VOL. 27. NO 13

PLANE IN FATAL CRASH AT HITTERDAL

On Wednesday afternoon the little village of Hitterdal received its first visit from an airplane. One hour after the arrival of the machine a horrible accident occurred, when the plane was making a landing, resulting in the death of two children and the injury of half a score of others.

Lieutenant Edward Axberg, an ex army aviator had been in Hawley for the past ten days with his Curtiss airplane and on Wednesday afternoon, the weather being very favorable for flying, he made a number of flights, carrying passengers each time. In the late afternoon the lieutenant decided to go to Hitterdal and fill a short engagement at that town, so he accordingly made the trip, arriving there at about three o'clock, making a landing on a plot of smooth ground just west of the Braaten residence.

Henry Hitterdal was the first passenger to go up in the machine and he was followed by Mr. Warling. Anton Melbye then stepped into the machine and rode for ten minutes.

While the flights were in progress a large crowd had gathered and an open sleigh driven by Merwin Melby and containing about twenty school children came along. This sleigh was one of the Consolidated School rigs for carrying the children to and from school. The driver of the sleigh stopped his team in order to give the children an opportunity to see the plane make a landing. This action on the part of the driver may or may not have contributed a cause for the accident, but at any rate it appears that the sleigh stood right in the path of the descending plane. The pilot of the machine, seeing the danger, dropped his plane to the ground more rapidly than he ordinarily would have done. According to his statement he saw that the machine would

It was a pleasant late-October afternoon in 1919. A crowd gathered around a field to see the first airplane ever to visit Hitterdal, Minnesota. Pilot Edward Axberg was offering rides for pay. Although Axberg operated out of Enderlin, ND, this event was a homecoming for him. In his flights over Hitterdal that day, and in the previous ten days he spent barnstorming in Hawley, Axberg would be looking down on the fields he worked as the son of Swedish immigrant farmers in Eglon Township. In the previous seven years, Edward Axberg had gone from farm laborer to bank clerk (first in Enderlin, then in Spokane) to 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army. As a pilot in 1919, he was one of our region's aviation pioneers.

Like many early aviators, Lt. Axberg learned to fly in basic training during the Great War. It was a dangerous but exhilarating job. Arthur Johnson, a professor who left Moorhead Normal School to serve as an Army pilot in 1917, wrote of his first flight "I can't say it was exactly pleasant, for there seemed too much responsibility in it for pleasure. It reminded me of a combination of the feeling I had when I first drove a car thru a crowded street, and the sensation of ski jumping." Soldiers grew used to the site of airplanes in the service. Albert Erickson from Rollag wrote home from the trenches in the summer of 1918 "Airplanes are about as numerous in France as crows in Minnesota, so I'll never go to a fair to see one again." It was not quite a year since the war ended and the boys were coming home to start the rest of their lives. Lt. Edward Axberg had returned to Enderlin, ordered an airplane to be delivered by train, built a hanger on the edge of town, and for the previous five months he had been barnstorming across the region. He holds the record as being the first airplane to land in many a small town around here.

That October afternoon in 1919, the people of Hitterdal

The Halloween 1919 issue of the Clay County Herald (Oct. 31) carried tragic news out of Hitterdal (HCSCC).

gathered around the flat field amid the rolling hills on the east edge of town that Lt. Axberg was using for his runway. One at a time (his Curtiss biplane could hold no more), people climbed aboard and payed \$10 for a 10-minute plane ride before Axberg returned to earth to pick up his next customer. One wonders if his customers knew that just two months before in Sutton, ND, Lt. Axberg's plane crashed, killing his customer and leaving the pilot with a broken wrist, collarbone, and ribs. Flying was dangerous in 1919.

At about 4pm, young Mervin Melbye was driving the horse-drawn open sleigh that served as the Hitterdal school bus. He stopped to give the 20-or-so kids on the bus a better view of the airplane. He stopped in the wrong place. The plane was coming in for a landing. Lt. Axberg saw the school bus full of kids directly in his path and tried to avoid them. He could not swerve left or right because of the crowd that formed on either side of the field. He touched down early in an attempt to take off again and glide over the bus. It almost worked. His plane, or rather his corpulent customer, Hitterdal butcher Anton Melbye, was too heavy. Either his wing or the rear wheel of his plane clipped the sleigh full of children, overturning the bus. People screamed. The horses, no longer attached to the bus, took off, dragging driver Mervin Melbye behind them by their reins. Mervin was unconscious and badly injured by the time the horses were calmed.

All of the kids on the overturned bus were taken into nearby homes to be cared for while others rushed to fetch Dr. Heimark from Hawley and Dr. Meigen from Ulen. Two children would not survive. Clifford Lomsdahl, 8 years old, died shortly after the accident of a broken neck. Alice Moe, 13 years old, suffered a fractured skull and passed away shortly after midnight. Of the survivors, Mervin Melbye, his younger sister Ruth, and Clarence Solomonson were the worst hurt.

Sheriff McDonald, County Attorney Garfield Rustad and County Coroner E. G. Melander conducted an investigation and appointed six local men to serve as a jury to decide if anyone was at fault. They judged it to be an accident and assigned no blame, but one wonders if pilot Edward Axberg or bus driver Mervin Melbye blamed themselves for the tragedy. Lt. Edward Axberg died in a plane crash in 1927.

Re-Discovering

Just shy of 100 years later, my father-in-law, Jim Steen,

called me on the phone. Had I ever heard of a plane crash in Hitterdal? I had not. Jim told me that he just heard about it at work from Mike Opatril. Mike was casually browsing through his copy of Hitterdal's centennial book and he noticed that the very next day, October 17, would be the 100th anniversary of an airplane crash in Hitterdal that killed two children in a school bus. Mike, who lives just outside of Hitterdal, spread the word to his coworkers, friends, and neighbors. It was decided that they would commemorate the event with a gathering at Hitterdal Liquors.

We all wanted to know more, so I dug into the archives. I'd like to take you through the process of uncovering this information because it shows the kind of resources we have here at HCSCC's Clay County Archives. Knowing what resources we have at the Hjemkomst Center may be helpful to you in uncovering your own local story.

The first place I went for information was the very book that inspired Mike Opatril to get his friends together in Hitterdal the next day: *Hitterdal – 100 Years – 1884-1984*. The Clay County Archives has several shelves of community history books like this. They were usually compiled by local families to celebrate anniversaries of the founding of their town or church. Many of these histories were written down in the 1970-80s to mark centennials, and are taken from the living memory of the children and grandchildren of the founding generation. Whenever I meet anyone who contributed to any of these books, I thank them profusely because these books are so helpful to our understanding of major events, daily life, family histories, and building histories. The Hitterdal book gave me a date – October 17, 1919 – and a description of the tragedy. Now it's off to read the paper.

Clay County once had as many as half a dozen newspapers at a time. We have on microfilm just about every issue of every local newspaper dating back to 1872, and you're welcome to read them. For news about Hitterdal in 1919, we figured the Ulen *Union* and Hawley's Clay County *Herald* would be the best sources. Both were weekly papers, so I knew the October 17 issue would not have the story, since the events happened at 4pm after the paper was printed and delivered that day. I was surprised, though, to see no mention of a crash that killed two children in the next week's issue of the papers, but it was headline news on October 31. I found three articles in the two papers and all of them agreed that the plane crashed on the 29th of October, not October 17 like the book said. Researchers are used to conflicting

information. No matter how good a source is, whether it's a town centennial book or Grandma's memory or articles in this newsletter, all people get things wrong sometimes. It's best to gather multiple sources and go with what makes the most sense.

So we checked our index of death records. When someone dies in Clay County, it is written down in death records, which we have on file in the archives. They list the date of death, the cause of death, some family information, and more. Looking up the names of the two children, we can confirm that little Clifford Lomsdahl died of a broken neck on October 29 and Alice Moe succumbed to her skull fracture the next day. I think we can confirm that the writer of the Hitterdal centennial book wrote down the wrong date in the account of the event.

That takes care of when, but what about where? We looked back at our two sources of information — the memories written down in the Hitterdal book and the accounts in the three newspaper articles — looking for any hints as to where the crash occurred. Each described the location: "north of the lake in an area east of the old Roos house," "on the east side near the Peter Solum Residence," and "west of the Braaten Residence." The

Hitterdal centennial book contains a short biography of Peter Solum and an old photo of his house, and there is a photo of the Roos house on another page. Could they still be standing? And where are they?

I looked through our leather-bound tax record books for the names Solum, Roos and Braaten. These books give descriptions of the property people own, once you learn how to read it. The problem is, I can't find the Roos or Braaten families in Hitterdal property tax records (they probably rented their homes rather than owned the property) but I did find Peter Solum. He owned Lots 5 and 6 of Block 3 in the Original Town Site of Hitterdal.

Now I can get out our plat maps! Humans have divided planet earth with invisible lines so we can buy rectangular chunks of it, live on it, grow plants on it, and tell roving children to get off of our lawn. Plat maps in our archives tell us how our county is divided and who owns what. I printed off the plat of the Original Town Site section of Hitterdal and found the lots that Peter Solum owned on the east edge of town.

I opened Google Maps on my computer to compare modern satellite imagery of Hitterdal to the 1880s plat



A 1939 USDA aerial photograph of Hitterdal. The 'X' on the right side is added to mark the 1919 crash site of a Curtiss biplane near the intersection of Wilson Street and North Shore Drive, just east of the Roos and Solum homes (HCSCC).

map of the Original Town Site. It is easily recognizable over a century later – same roads, same blocks. A nice thing about GoogleMaps is that the giant tech corporation has cars with cameras on top of them that drive down every street in America taking pictures from all angles. This gives us the ability to switch from a satellite view to a street view and virtually walk down the road. On my virtual stroll, I see a house that looks an awful lot like the picture of Peter Solum's house just where Peter Solum's house ought to be, and directly across the street appears to be "the old Roos place." So the plane crashed just east of these two houses and west of the Braaten house. But where are the Braatens?

I looked for the Braatens in the 1920 US Census through Ancestry.com. It didn't give me their address, but I found them living on Wilson Street right next to the entry for Peter Solum. Carl and Ingaborg Braaten were farmers, so it made sense for them to live on or past the edge of town. I couldn't find them in the Hitterdal centennial book or in property records in the Register of Deeds (at least not for this property), so I hit a dead end. That's okay. You gotta stop digging sometime and I had already collected a lot of clues.

There was one more source to try before I left the Hjemkomst Center. This Ed Axberg of Enderlin seems like just the kind of guy that I would be interested in if I worked at the Enderlin Historical Society, so I emailed our friends at that museum to see if they had heard of him. Museum co-director Susan Schlecht responded with three local newspaper articles that she wrote about Lt. Axberg's antics as well as a write-up about him in the book *Ransom County's Loyal Defenders* by Michael Knudson. This pilot was more interesting and more important to our local history than I realized.

You can only learn so much in the basement of the Hjemkomst Center. Time for a road trip! Jim Steen (my wife's step-dad) picked me up and we took the country roads to Hitterdal. Jim is a lover of local history with deep family roots in the county, which is why he serves on the board of directors for the Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County. Along the way he pointed out the Steen homestead and the site of the old schoolhouse where his great-grandpa rescued the children after their teacher was shot by her crazed admirer...a story for another time. We decided to find the crash site while there was still light, before we met with the others at the bar. We confirmed in person that those two houses I saw on GoogleMaps must be the Solum and Roos homes. We drove around a bit

exploring. I walked up to the crest of a hill, to a field that was just to the east of the houses. I saw rolling hills all around except for the flat and even ground on which I was standing, good enough for the runway of a barnstormer. This must be the place. I imagined the crowd a century ago, and the school bus, and the low-flying plane. I turned around and saw a beautiful view of Flora Lake on a sunny late October afternoon before the colored leaves fell from the trees. The crash happened on a day just like this.

Re-Remembering in Hitterdal

When Jim and I arrived at Hitterdal Liquors I was surprised that two tables were already full of people and we soon had to pull another table over for our growing party. Get-togethers like this are common for this group of friends, family and coworkers. The excuse to gather that day was marking the centennial of a plane crash four blocks away, but the mood that night was as jolly as you would imagine a gathering of friends in a hometown bar to be. And while much of the conversation meandered about topics like fishing, the building trades (most at the table are in the concrete business), and speculation on the bathroom accommodations for the guy in the giant crane above downtown Fargo, the conversation kept coming back to the plane crash. Mike had brought several copies of the three articles we found in the archives and many at the table had already memorized the details. The maps and photos I brought with me were passed around. Overall probably 20 people gathered in Hitterdal that evening to mark the crash, which is pretty impressive for a town of 201 people.

As we chatted, some of the regulars came in for supper, stopped by our table and read the articles from a century ago. Some men were of an age that their parents would have surely known the story of the crash, yet they themselves had never heard of it. I learned so much from talking to people who knew Hitterdal – the location of old railroad beds and burial mounds, and the story of the local guy whose eagle made a mess on the *Johnny Carson Show*.

The past is forgotten when we stop telling a story. People are forgotten when we stop talking about them. But our archives are filled with forgotten lives and forgotten events that are waiting for us to remember again. For the first time in a long time, three tables full of people remembered the plane crash that killed Clifford Lomsdahl and Alice Moe in 1919. And the story is not likely to be forgotten again any time soon.

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A "Ralph's Corner Bar" History Harvest Tuesday, January 28 | 5-7PM | Rustica Tavern

Did you spend time on the "Corner That Rocked"? Do you have memories, photos, t-shirts, posters, etc, from Ralph's Corner Bar? We want to talk!

Please join us at Rustica on **Tuesday, January 28**, for a "Ralph's Corner Bar" History Harvest. What's a History Harvest? A rapidfire research event. We bring scanners, cameras, and audio recorders; you bring stories and artifacts; together we compile the stories of a Moorhead icon for a future Hjemkomst Center exhibition. (And Rustica's throwing in free appetizers!)

For more information, please contact HCSCC by phone at (218) 299-5511 or by email at communications@hccsmuseum.org. See you there!

Slough Apes & Hairy Men: Bigfoot Sightings in the Red River Valley

• By Davin Wait

For roughly the past 50 years, a series of wooded trails and minimum maintenance roads between Maplewood State Park and Vergas, Minnesota, have produced some of our region's eeriest sightings, ranging from robe-clad cults to shifting, labyrinthine paths and even whispering trees. As many locals will attest, though, the most famous of these legends is the Sasquatch- or Bigfoot-like creature said to roam those parts, where it's known as the Vergas Hairy Man.

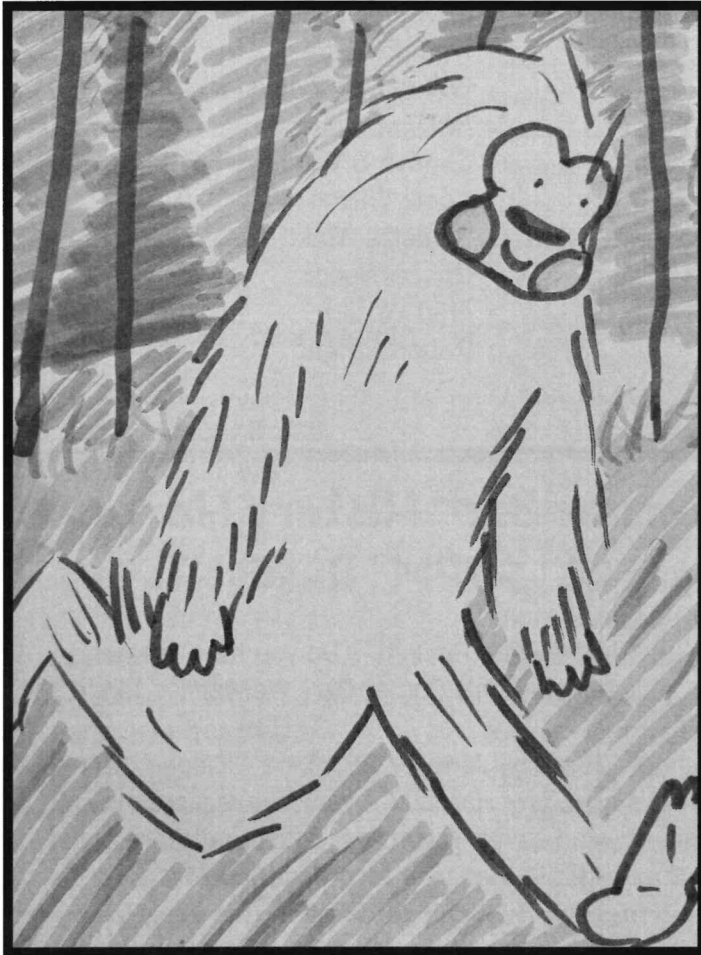
The many (dozens, in fact) witnesses of the Hairy Man typically describe the creature as a large hominoid or ape that scavenges the forests and terrorizes the residents. Given its size – standing somewhere between

6' and 9' tall and weighing more than 300 pounds – its noted stench, and its propensity to chase humans and roar, it elicits a fair amount of terror.

Given the similarities of the Vergas Hairy Man (and its Ulen cousin, the Slough Ape) to the Yeti, Bigfoot, and Sasquatch, it's worth placing the creature's footprint and legend in a broader historical context.

"Wildmen" have decorated human histories for millennia. Today academics often point to Bigfoot predecessors like Enkidu in the ancient Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Nebuchadnezzar II in the ancient Aramaic and Hebrew *Book of Daniel*, or the monstrous races in the ancient Roman and Greek histories of Herodotus and Pliny the Elder. Joshua Blu Buhs, author of *Bigfoot: The Life and Times of a Legend* (maybe the definitive work on the subject), includes modern incarnations of Santa Claus in this list and shows how these historical referents helped form modern versions like the P.T. Barnum "What Is It?" creature that traveled in the famed showman's circuses and freak shows.

The modern American Bigfoot encounter began to take shape in the 19th and 20th centuries at the edge of the British and American empires. As British military and industry moved through India into the Himalayan Mountains of Nepal, Tibet, and Sikkim, they encountered rumors of the "Yeti," a hairy, tail-less demon roughly the size of a human. These early rumors prompted investigation by explorers already eager to climb Mount Everest and amplified the frequency and detail of Yeti encounters to readers abroad. A 1951 exhibition led by British mountaineer Eric Shipton yielded what some believed to be a Yeti track. The photo Shipton shared of this track proved popular around the world and generated enough interest and funding for both the 1957 Peter Cushing film *The Abominable Snowman* and a 1960 Himalayan expedition led by famous New Zealand mountaineer Sir Edmund Hillary and American zoologist Marlin Perkins. The evidence they collected, purported to be Yeti remnants, proved to be tissues from bear and goat-antelope.



Moorhead 6th-grader Morgan Hanson completed this drawing of the Vergas Hairy Man following a talk about folklore during an October field trip to the Hjemkomst Center (HCSCC).

In the United States and Canada, a similar process unfolded among loggers, miners, and fur traders who encountered First Nations stories of wild giants in the Pacific Northwest, including the Yeti-like “Sasquatch” popularized by a Chehalis Indian Reservation teacher named J.W. Burns in an April 1, 1929, *Maclean’s* article entitled, “Introducing B.C.’s Hairy Giants.” The term “Sasquatch” is an Anglicized form of the giant’s name in the Halkomelem language.

In September of 1958, Yeti and Sasquatch sightings took an important turn when Andrew Genzoli and Betty Allen of northern California’s Humboldt *Times* gave birth to the name “Bigfoot.” The columnist and reporter had started covering a sequence of strange sightings, including a logger’s discovery and subsequent casting of unnaturally large, human-like footprints similar to those of the 1951 Shipton expedition. Readers ate the story up, and as a result the *Times* covered the story throughout the year, including eighteen pieces in October alone. Some issues even carried more than one Bigfoot story. The small newspaper had birthed a celebrity and renamed a legend.

Driven by regular appearances in TV, film, and magazines, Bigfoot’s celebrity exploded throughout the 1960s, despite a growing chorus of skeptics and a growing list of sightings and samples that were proven to be hoaxes. In 1967 that celebrity grew even further with two major developments: 53 seconds of grainy footage shot on October 20 and purported to show a female Bigfoot walking across a shallow river in Northern California; and Frank Hansen’s traveling exhibition of an ice-encased creature known initially as the “Siberskoye Creature” and “The Creature On Ice.” The first of these developments would come to be known as the “Patterson-Gimlin Film” and the second of these would come to be known as the “Minnesota Iceman.” Both were exhibited at fairs and conventions to the curious, paying public of the Midwest and Pacific Northwest for several years thereafter — including the curious, paying public of Minnesota — just as the Vergas Hairy Man started developing a name of its own.

Outside of vague references to unknown sightings from the 1940s and ‘50s, the earliest Hairy Man report comes from the late Ken Zitzow, who claimed to see the creature in 1966 while driving County Road 130 west of Vergas with his brother Duane and Duane’s girlfriend Pam. Ken described it in a 1991 Detroit Lakes *Tribune* interview as a “Bigfoot-looking thing.” After the

creature walked out of the woods and hit Zitzow’s trunk hard enough to leave a dent, Zitzow drove away before returning for another look. Zitzow claimed to have later tracked the animal’s den with his brother. They found an abandoned shack containing an old mattress and “thick with wild animal smell” and burned it to the ground. In the same 1991 *Tribune* piece, Dave Bruhn is quoted as also having seen the creature up close a year later. It jumped on the hood of his car from a cutting. A few swerves knocked it off.

In 2012, an investigation for the SyFy TV show *Haunted Highway* prompted another round of Hairy Man coverage in local media. Witnesses added to the Hairy Man legend, including former *Tribune* reporter Brian Wierima, who reported on several sightings and added photographs of a strange skull from the Vergas Trails to the Hairy Man legend; Cheryl Hanson, who claims to have been chased by the creature while snowmobiling as a child in 1972; and Mike Quast, who claims to have seen the creature near Strawberry Lake north of Detroit Lakes as a child in 1976. Together they might have breathed the most life into the Hairy Man legend.

Today Quast might even be best described as a Bigfoot researcher, having authored two books on the subject: *The Sasquatch in Minnesota* and *Bigfoot Chronicle: A Researcher’s Continuing Journey through Minnesota and Beyond*. His research offers a wonderful compilation of Hairy Man sightings, including many that venture northward through Ulen-Hitterdal — where a “Slough Ape” was sighted near the South Branch of the Wild Rice River in 2009 — toward Crookston and Remer, where the Bigfoot legend lives even larger.

Quast believes the Hairy Man and Bigfoot to be the “most human-like ape species in existence today” [besides homo sapiens]. When asked about hoaxers, or people who might just share a sighting for the attention, Quast points out that the attention is often ridicule. “It’s not the kind of attention you want,” he said.

Emily Beurmann, of the Becker County Historical Society, is aware of the many legends coming out of the Vergas Trails and notes that, “a lot of reputable people have reported sightings.” That said, she’s hesitant to speak to the veracity of the Hairy Man, given the general absence of documented sightings and physical specimens.

A modified version of this story was printed in the Forum on Nov. 3, 2019, as part of a new content partnership.



News from the Comstock House

Comstock Winter Tours

Winter at the historic Comstock House means we've ended regular tours until Saturday, May 23. Please contact HCSCC director of operations Emily Kulzer at (218) 291-4211 or emily.kulzer@hcsmuseum.org to schedule a special tour.

Christmas with the Comstocks

On **Saturday, December 14**, from 4:00PM to 7:00PM, we're celebrating a Victorian Christmas at the historic Comstock House. Learn about the Christmas customs of the Comstock family and other Victorian traditions. Play Victorian parlor games, make and take ornaments, and enjoy hot cocoa and holiday treats.

Tours will be offered at 4:30PM and 6:00PM. Admission is free (or a freewill donation).

Additional parking is available in the lot at First Congregational United Church of Christ (406 8th Street South in Moorhead).



Victorian Christmas Tours

Explore the Victorian origins of many of today's Christmas traditions during a Victorian Christmas Tour at the Comstock House. Moorhead's 1883 Victorian mansion will be decorated with Christmas trees, stockings by the fire, mistletoe, and holiday lights. At the end of the tour, enjoy hot chocolate and Christmas cookies.

Victorian Christmas Tours are held at the Comstock House on **Thursday, December 5 & 19**, beginning at 5:30pm and 7:00pm. Tours are limited to 12 people each and admission for the event is \$10 (\$5 for MNHS and HCSCC members). Tickets may be reserved by phone, email, or online via our website.

HCSCC Wine Class Becomes Victorian Gothic Dinner at the Comstock House

On Thursday, October 24, we hosted a Victorian Gothic dinner at the Comstock House. Despite some technology constraints in the Comstock kitchen, the evening was a resounding success. Visitors enjoyed a meal prepared and served by HCSCC member/donors Sam & Coralie Wai and HCSCC staffers Lynelle Martin & Emily Kulzer. The menu was recreated from one prepared at Moorhead's Grand Pacific Hotel and the program included both Sam's food histories and presentations by HCSCC Programming Director Markus Krueger on local mesmerists and clairvoyants and HCSCC Communications Manager Davin Wait on the United States' Victorian Gothic revival.



HCSCC Winter 2019 / Spring 2020 Calendar

History on Tap! – “Ralph’s Corner Bar”

Monday, December 2, 6:00PM - 7:00PM
Junkyard Brewing Company (Free)

Victorian Christmas Tours

Thursday, December 5, 5:30PM - 8:30PM
Comstock House (\$5/\$10)

HCSCC Wine Class – Sparkling Wine

Thursday, December 12, 6:30PM - 9:00PM
Hjemkomst Center (Reservations Required)

Christmas with the Comstocks

Saturday, December 14, 4:00PM - 7:00PM
Comstock House (Freewill Donation)

Lecture: Clay County Nurses of World War I

Tuesday, December 17, 6:00PM - 7:00PM
Hjemkomst Center (Free)

Victorian Christmas Tours

Thursday, December 19, 5:30PM - 8:30PM
Comstock House (\$5/\$10)

History on Tap! – “Blind Pigs & Bootleggers”

Monday, January 6, 6:00PM - 7:00PM
Junkyard Brewing Company (Free)

Lecture: Hairy Men, Slough Apes, & Bigfoot

Tuesday, January 21, 6:00PM - 7:00PM
Hjemkomst Center (Free)

History Harvest – “Ralph’s Corner Bar”

Tuesday, January 28, 5:00PM - 7:00PM
Rustica Tavern (Free Appetizers, Cash Bar)

History on Tap! - “Prohibition & Rum Runners”

Monday, February 3, 6:00PM - 7:00PM
Junkyard Brewing Company (Free)

OPENING RECEPTION

Artist First

Saturday, February 8, 1:00PM - 4:00PM
Hjemkomst Center (Free)

Giving Hearts Day

Thursday, February 13, All Day
Please consider a donation to HCSCC – donations can be made online via givingheartstoday.org or in the museum

HCSCC Wine Class – Wines of Portugal

Thursday, February 13, 6:30PM - 9:00PM
Hjemkomst Center (\$50, Reservations Required)
Reservations open at 9:00AM on Thursday, January 23

Lecture: Southern Slaveholders in the North Star State

Saturday, February 22, 1:00PM - 3:00PM
Hjemkomst Center (Free)

History on Tap! – Fall of a Moorhead Gangster

Monday, March 2, 6:00PM - 7:00PM
Junkyard Brewing Company (Free)

Celtic Festival

Saturday, March 21, 10:00AM - 4:00PM
Hjemkomst Center (Free)

OPENING RECEPTION

Grand Army of the Republic

Tuesday, March 31, 5:00PM - 8:00PM
Hjemkomst Center (Free)

HCSCC Wine Class – Wines of Austria

Thursday, April 2, 6:30PM - 9:00PM
Hjemkomst Center (\$50, Reservations Required)
Reservations open at 9:00AM on Thursday, March 12

OPENING RECEPTION

FMVA BIG Art Show

Tuesday, April 7, 5:00PM - 7:00PM
Hjemkomst Center (Free)

Lecture: Moorhead’s Wild Murie Brothers

Tuesday, April 21, 6:00PM - 7:00PM
Hjemkomst Center (Free)

HCSCC Annual Meeting

Thursday, May 7, 6:00PM - 9:00PM
Hjemkomst Center, cost TBA

Want to Reserve Tickets for HCSCC Events?

Perfect! Go to www.hcscconline.org, click on the ‘Visit Us’ tab on the top drop menu, then click on ‘Events.’
Alternatively, follow us on Facebook and reserve your seats through our Facebook events!

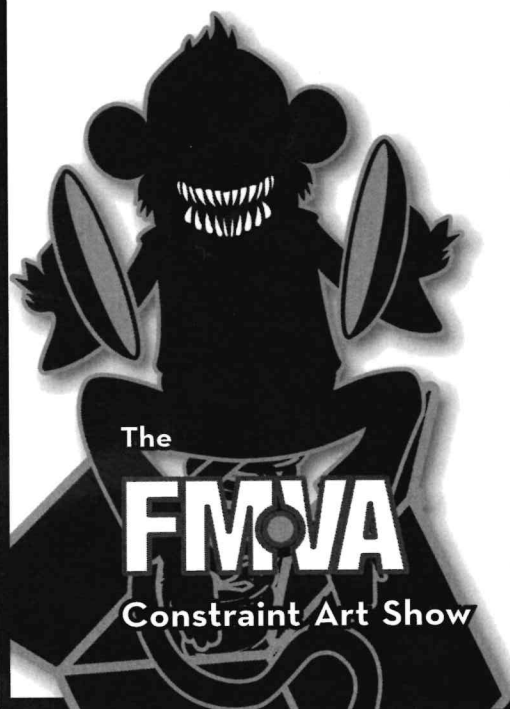
Historical & Cultural Society of Clay County

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.



**MONSTERS,
MARVELS &
MEMORABILIA**

On Exhibition Now! See it with America's Monsters, Superheroes, & Villains through January 31!