

Clay County Historical Society

Clay County Historical Society Newsletter

July/August 2004

Volume XXVII No. 4

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Moorhead's Center Avenue about 1872. The view is to the west from about 5th Street. Moorhead's earliest months were characterized by lawlessness and lack of civil society. A series of shootings early in 1872 led citizens to petition the governor to appoint a county government – and a sheriff. Flaten/Wange Collection

President's Column

By CCHS President, Dale White

We who are involved closely with CCHS feel the organization's activities are professionally done, but how do we measure that?



Well, it's nice to be told. We are excited that the Clay County Historical Society has been selected as a 2004 award winner by the American Association for State and Local History. We were notified by that Association in early July that the recent *Eating Out in Clay County* exhibit has won a Certificate of Commendation. AASLH's awards program, started in 1945, is the most prestigious recognition in the nation for efforts in preservation and interpretation of local, state, and regional history.

Applause for our staff who put the exhibit together!

The Long Range Planning Committee members often considered this matter of quality and its measurement as we met over the last year. We found ourselves making assumptions about what people wish to view, or learn, or in what they wish to participate—and how successful CCHS's efforts are in meeting those expectations. There seemed to be a general agreement that the Board needs to do more specific market research and program evaluation within the county. We plan in 2005 (hopefully with grant monies) to conduct a structured national Museum Assessment Program with the public. Elsewhere in this newsletter you will find a more complete report by Donna Voxland on the Board's long term strategic plan.

It takes a lot of effort to continually try to improve. Unfortunately, it also takes money, and during the last year the Board has had much discussion about CCHS finances. We concluded that the organization must increase its funding in order to meet its goals in collections and programming, and it must diversify its financial basis so it is less dependent on single source income. We will also attempt to greatly strengthen our endowment program.

There will probably be a newsletter supplement in the near future detailing these financial matters.

Calendar

June 2004—March 2005

Old, New, Borrowed, Blue: Weddings in Clay County exhibit

August 13, 2004—January 24, 2005

Mexicanos in the Red River Valley photo exhibit

Sept. 25 Clay County History Tour 8:00-5:00

December Holiday Open House

Winter 2005 Display Class by Pam Burkhardt

Jan. 8, 2005 Rok Day, traditional spinning and weaving, Fiber Artists Guild members

January 29, 2005—March 12, 2005

Here Comes the Bride: Weddings in America traveling exhibit from Rogers Historical Museum

Schedule subject to change



CLAY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Hjemkomst Center, 202 1st Avenue North
PO Box 501, Moorhead, MN 56561-0501
Phone: 218-299-5520/Fax: 218-299-5525
www.info.co.clay.mn.us/history

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NEWSLETTER PRODUCTION

Lisa Vedaa, Editor lisa.vedaa@ci.moorhead.mn.us
Pam Burkhardt, Contributor pam.burkhardt@ci.moorhead.mn.us
Mark Peihl, Contributor mark.peihl@ci.moorhead.mn.us

Eating Out in Clay County exhibit recognized with national award

The Clay County Historical Society is proud to announce that we can now claim to be a *national* award-winning organization! In July, the American Association for State and Local History announced that CCHS had been awarded a Certificate of Commendation for our exhibit *Eating Out in Clay County*.

The AASLH Annual Awards Program, now in its 59th year, is the most prestigious recognition for achievement in the preservation and interpretation of local, state, and regional history. Awards for 2004 represent 102 organizations and

The History Channel will once again help underwrite the cost of the Awards Banquet.

The awards program was initiated in 1945 to establish and encourage standards of excellence in the collection, preservation, and interpretation of state and local history throughout the United States. The awards program not only honors significant achievement in the field of local history, but also brings public recognition of the opportunities for small and large organizations, institutions, and programs to make contributions in this arena.

AASLH is a not-for-profit professional organization of individuals and institutions working to preserve and promote history. From its headquarters in Nashville, Tennessee, AASLH provides leadership, service, and support for its members who preserve and interpret state and local history in order to make the past more meaningful in American society.



individuals from the United States. Award winners will be honored at a special banquet during the AASLH 2004 Annual Meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, on Thursday, September 30, 2004. A generous contribution from

Ghost Towns will be a feature of County History Tour September 25

The next CCHS History Tour will be right in our own backyard! Mark Peihl will lead a tour to historic sites in Clay County on Saturday, September 25.

Participants will enjoy a relaxing ride in a deluxe motor coach from Red River Trails. Lunch will be served by Mosaic caterers from Fargo in a restored and nostalgically-decorated grainery on the Tom & Sherry Watt farm near Glyndon.

The tour will depart from the Hjemkomst Center at 8:00 a.m. and will visit several historic sites in Moorhead before venturing out to other historic sites in the county. Did you know that Moorhead is the site of the worst aviation disaster in the history of the state? The pilot was the only survivor of the October 30, 1941 Northwest flight from Chicago. The neighborhoods of Moorhead and Barnesville's infamous red light districts will be visited, as well as the locations of several "ghost towns," such as

Catton, Lafayette and East Burlington. Other sites to be visited include the Stockwood Fill, Probstfield Farm, Old Georgetown, and Gantz Reservoir, pictured below during construction, about 1907. The reservoir was developed to provide a source of water for steam locomotives and the City of Dilworth.

Cost of the tour is \$35 per person and includes bus fare, morning coffee and rolls, and lunch. Registration deadline is Friday, September 17. To register, send your name, address, phone number and payment to CCHS, PO Box 501, Moorhead, MN 56561.



Outreach Displays

	<u>Open</u>	<u>Close</u>
Hawley Public Library	August	October
Moorhead Public Library	August	October
Barnesville Public Library	August	October
Fargo CVB	August	November

The Hawley Public Library concludes a series on toys. Part 3 **GIRLS' TOYS** features toys meant to prepare a girl for her future role as a mother and homemaker. Dolls, laundry and ironing toys from early years are featured as well as WWII-era paper dolls.

Part 2 of the toy display will be at the Moorhead Public Library. **BOYS' TOYS** features active toys recalling the days of noisy activity. Be prepared to knuckle down with these playthings from the past.



HAIL TO THE CANDIDATE! is on the campaign trail again and will caucus at the Barnesville Public Library. This display contains memorabilia and interesting facts about the presidential elections held between 1871 and 1984. Artifacts include pinback buttons, a partisan cookie cutter and sheet music titled *With Garfield We'll Conquer Again*.

WELCOME! The hospitality industry is the topic this summer at the Fargo Convention and Visitors' Bureau along I-94. Serving dishes, plates and menus from the past may tempt visitors to sample the gustatory welcome we provide today! Don't forget your room key!

IN-HOUSE DISPLAYS

The Five Generations of wedding dresses section of the *Old, New, Borrowed, Blue* exhibit is now featured in the CCHS hall case.

CCHS arranged a new display of exquisite, hand-decorated china in the lobby area. These items were painted by Beulah Forness who holds china-painting classes in the building Tuesday mornings.

Artifacts & Donors

May/June 2004

Donors include:

Moorhead: Blaine Wright, Northern Prairie Fiber Artists
 Fargo: Juliet Hanson & Juliet Hanson Estate, Gothard Knutson, Phyllis Thysell
 Omaha, NE: Bob & Lavonne Woods

Artifacts include: box of (14 reels) 16mm movie film from Bergstrom Studio with some showing on area projects [not viewed yet]; 1935 FM telephone directory; 1930, 1933, 1935 Detroit Lakes - Mahanomen telephone directories; Fiber Crafts Guild minutes, newsletters, membership lists and program lists from April 14, 1976 – April 29, 1981; photo of a child (Bob Woods) with his birthday cake in the living room of the Peterson* house in Moorhead; (17) instructional booklets on topics such as how to read blue prints and working with sheet metal [associated with an earlier collection of similar items]; WMSTR yearbook; 2nd ed. (1958); *Tummy Tingles* published in 1937 by the Wheat Flour Institute with recipes and poems for children; wood and metal puzzle; Minn-Kota fishing motor (1950s); watch chain which belonged to Dr. Bottolfson, Moorhead with 2 fobs ("University of Minnesota, B. T. Bottolfson, 1916" & "ICS, College International de Chirugiens")

*The Peterson house was built around the John Bergquist log cabin now owned by the museum. The cabin was revealed during a restoration completed in the 1980s.

Juliet Ledry Hanson & Juliet Hanson Estate items: box of glass plate negatives, film negatives, photographic how-to booklets & prints taken in Clay & Becker Cos. by uncle Andrew T. Olson; framed photo of John Olson WWI soldier (brother of Andrew T. Olson); donor's wedding dress & veil; dress/veil patterns with left over material & lace; mother's wedding dress & hat; matron of honor's hat; Harold Hanson's wedding suit; Juliet's wooden sled; small parlor organ (purchased in Hawley) and stool; wall bracket lamp with intact, original glass reflector; (3) pieces of rosmalling by Juliet Hanson and other clothing.

Board adopts Long-Range Plan

By Donna Voxland, Long-Range Planning Committee Chair and Past-President



I am very happy to report that the Long Range Plan is finished and has been approved by the Board of Directors. In June 2003, we began brainstorming to develop a one to five year plan for the staff and board

to use as a guide for future direction and also for prioritizing our needs and dreams despite the budget situation we were suddenly faced with due to county budget cuts. We listed our strengths and weaknesses and then proceeded to discuss each of our resource areas in terms of what we need to do to strengthen and enhance each area.

We went off on many tangents, but they proved to be very constructive and interesting side roads. We all feel that we have a better understanding of our organization as it is now and where we would like to see it be in five years. We have already implemented some goals such as a New Board Member Orientation, a Clay County History Fall Bus Tour, initial steps toward an Endowment Fund Drive, an active fundraising committee, an active membership committee and others.

Some five-year goals involve more than our hard-working current staff are able to do in their already busy days. One major long-term goal is to hire at least one more part-time staff to enable us to expand our programming and exhibits. We are very excited about the finished product, and we invite you to request a copy of your own. I want to thank the very diligent staff and board members who faithfully attended the 15 meetings that often seemed a bit overwhelming. We plan to continue to meet every couple months, in addition to our board meetings, to informally chat about how we are meeting our goals and to always be open to new directions and changes.

Win a dinner for two at Sarello's in new "Romance" Raffle

In the spirit of our new exhibit *Old, New, Borrowed, Blue: Weddings in Clay County*, CCHS is kicking off a raffle for a volley of romantic prizes! The drawing for the Romance Raffle will be held on (drumroll, please) Valentine's Day, February 14, 2005. Be at the Clay County Museum at 3:00 p.m. that day to hear the winners announced (need not be present to win).

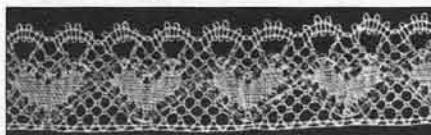
The first prize in this "Romance Raffle" is a—what else?—romantic dinner for two at the fabulous Sarello's fine restaurant in Moorhead. Sarello's is located at 28 Center Mall Avenue. Voxland Electric generously donated \$100 for the dinner.



CCHS Collections Manager Pam Burkhardt has volunteered her fine talents to lovingly craft an entire yard of exquisite bobbin lace in a beautifully delicate heart pattern for use in a bridal garter, handkerchief, christening gown, guest towel, or whatever the winner wishes.

The third prize is a Scandinavian wrought iron candle holder for dreamy dinners at home. Other prizes include one dozen gorgeous red roses, \$20 toward creative framing for a photo of one's choice by expert framer Steve Johnson, and a box of de-li-cious chocolates.

Tickets for the raffle are \$2 each, and can be purchased at the CCHS Office Monday through Friday, or from CCHS Staff and Board Members whenever you see them out and about.



"Wedding Hearts" bobbin lace pattern

SNOWBIRD ALERT!

We have just one small favor to ask....

Our newsletter is sent at a non-profit bulk rate, and cannot be forwarded, nor can it be held when you are temporarily away.



Unless we have your correct address or instructions not to mail out the newsletter during a certain time frame, you do not get your newsletter, and we are charged an additional 70 cents for every newsletter that is returned to us—more than a first class letter.

Please help the historical society save money for educational exhibits and programs, and assure that you get your CCHS newsletters, by notifying us of your winter address or letting us know if you are going to be away for any length of time. Your help is appreciated!



HERITAGE-HJEMKOMST INTERPRETIVE CENTER

Exhibit Schedule

PREHISTORY OF THE RED RIVER VALLEY

July 12—September 26

Discover the geological history and Native American tribes of the Red River Valley with information & artifacts relating to recent archaeological surveys conducted around the valley.

ROSEMALING

July 1—September 26

Learn about the beautiful work of Telemark rosemaler, Knut Mevastaul (1785-1862). Porcelain dolls by Judith Blanchard.

TASTE OF THE VALLEY FINE ART EXHIBIT

August 2—September 24

Experience a Taste of the Valley with original artwork by the region's finest artists in this juried art show.

TEAM UP! Explore with Science & Sports

October 1—December 31

Test your skills in sports such as basketball, tennis, soccer, and football while learning about geometry, physics, force, and friction. Learn about local college and high school sports teams from the Red River Valley.

**All programs subject to change*

Donations to CCHS make a thoughtful memorial

For that special person on your list who has everything, a contribution to the Clay County Historical Society is a perfect gift! Consider recognizing someone you love or want to honor with an investment in the Endowment Fund; a card noting your investment can be sent in the name of someone you love for any event:

- Birth of a child or grandchild
- Special event
- Honor your mentor
- Anniversary
- And many more...

To find out how to support the Clay County Historical Society, contact Lisa at 218-299-5520.

Reflect on the past....commit to the future!

Volunteer Rewards monthly drawing results

CCHS is happy to announce the recent winners of the monthly volunteer prize drawing! Congratulations and thank you to these special people for volunteering your valuable time and talents:

March: Al Rieniets

June: Helen Danielson

April: Sam Leathes

July: Faith Meurrens

May: Jane Renner

The monthly prize drawing was created as a token of appreciation to reward our wonderful volunteers! Every volunteer who volunteers during a month has their name entered in the drawing once for each time they volunteer. Prizes include gift certificates to area restaurants, museums, stores, and other amusements. Some items are great to use in entertaining your grandchildren! The prizes are donated by volunteer coordinator Jan Nelson and CCHS Board Members.

Old, New, Borrowed, Blue: Five Generations of Wedding Gowns

By Pam Burkhardt, Collections Manager

A special section of the *Old, New, Borrowed, Blue* exhibit is titled *Five Generations of Weddings*. Charlotte Watson, formerly of Fargo, is responsible for keeping this collection together. She donated these and related items in 1999. Four dresses come down in an unbroken line with another, the oldest, coming from Charlotte's uncle's family. The six dresses represent the following five weddings:

1. Mary Rogers married Donald McLeod in 1865.
2. Selma Westerson married Charles Johnson in the early 1880s.
3. Edith Johnson, daughter of No. 2, married Frank Newberry in 1919.
4. Charlotte Newberry, daughter of No. 3, married Philip Watson in 1948.
5. Ann Watson, daughter of No. 4, married Lawrence Miller in 1977.
6. Ellen Watson, sister of No. 5, bridesmaid at Ann's wedding in 1977.

This article focuses on the 1865 wedding dress, one of the oldest, complete dresses in the museum's collection. We were fortunate to receive detailed information about the dress, its maker and history. Using this information, we were able to find even more!

Donald William and Mary McLeod's daughter Margaret married William Gimblett, a minister (1906 to 1910) at the Plymouth Congregational Church in Fargo, North Dakota. In 1956, Margaret wrote about the dress:

Married in Enniskillen, Ontario, Canada July 11th 1865 on her 24th birthday. This - her wedding dress was made by Miss Nell Kennedy, a dressmaker friend. The dress has been kept by 3 of her daughters in their turn from the eldest - down to the youngest.

[written by] Margaret McLeod Gimblett The only surviving member of her immediate family. [dated Feb. 9th 1956]

Using this information, more was found on the internet. A memoir written by an unnamed "Old Durham Boy" included recollections of mid-19th century Ontario including D.W. McLeod and his bride. You can read more about D.W. McLeod at the source titled *Early Days in Enniskillen* at www.ontariogenealogy.com/Durham/enniskillen.html



A view of the front of the 1865 dress as seen in the exhibit. The dress is blue silk with collar, peplum and sleeves edged with blue fringe. It will be moved with the others to a featured position in the CCHS hall case for the duration of the *Old, New, Borrowed, Blue* exhibit, through March 2005.

It caused no little surprise in the community when Mr. McLeod married. It was generally supposed he was a confirmed bachelor. The bride he chose was Miss Mary Rogers, sister of David Rogers so well and favourably known to many readers of The James Papers. A touching compliment was paid the bride and groom on the night of their return home from their wedding trip. The company of the militia of which I have spoken, quietly gathered late in the evening, and at 12 o'clock fired a right royal welcoming salute. The company was afterwards entertained by the bride and groom. The noise of the firing caused great excitement as there were few in the secret outside of those who took part.

Rev. D. Rogers of St. Thomas added information to these recollections. There is no evidence has been found that Rev. Rogers has any relation to Mary Rogers McLeod.

The first store I remember ever being in, was that of D.W. McLeod. A big sign on the front then, informed any who cared to know, that it was The Farmers General Store. He also owned the foundry and wagon shop, across the street and down a short distance. D.W. was brother of John McLeod

Continued on page 14...

Moorhead, MN: Wickedest



Moorhead saloon interior, about 1912. Did saloons like this one make Moorhead "the Wickedest City in the World?"

City in the World?

By Mark Peihl, CCHS Archivist

Local folklore is filled with colorful legends, oft-told fables and outright myths. Among the most popular in Clay County is the notion that Moorhead was once known as “the wickedest city in the world.” Or the U.S. Or... someplace. The story often compares our county seat with “Port Said, Egypt; Marseilles, France or Shanghai, China.” I’ve wondered for years about the origins of this tale. We may have recently come up with an answer.

Most local histories published in the last fifty years include some mention of the more unsavory aspects of Moorhead’s past and often repeat the “wickedest city” phrase. The city did go through two problem eras.

Moorhead popped into existence when the Northern Pacific Railway, building west from Duluth, reached the Red River in Fall 1871. The railroad stopped construction for the winter. Moorhead, like Brainerd before it in 1869 and Oak Lake in 1870, became the over-winter end of the line and a magnet for legitimate businessmen and settlers as well as gamblers, prostitutes, thieves and various other ne’er-do-wells. Like many other towns, Moorhead went through a frontier period when lack of law enforcement and established civil society made life pretty hairy for local residents. And, as in many other towns, this period only lasted a few months. A series of shootings early in 1872 induced law-abiding citizens to petition the Governor to appoint a county government – and a sheriff. By 1873 things had settled down in Moorhead. But the stories of the wild days of 1871-1872 lingered.

Moorhead’s other “colorful” period began June 30, 1890 when, by constitutional mandate, all the saloons in North Dakota closed. Fargo liquor dealers moved across the Red River. On July 1, Moorhead added a vanguard of five new saloons. Many more followed. Through the 1890s, alcohol became a huge part of the local economy. In 1900, the number of saloons peaked at 45 – in a city of about 3,700 people. The businesses brought in a lot of money for schools, streets and other improvements, but they also brought crime to Moorhead’s streets, corruption

to city government and a new, unenviable reputation to the city generally. After the turn of the twentieth century, reforms alleviated some of the city’s problems. Moorhead “dries” attempted to close Moorhead’s saloons under the state’s local option law. This allowed voters in a city or township to vote on the saloon issue in that city or township. But wet interests in Moorhead proved too strong. In 1915, the Minnesota state legislature passed a county option bill. On May 17, Clay County voters decided to close all county saloons. On June 30, 1915,



Moorhead's north bridge saloon district 1902. The view is to the east across the Red River from Fargo's Case Plaza. Nearly all the buildings on the Moorhead side of this photo are saloons. The liquor dealers tended to congregate around the Moorhead ends of the two bridges to be as close to dry North Dakota as they could. The north bridge is visible at right. Flaten/Wange Collection.

exactly 25 years to the day after North Dakota’s bars closed, Moorhead’s saloons shut down as well.

Local historians have often lumped both of these two, distinct periods together. Stories of violence and lax law enforcement in the early 1870s are told in the same breath as the tales of corruption and saloons from the 1890s. This may make for better story but gives the impression that throughout the 19th century Moorhead

Continued next page...

was wild, violent, corrupt and drunk, ignoring the two decades in between of relatively normal life.

Until recently, the earliest reference to the "Wickedest City" story I could find came from Edith Moll's 1957 NDAC master's thesis, *Moorhead, Minnesota: Frontier Town, 1871-1915*. Edith never actually uses the phrase but titles a subchapter on the saloon era "The Most Wicked City." In 1966, Erling Rolsrud expanded on the story. In his *Cobber Chronicles: an Informal History of Concordia College*, he claims "Residents of present-day Moorhead may well be shocked to learn that once their home was called 'The Wickedest City in the World.' This

money in the wicked department. Dozens of towns have claimed the wickedest city moniker. (A quick Google search on the internet revealed at least 40 such places.) Foremost may be the seventeenth century pirate haven Port Royal, Jamaica, described by an eye witness as "the wealthiest and wickedest city in the New World." (Port Royal's reputation may have been enhanced by its spectacular demise. On June 7, 1692, a huge earthquake sent the city sliding into the sea – an end reminiscent of two other wicked cities, the Biblical towns of Sodom and Gomorrah.)

There must be some basis for the Moorhead story. The most likely source we can find is 1930s *Chicago Tribune* reporter, war correspondent, international adventurer and savvy self-promoter Floyd Gibbons. Recently we came across an article about Gibbons in the *Moorhead Country Press* which may shed some light.

Raphael Floyd Phillips Gibbons was born July 16, 1887 in Washington DC. His father, an egg and dairy salesman, moved the family to Des Moines, Iowa in 1898 where he started a successful trading stamp business. Three years later, they moved to Minneapolis, where, in 1906, Floyd took a job as police reporter with the *Minneapolis Daily News*. Always a bright kid, Gibbons quickly developed a clean and spare but personalized style which endeared him to readers. This led to stints as crime reporter for the *Milwaukee Free Press* and the *Minneapolis Tribune*. By 1912, he was reporting for the *Chicago Tribune*. Gibbons covered Pancho Villa's exploits on the U.S.-Mexican border, and later General John Pershing's attempts to catch the bandit. In 1917, while on the way to Europe to cover World War I, his ship, the S. S. *Laconia*, was sunk by a German submarine. Gibbons' first hand account is still a classic in journalism. Gibbons followed the U.S. Marines through the Chateau-Thierry and Belleau Woods campaigns where he lost his left eye to machinegun fire. Thereafter Gibbons wore a white, hand-knit eye patch. It became his trademark.

After the war, the *Tribune* sent Gibbons to cover more conflicts. In the 1920s and 1930s he reported on the Irish Revolution, Polish-Russian war, the conflict between the French and North African tribes, the Polish Revolution, the war between Japan and China over Manchuria, the Italian-Ethiopian war and the Spanish Civil War. He became the first American to cross the Sahara Desert and circled the globe twice. In 1929, he began radio broadcasting for NBC. His distinctive style and fast talking (he could speak 217 words per minute) made him an instant



Chicago Tribune reporter Floyd Gibbons at work. *Floyd Gibbons: Your Headline Hunter*, Edward Gibbons; New York: 1953.

reputation it earned shortly after its establishment in 1871, and kept it – with good reason – for nearly three decades." Rolsrud never mentions where he received his information but it's tough to keep a good story down. The tale was subsequently repeated in numerous local histories.

So, did Moorhead deserve such a reputation? Not likely. The problems Moorhead faced in the 1870s and 1890s were not that much worse than other border or frontier towns. Dodge City, Kansas and East Grand Forks, Minnesota probably could give Moorhead a run for her

Floyd Gibbons

Adventurers' Club

Hello Everybody!



"Warning in Russian"

By FLOYD GIBBONS
Famous Headline Hunter

Gibbons' syndicated column, "The Adventurers' Club", ran in Moorhead's *Country Press* and many other newspapers nationwide. *Country Press*, April 16, 1937.

hit.

Gibbons' reporting, books, lecture series, syndicated columns and radio commenting made him a celebrity – and a wealthy one. Early in 1937, he bought a private 75-foot yacht, the *Adventurer* (a rarity for a reporter!). Gibbons entertained friends, other reporters and celebrities onboard.

Sometime that spring, visitors included Neal O'Hara, well-known writer and columnist for the brand new *The Commentator* magazine. O'Hara's column for the monthly, called "He Wouldn't Fool You," featured short, pithy items of timely trivia. (Example: "Although Colonel [Charles] Lindbergh is a near-millionaire, he pays only from \$60 to \$75 for his suits... There's no such thing as gray hair. It's either the natural color of your locks or it's white... Montana, Washington, North Carolina, and South Dakota are the only states in the Union that have never had a dreadnought named in their honor.") In the April issue, O'Hara related, "We once spent a week-end on Floyd Gibbons' yacht and counted 128 fresh eye-patches hanging on door-knobs, hooks, neck-tie racks, and the like." (Gibbons went through dozens of patches a day as they became soiled.) Then O'Hara went on to say, "And in a conversation with Floyd, who has knocked about in Port Said, Marseilles, Alexandria and Shanghai, we asked what was the toughest town he'd ever been in. He said it was Moorehead [sic], Minnesota."

Well. After the editor of the Detroit Lakes *Record*

mentioned the piece, it generated considerable interest in Moorhead. *Country Press* publisher John A. Whaley picked up the story: "Localites were more than a little bit amused at this sombriquet. 'Perhaps,' said one old-timer, 'Mr. Gibbons hit town twenty-five years ago when this was the "jumping off" place for harvest labor in North Dakota and lumberjacks for the north woods. These laborers were none too handsome to look at,' he said, 'and a stranger who happened over in those days would get the impression the town was a tough one all right.'"

"If Mr. Gibbons should happen in Moorhead today he would find an entirely different set-up from that of twenty-five years ago. 'The toughest-town' crack is so ridiculous that we feel it too humorous to be suppressed from the people of this county."

"Letters of 'where do you get that stuff' have evidently been forwarded to Mr. Gibbons from indignant citizens. A column by Floyd Gibbons entitled 'Adventurers' Club' appears weekly in this newspaper."

In his travels, Gibbons apparently did visit Moorhead – and the experience stuck with him. Born in 1887, it clearly wasn't during Moorhead's frontier days of the early 1870s. It had to have been during the later stages of the city's saloon era. His biography, *Your Headline Hunter*, by his brother, Edward, mentions no specific Moorhead visits but suggests two times when he may have passed through. In 1906, before his employment at the Minneapolis *Daily News*, Gibbons spent "a few months" working in a lumber yard in the tiny town of



Floyd Gibbons at age 20, about the time he was living at Lucca, ND – and may have visited Moorhead. *Your Headline Hunter* – Floyd Gibbons, Edward Gibbons: 1953.

Cont. next page...

Wickedest, continued

Lucca, North Dakota. (After hours he moon-lighted for the local newspaper, apparently the *Lucca Ledger*, published as part of the *Fingal Herald* during the time period.) Lucca sat where the Soo Line and Northern Pacific Railways crossed south of Valley City. Gibbons had two alternate routes to Lucca from Minneapolis, either on the Soo Line through Hankinson and Enderlin, ND or via the NPRy – through Moorhead. He may also have made an occasional trip or two to Fargo-Moorhead. Either way, as an impressionable 19-year-old, the “old timer’s” none too pretty laborers may have affected Gibbons. The other chance was as a crime reporter for the

Twin Cities’ newspapers which occasionally sent scribes to cover Moorhead’s saloon problems.

Even so, was Moorhead the “toughest town” Gibbons had visited? Again, not likely. Gibbons, ever vigilant for a chance for self-promotion, probably pulled a memory from his past and sprang Moorhead on O’Hara fully knowing that *The Commentator* columnist would quote him. And it worked.

And it may still be working. Of the recent local historians who have repeated the story, Gertrude Knutson, in her fine 1982 history of Trinity Lutheran Church, suggests it

Continued next page...

New CCHS Memberships & Renewals

CCHS extends a special thank you to the following individuals who renewed their memberships or became new members in May and June:

NEW MEMBERS

Harold Anderson, Moorhead
Kevin & Kristy Campbell, Moorhead
Fargo-Moorhead Heritage Society
Jessica Henry, Hastings, NE
City of Hitterdal
Susan Nordin Family, Moorhead
Janice J. Peltz, Fargo
Charles Peterson, Hillsborough, CA
Paul Pratt, Gardner, ND
Ronnie & Donna Tang, Felton
Sandra Thimgan, Battle Lake

RENEWALS

Marjorie Aakre, Moorhead
Norman B. Akesson, Davis, CA
Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, IN
Marlene Ames, Fargo
Olive Andvik, Moorhead
Mary E. Bolstad, Moorhead
Irene Burkhardt, Fargo
Chamber of Commerce of Fargo-Mhd
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Wickedest, continued

was aviator Wiley Post who came up with the line. It's an understandable mix-up. Both 1930s adventuring celebrities wore a trademark eye patch. (Indeed, in a 1962 episode of the TV show *The Untouchables*, crime-fighter Elliot Ness, played by Robert Stack, asks Floyd Gibbons, played by Scott Brady, how he managed to get a room in a swanky Chicago hotel. Gibbons replies that he let the manager believe he was Wiley Post!)

Of the local histories which touch on the subject, perhaps Dr. Clarence "Soc" Glasrud's "Saloons and Politics" chapter in *A Century Together: A History of Fargo ND and Moorhead MN, 1875-1975*, probably sums up the "Wickedest City" question the best. Soc writes that even before "the drying up of Fargo concentrated the liquor business in Moorhead, the town had a 'tough' reputation, though perhaps no more than any semi-frontier end-of-the-road railroad town. There are legends of fathers refusing to give their daughters' hands in marriage when the prospective son-in-law revealed his intention of moving to Moorhead. But the story is quite possibly apocryphal, and the title 'Wickedest City' in the state or nation is a boast that others have made. Nevertheless, there are stories of the early-day wickedness – related to alcohol – that a candid history of Moorhead must not overlook."

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Five Generations, continued from page 7

of Bowmanville, who was M. P. P., for two or three terms, representing West Durham.

What about the dressmaker-friend Miss Nell Kennedy?

There is only one Kennedy family listed in the 1861 Canadian census for Enniskillen, Lambton County, Ontario. The head of that family was Eleanor Kennedy – a widow with five children. One daughter, also named Eleanor, would have been 10 on or before August 14 of 1861. This Nell would have been 14 or 15 by July of

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Five Generations, continued

1865 and would have been capable of making this dress (had she become a dressmaker's apprentice). The dress has a simple style with few sections to cut and sew. There is some piecing at the waist in the back. When you read the description of the dress, you will see how this piecing was hidden.

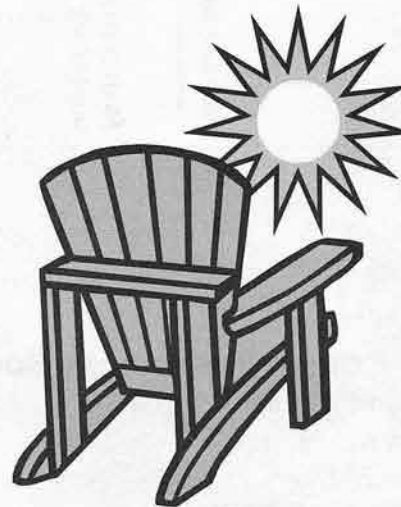
Further research using the 1881 Canadian census shows no Kennedys in residence in Enniskillen. Of course, this Nell Kennedy may not have been the one named in the Gimblett note. In addition, Kennedy family members may have moved, died, or and the widow and daughters married.

Mary Rogers' silk dress is typical of the mid-1860s. The fabric is a blue, windowpane check consisting of large "squares" of medium blue silk crossed by thin, black and medium brown lines. The bodice has piping in each seam. The top-line of the garment slopes down from neck down to the arms. Sleeves are tight at the armseye and open very wide at the lower arm. White undersleeves are usually worn inside these open sleeves. Typical of this period, shoulder seams are not at the top of the shoulder, but sit a few inches down on the back of the bodice. Also, the sleeves are set-in lower on the arm than our modern shoulder seams are.



A separate collar conceals a plain, round neckline. The skirt has yards of fabric flowing out from all sides. For extra fullness, back of the skirt is gathered at the waist by a series of tiny pleats called *cartridge* pleats. The pleated fabric was pieced in and not part of the body of the skirt. This piecing was hidden by a *peplum* - a short skirt, attached to the waist of a dress. However, this peplum is actually part of the belt, not the dress. The skirt has one pocket at the right side seam. The collar, sleeves and peplum are all trimmed with blue silk fringe. The dress is lined with a light brown cotton fabric. The family kept the extra fabric and fringe.

Left: A view of the back of the 1865 dress.



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