

# Clay County Historical Society

Clay County Historical Society Newsletter

May/June 2005

Volume XXVIII No. 3

## In this issue:

- "Christmas at the Cabin" Bergquist Cabin Open House June 24 & 25, p. 3
- CCHS Awarded Prestigious IMLS Grant for Public Perception Study, p. 5
- Probstfield Farm 2005 Activities, p. 6
- CCHS at the Clay County Fair and History Tour Destination, p. 7
- Recreation on the Red River, p. 9



Kids swim, wade and generally hang out at the mid-town dam in 1937. In the next decades, changes occurred which ended Red River recreation for many years. See article on page 9. Forum Communications Company Collection.

## President's Column

By Dale White, CCHS Board President

The annual CCHS meeting in April was highly successful, measured by the large number of members in attendance. So we begin a new year by welcoming two new Board members, by anticipating the Society's usual summer activities, and by asking ourselves questions about our successes in the past year.



First, we are glad to have Ron Ulven and Gene Prim on the Board; both will bring unique perspectives and experiences with them. Also in the last month Sherry Watt has resigned from the Board due to logistics. So the Board will appoint someone to fill out the remainder of her term which ends next year. Sherry has been very active in CCHS, bringing a rich connection with Clay County history, and we thank her for her service.

Summer always brings CCHS a change of pace. The Bergquist Cabin is only open to the public two days each year, and this summer's Open House is on Friday and Saturday, June 24 and 25, from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

CCHS always has a booth at the Clay County Fair in Barnesville, as well as displays at the schoolhouse on the fairgrounds. Fair dates this summer are July 15 through July 18.

Come renew your acquaintance with the Historical Society and your county's history at these events. If you have out-of-town visitors this summer, bring them to the exhibit at the museum or to do a little digging in the Archives. You may have a special request; perhaps we can help you. Just call the CCHS office. We will be as responsive as possible to our members. That is one way we define success.

\* \* \* \* \*

Elsewhere in this newsletter, you will find an article about the Probstfield Living History Farm, written by the president of their Board of Directors. If space allows, we may carry reports from that organization in our newsletters on a regular basis. While it is not directly affiliated with CCHS, the Probstfield Farm has a major place in Clay County history, and we view their efforts with a lot of interest.



## 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](http://www.info.co.clay.mn.us/history)

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dale White, President, Moorhead  
Rose Bergan, Vice President, Hawley  
Alvin Swanson, Treasurer, Moorhead  
John Elton, Secretary, Hawley  
Ben Brunsvold, County Rep., Moorhead  
Carolyn Barden, Moorhead  
Rodney Erickson, Moorhead  
Darren Leno, Moorhead  
Gene Prim, Barnesville  
Pearl Quinnild, Barnesville  
Ron Ulven, Hawley

### STAFF

Lisa Vedaa, Director  
[lisa.vedaa@ci.moorhead.mn.us](mailto:lisa.vedaa@ci.moorhead.mn.us)  
Pam Burkhardt, Collections Manager  
[pam.burkhardt@ci.moorhead.mn.us](mailto:pam.burkhardt@ci.moorhead.mn.us)  
Mark Peihl, Archivist  
[mark.peihl@ci.moorhead.mn.us](mailto:mark.peihl@ci.moorhead.mn.us)  
Janet Nelson, Volunteer Coordinator  
Jane Renner, Experience Works

### NEWSLETTER PRODUCTION

Lisa Vedaa, Editor  
Pam Burkhardt, Contributor  
Mark Peihl, Contributor

## Donations

### Archival Shelving

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans -  
\$500 Grant  
Anonymous - \$250 Donation

### Corporate Membership Match

Jeff Longtine, Moorhead

### Endowment Fund

Bette Haring, Lake Park, MN  
Charlotte Onstine, Tucson, AZ

### General

Robert J. Hill, Inglewood, CA  
Memorials in honor of Marie Wenner



## Bergquist Cabin Open House June 24 & 25 has "Christmas at the Cabin" theme

Christmas will be the theme at the 15th Annual Bergquist Cabin Open House, June 24 and 25! Visitors will experience an even wider variety of ethnic crafts and can help decorate a full-size Christmas tree, Swedish-style. A free shuttle bus sponsored by State Bank of Moorhead will take visitors between the cabin and the Hjemkomst Center during the open house, 1-4 p.m. both days.

The cabin, at 1008 7th Street North in Moorhead, is the oldest home on its original site in Moorhead. The Open House is conducted jointly by the Clay County Historical Society and the Swedish Society of the Red River Valley in conjunction with the Scandinavian Hjemkomst Festival.

CCHS Archivist Mark Peihl will talk about the cabin's historic background and Ron Anderson will provide live accordion music. Members of the Swedish Society will provide homemade cookies for refreshments and the Moorhead McDonald's will furnish the kool-aid. The cabin is the only place you can register to win a bobbin lace Swedish

heart basket in Icelandic colors made by Pam Burkhardt!

The cabin open house is held in conjunction with the 28th Annual Scandinavian Festival. The festival runs June 24-26, and celebrates the cultures and traditions of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Scandinavian America. Iceland is this year's featured Scandinavian country.

Authentic Scandinavian and Scandinavian-American ethnic entertainment, with folk dancing, arts and crafts demonstrations, and music from Scandinavian Folk to the new Nordic Sound are featured at the festival, as well as mouth-

watering Scandinavian foods, colorful folk costumes, family history resources, and magical storytellers.

Admission to the festival is \$5 for adults, \$4 for 55+, and free for ages 19 and under. Adults can purchase a three-day festival pass for \$8. For more information about the Cabin Open House, contact CCHS at 218-299-5520. For festival info visit [www.scandinavianhjemkomstfestival.org](http://www.scandinavianhjemkomstfestival.org), or call 218-299-5452.



## Burkhardt and Murch honored and new Board members elected at record Annual Meeting

The Clay County Historical Society elected four members to its Board of Directors, Tuesday, April 12, at the Annual Meeting at the Hjemkomst Center. Carolyn Barden, Gene Prim and Ron Ulven were elected to their first three-year terms, and John Elton was elected for a second term.

This year's Annual Meeting was one of CCHS' largest ever, with 103 attending! A special feature of this year's meeting was the Grand Opening of the new exhibit *Inside, Outside, Upside Down* prior to dinner, with stuffed appetizers to match the inside-outside exhibit theme.

Outgoing board members Donna Voxland and Helen Rudie were honored for serving two full board terms and Alvera Murch was honored for her service as book-keeper for CCHS for over fifteen years. CCHS Collections Manager Pam Burkhardt was honored for her 20th anniversary with CCHS with a light-hearted roast by long-time colleagues Donna McMaster, former CCHS Office Manager

Margaret Ristvedt, and HHIC Director Dean Sather.

Newly elected board member Gene Prim owns the *Barnesville Record-Review*, *Hawley Herald*, and *Lake Park Journal*. He was the mayor of Barnesville for ten years, and has worked with Barnesville's Jaycees, Chamber of Commerce and Main Street Program.

Ron Ulven was born and raised in Highland Grove Township and is retired from over thirty years in the banking business. He has worked with Hawley's Jaycees and Chamber of Commerce, the Minnesota 4-H Foundation and the March of Dimes, and currently manages farms in the Hawley area.

Following the dinner and business meeting, Tim Glines from the Minnesota Historical Society Field Services gave a fascinating talk about how the Clay County Historical Society became organized during the county historical society movement in Minnesota, and the important role Ella Hawkinson played in the historical society's development.



## Outreach Displays

	<u>Open</u>	<u>Close</u>
Hawley Public Library	June	September
Moorhead Public Library	July	September
Barnesville Public Library	June	September
Fargo CVB	April	October

The Hawley Public Library celebrates the summer months with A CENTURY OF CYCLES – the bicycle in Clay County – with photos and artifacts.

The Moorhead Public Library will have a Scandinavian display during the Scandinavian Hjemkomst Festival. The display following that will be OH, WHAT A BEAUTIFUL BABY! with photos and baby-related artifacts.

MASH NOTES - a display about the "a-peeling" potato - visits the Barnesville Public Library for Potato Days! Artifacts include potato mashers, a potato basket and liner as well as items from previous Potato Days.



Visitors can see what's FUN IN THE SUN in Moorhead and Fargo at the Convention and Visitors' Bureau in Fargo this spring and summer. with a display that takes tourists to the ballgame, parks and fishing and swimming!

The Fargo Dome has a temporary display on the Hjemkomst Center in a small case shared between CCHS and HHIC.

## IN-HOUSE DISPLAYS

Special displays in the building's level 3 hall cases focus on Iceland - the featured country during the 2005 Scandinavian Hjemkomst Festival.

A new display of Beulah Forness' exquisite, hand-decorated china has been arranged in the lobby area of the Hjemkomst Center. Forness teaches china-painting classes in the building Tuesday mornings.

## Artifacts & Donors

### March/April 2005

#### Donors:

Moorhead: Moorhead Public Library, Helen Hedelund, Clay County Extension Office, MSUM Student Collaboration, Beth Iverson  
Baker: In Memory of Jacob & Leona Mertes by the Family of Jacob & Leona Mertes  
Glyndon: Don and Alvina Lein  
Fargo: Prairie Public Television  
The Woodlands, TX: Steve & Vicki Bremer

**Artifacts:** Enlarged print of photo postcard showing the north bridge area of Moorhead from the Fargo side of the Red River; photo postcard of a residential street in Ulen; receipt No. 9495 from the Moorhead Tourist Camp with image; letter in Norwegian dated Dec. 7, 1898 from B.O. Hjelde, Ulen to Ole Olsen, Norway, Kansas; program for Commencement Exercises At Hope Academy, Moorhead, Minnesota May 20-24, 1892; MSUM, *The Tokns Project: An Oral History of Hispanic Immigrants to the Red River Valley* May 2005; (10) vol. school annuals: 1930 & 1934 Chokio, 1937 Cobber, 1956, 1957 & 1958 Hitterdal Viking, 1972, 1974, 1975 & 1976 Central Jr. High, Moorhead; DVD *Red River Divide* documentary; certificate from the Clay County Commission & plaque from the Clay County Fair Board both Congratulations for 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of 4-H in Clay County. National cash register, used in the Baker Store pre-1925 to 1978; collection of items relating to the building and voyage of the "Hjemkomst" - (4) boxes records, (2) boxes clothing, box each of rivets and roe plates, head and tail piece of small plywood dragon labeled "Hjemkomst Junior" used with a canoe; wooden folding chair from Beck & Wright in Moorhead, *I Like Ike* pinback button, booklet, *Knit for Defense* (WWII) and book, *Soldier's Service English/French Dictionary* 1917, retracting pocket knife given away by the Glyndon Farmers Elevator, (4) unused 11¢ airmail envelopes; wooden nickel token (about 1958) from "Russell Rockvam, Moorhead, Minn Good For \$1.00 on a Pair of Shoes Until Aug. 1;" (2) booklets: *A Scrapbook About Old Dolls*, 1964, Margaret Marshall Lehr, Margaret Pattie Follett, published by Follett Studios, Moorhead, Minnesota and *Speaking of Old Dolls*, 1964, Margaret Marshall Lehr & Margaret Pattie Follett; dust cover fabric with label from Harry A. Simon & Sons store in Moorhead.



# IMLS awards CCHS prestigious grant to study public perception

Thanks to a grant from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the Clay County Historical Society (CCHS) will evaluate the way in which it serves the community and audiences through exhibits, programs, and other services and how it communicates with its audience through public relations, planning and evaluation.

CCHS was awarded \$4,820 for the Public Dimension component of the Museum Assessment Program. The grant covers administration costs and travel expenses for two outside museum professional surveyors, and includes a stipend for implementing recommendations from the final report. CCHS must provide a cost-share match for a portion of the administrative fees.

"With the results of this study we will be able to increase the visibility and use of our exhibits, programs and research services, which will in turn positively impact the quality of this public programming," said Lisa Vedaa, CCHS Director.

"The Institute of Museum and Library Services supports America's museums and libraries to ensure a lifetime of learning critical to a thriving, democratic society," said IMLS Director Robert Martin. "The Museum Assessment Program grants we make today will help museums strengthen professional practices and educational services that will benefit communities all across the country."



CCHS will soon be asking for your help and your opinion of our exhibits, programs and services for the data-gathering portion of the MAP Public Dimension Assessment.

The IMLS has awarded \$439,275 in Museum Assessment Program (MAP) grants to 160 museums across the country for 2005, only four of those to museums in Minnesota. MAP is a cooperative program between the IMLS and the American Association of Museums (AAM) designed to help museums assess their strengths and weaknesses and plot a course for future improvements. IMLS provides grants to museums to participate in MAP, which is administered by AAM.

The assessment program includes the completion of a self-study workbook by the board and staff of the participating museum, an on-site visit by a professional from an unrelated museum, and a confidential report of recommendations for change. As part of the Public Dimension Assessment the participating museum must also complete various activities designed to gather data about the public's perception of the museum. MAP offers four types of assessments: Institutional, Collections Management, Public Dimension, and Governance.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services is an independent federal grant-making agency dedicated to creating and sustaining a nation of learners by helping libraries and museums serve their communities.



# Probstfield Organic Gardens open and more...

The mission of the Probstfield Living History Farm Foundation, to conserve and interpret the heritage of the R. M. Probstfield Family Farm and promote education of it for the public, is closely related to that of CCHS: to collect, preserve and disseminate knowledge of the history of Clay County, Minnesota. For this reason, and in the spirit of cooperation with our fellow area historical organizations, we bring you news from the Probstfield Living History Farm, arguably one of the most significant sites documenting the early history of European settlement in Clay County.

By Jay Leitch, Probstfield Farm Foundation President

Probstfield Farm Living History Foundation kicked off its season with its annual neighborhood picnic on Tuesday, May 10, at the Farm on 11th Street north of Moorhead. In spite of near freezing temperatures, about 75 members and neighbors showed up for hot dogs and chips, to hear about the farm's history, and to learn more about the organic garden.

This year's activities at the Farm will include the Probstfield Organic Community Garden, development of a hiking trail, identification of the Red River Ox Cart trail through the Farm, tree identification, and service learning projects with Moorhead's K-12 students.

The Organic Garden was re-opened last summer after sitting dormant for a few years. More than 40 plots have been spoken for by anxious gardeners. In addition, about 20 people have purchased shares in the Farm's asparagus patch. The 7-acre Organic Garden is at the northeast corner of 11th Street and 43rd Avenue North. Garden plots are available by contacting Gretchen Harvey at [www.probstfieldfarm.org/gardens.htm](http://www.probstfieldfarm.org/gardens.htm).

Development of a hiking trail/nature walk was initiated by Tyler Lambert-Perkins as an Eagle Scout project two years ago. With the help of over a hundred middle school students, the Foundation plans to complete marking and mapping the 1.5-mile long trail this summer. The trail will eventually be open to the walking public and to cross-country skiers. Motorized vehicles and bicycles are not permitted on the trail.

In the 1800s, one of the Red River Ox Cart Trails from

St. Paul to Winnipeg passed through the Farm. In fact, R.M. Probstfield offered limited goods and services to both ox cart and river boat travelers. This summer, the Foundation plans to identify where the ox carts crossed the Farm and provide interpretive markers.

R.M. Probstfield planted many different varieties of shade, ornamental, and fruit trees. Many of the trees near the original house have been identified and several are marked to assist students in their tree identification. More trees will be identified and marked this summer and a map will be developed to guide people to various species.

The Foundation hopes to complete most of the general clean-up of the Farm this summer. Over 60 tons of trash have already been hauled away. Some of the trash was left by homeowners wanting to get rid of old furniture, appliances, car batteries, and tires. That type of unauthorized dumping has almost stopped since the yard has been maintained the past few years.

The Foundation purchased a 1959 Ford tractor last summer to use in the Garden and maintain road ditches and trails. This past winter the Agricultural Systems Management Club at NDSU restored the tractor as a service project. If the Foundation can find an old hay rack, you may see the tractor in future parades!

To learn more about the Farm go to [www.probstfieldfarm.org](http://www.probstfieldfarm.org).



There is plenty of activity planned for the Probstfield Living History Farm this year, but restoration and interpretation of the main house will be a long, intense project.



## Thrivent, Paulson and volunteers provide shelves for CCHS

CCHS would like to effusively thank Lloyd Paulson and Thrivent Financial for Lutherans for a \$500 grant awarded to CCHS this spring for archival shelving. Paulson helped obtain the grant and also recruited friends Bill DesSaint and Walter Stenson to help assemble the shelves and install them in a CCHS storage room. Thrivent, Lloyd, Bill and Walter: Thank you! Your help is greatly appreciated. It is the support of great volunteers and members like these that the work of the historical society is sustained and successful.

Mr. Paulson also helped CCHS acquire library shelving from the former Washington Elementary School. After a few minor repairs, this sturdy shelving will replace shelves in the archives that were designed to stand back to back, not flat against the wall (that shelving will be installed properly in Mark's office).

CCHS would also like to thank an anonymous donor who gave \$250 for another unit of archival shelving. We would like to purchase 16 more shelving ranges to make more effective use of our storage areas. Two shelving units make a range. Donations are welcome. Thank you for your support!

## Meet us at the Fair!

Come see what's new at the CCHS booth at this year's Clay County Fair in Barnesville, Thursday through Sunday, July 14-17! The CCHS booth is always #14 in the Grandstand, hours for which are 5:00-9:00 pm Thursday, 12-10 pm Friday and Saturday, and 12-7 Sunday.

This year's booth will feature research sources described in the "Discovering Your House's History" article in the March/April newsletter. Learn how to delve into the fascinating history of your home! Copies of the newsletter article and a list of other resources will be available.

Back by popular demand is the 1909-1910 ethnic map of Clay County, a compilation of the 1909 plat map and the 1910 census that indicates the distribution of different ethnic groups in the county with a designated color for the landowners' heritage. This map tends to draw passers-by into the CCHS booth time and again. We hope to see you there!

**DID YOU KNOW: The first Clay County Agricultural Fair was held in Glyndon when the county was less than a year old!**

## A "Superior" Tour takes members to Duluth!

Duluth will be the destination of the next CCHS History Tour! September 22 and 23, CCHS Members can board a comfy Red River Trails motorcoach and ride the scenic route across Minnesota's lake country to the shores of Lake Superior to experience the culture and history of one of the state's most important water ports.

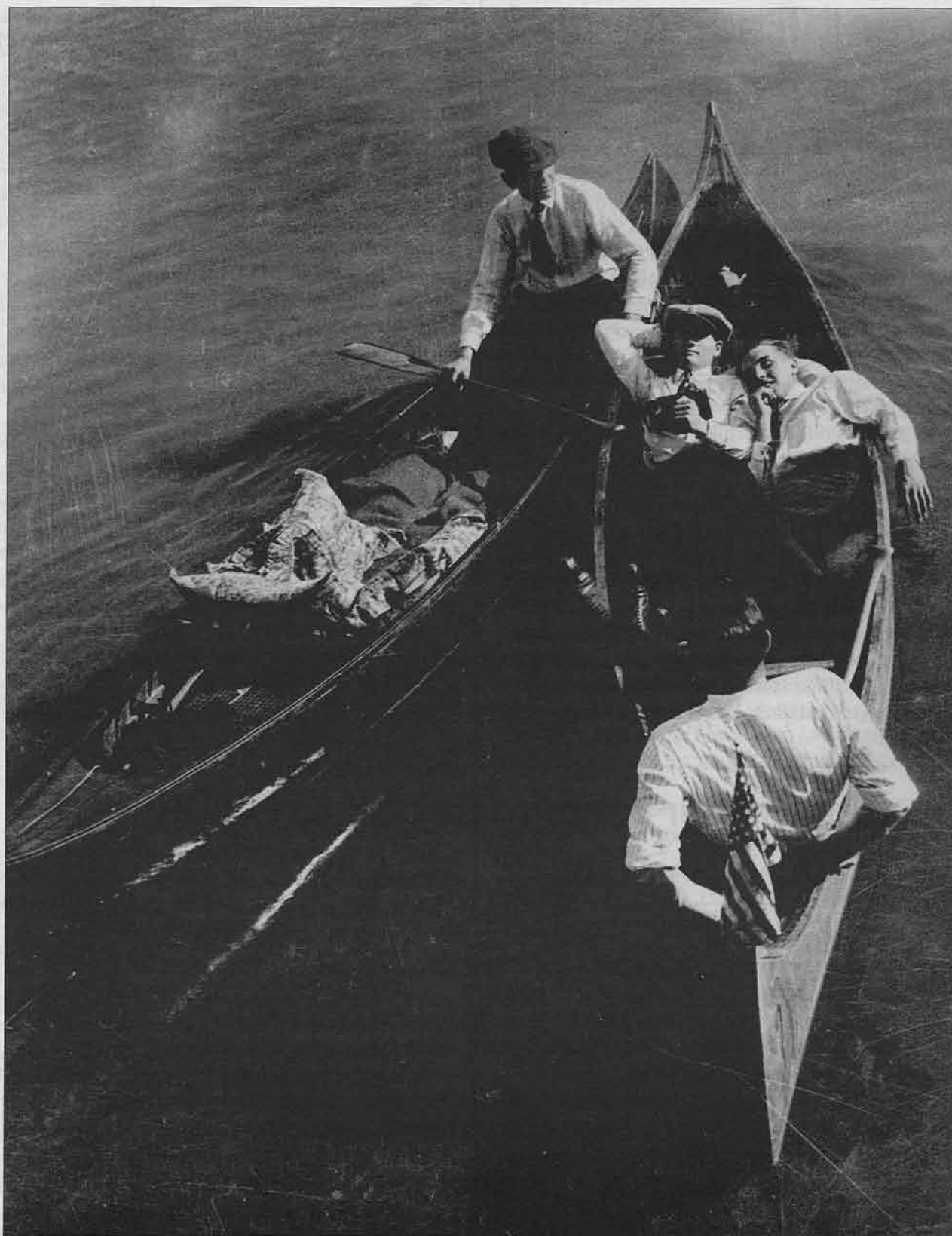
This time of year is prime for viewing beautiful fall colors in northeastern Minnesota, and one of the highlights of the trip will be a leisurely fall colors brunch cruise on Lake Superior aboard one of Duluth's premier sightseeing cruise lines: the Vista Fleet!

This year's tour will launch again from the Hjemkomst Center at 7:30 a.m. and travel along Highways 10 and 210, passing through the Detroit Lakes area, past historic New York Mills and Pillsbury State Forest, along the Brainerd Lakes area and the Cuyuna Iron Range, and past the Savanna and Fond du Lac State Forests, before descending the forested hills around Lake

Superior into Duluth. The Rushing Rapids Scenic Byway runs the last nine miles long the St. Louis River and Jay Cooke State Park before arriving in Duluth.

Other attractions to look forward to are a scenic ride on the North Shore Scenic Railroad, three and a half miles along Lake Superior and the same distance through wooded areas and over two scenic bridges to the Lester River; a tour of the S.S. William A. Irvin, the flagship of U.S. Steel's Great Lakes Fleet; a visit to the Karpeles Manuscript Museum; and a tour through the US Army Corps of Engineers Lake Superior Maritime Visitor Center. As always, we will lodge in comfort at one of the area's first-rate hotels, with the convenience of baggage handling.

The price of the tour has not yet been determined, but will be available by July 13. Registrations are being accepted now! The deadline for registration is August 22. CCHS Tour Refund Policy: Cancellations made after the registration deadline are subject to surrender of 30% of the published tour price.



Don't rock the boat! These guys look pretty comfortable on the Red in 1920.  
Eugene Ruud Collection



# Recreation on the Red

By Mark Peihl, CCHS Archivist

On a recent, very pleasant Saturday afternoon, I walked my dog from the north dam on the Red River to the mid-town dam and back. I counted 27 people fishing from shore, two kayakers, a fishing boat and scores of folks jogging, pushing baby carriages or just strolling along the river's bike paths. And it was only April. These days the Red's banks practically buzz with activity. It wasn't always like this. When canoeing on the Red twenty years ago I never saw another canoeist on the river, much less kayakers or boaters; few people fished. We know that early in Fargo-Moorhead history folks regularly recreated on the Red, but for most of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century locals turned their backs on the river. We wondered what happened, what caused these ups and downs in recreation. Here's what we've found.

From Fargo-Moorhead's earliest days, residents had fun on the river year-round. Ice skating was long a popular diversion. Skaters enjoyed flooded rinks in various parts of town, but occasionally folks scraped the river free of snow for their sport. In the 1890s skaters got a break. In January 1892, the *Moorhead Daily News* reported that "The race course on the river back of Overboe's Mill and extending south from that point, is becoming a popular afternoon resort for the drivers of the fast horses of the twin cities." Equine enthusiasts continued to race horse-drawn sleighs on the frozen Red well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The mile-long track mentioned ran from today's Gooseberry Park north to where the Moorhead power plant sits. The river provided a nice, flat surface for the animals that wore special shoes on their hooves for traction. Horsemen removed the snow (providing skaters with a nice surface when the racing was over) and set up bleachers along the banks for spectators – and bettors. Another quarter mile track ran just west of the Hjemkomst Center.

Sledding was another popular activity. Here

in the Red River Valley, decent sliding hills are pretty rare. Often we have to build our own. In December 1886, Moorhead brothers George and W. H. Robinson opened a toboggan slide on the riverbank west of downtown. Sliders climbed a wooden scaffold alongside the NP Railway bridge and careened north down a steep, snow-filled trough to the frozen surface. Momentum carried the toboggans a couple of hundred yards down river to the old North Bridge.

Norwegian immigrants brought their love of ski jumping with them. This posed another challenge in the ultra flat valley. In the early 1920s, a bunch of Concordia College students formed the Dovre Ski Club and built a 66-foot slide just west of the Moorhead Country Club. Skiers landed on the riverbank, skidded across the Red and up the North Dakota bank to stop. The slope proved too small for the jumpers so they added another twenty feet. Even that was not high enough. In the early 1930s, the Dovre Club built a whopping 140-foot wooden scaffold on the Fargo side of the Red, west of today's Trollwood Park. It was the tallest ski slide in the country at the time and Fargo's highest structure. In 1942, federal authorities demanded it be torn down as it was a threat to planes coming into Hector Airport!

But summer was the time most folks took advantage of the Red's waters. All through the late 1800s folks fished, boated or swam in the river. But summer activity really got a push from, ironically, a drought.

Nineteen-ten was an extremely dry year. The Red ran to just a trickle. In 1910, Fargo residents were, just as they are today, completely dependent on the river for all their water needs. The thirsty city quickly slapped up a dam at the end of Moorhead's Fourth Avenue South to back up a stable supply of water – basically why we have dams today. The dam also created a reliable water source for recreation. Within a few years, numerous docks and private gas

Continued next page...

powered boats appeared on both sides of the Red above the dam. By 1917, entrepreneurs opened several "boat livery" where recreationists could rent canoes or gasoline powered launches.

Moorhead's Frank Dommer owned one of the longest-lived operations. His livery, just upstream from the dam, operated for 42 years. When he retired in 1959, Frank told the *Fargo Forum* that many people had told him their marriages got started

House Hotel in the 1870s. Accounts indicate much of the subsistence fishing was done by women or kids. Many used trot lines. A heavy line, weighted on one end and tied to the bank on the other, trailed a number of lighter lines, each with a weight and baited hook. The line would be placed in the evening and checked the next morning for whatever had grabbed the bait.

The one fish many people think of when they

think of the Red is carp. But carp are not native to the Red or even North America. Introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to provide fishing and culinary opportunities, these rough fish have spread rapidly. The earliest introduction I've heard of to the Red River watershed was in the 1880s in a tributary of the Souris River near Minot, North Dakota. The Souris flows into the Assiniboine River in Manitoba which flows into the Red at Winnipeg. However, it wasn't until the 1930s that their numbers were enough to disrupt commercial fishing on Lake Winnipeg. In this part of the watershed, an introduction may have occurred in 1920. In November that year a Breckenridge newspaper reported that an official of the North Dakota Conservation Department (predecessor to the North Dakota Game and Fish Department)

transporting several thousand fish fry, including eight cans of carp fry, had stopped at Breckenridge. Finding the fish dying, he dumped them into the Red. The Conservation Department vehemently denied being involved. Sportsmen's subsequent angry letters to editors suggest that carp were not present in this part of the river before 1920.

Swimming the Red's muddy waters was once very popular. With no swimming pools and few folks able to visit the lakes, kids swam where they could. In early summer 1931, the *Moorhead Daily News* reported that scores of kids were swimming at the end of Moorhead's Sixth Avenue South near the water and power plant every evening. Many weren't careful about where they changed into



Frank Dommer rented canoes and boats here at the end of Moorhead's 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue South for 42 years from 1917-1959. Flaten/Wange Collection.

with a ride in one of his canoes. It was a great place to take a date!

Fishing has also had a long popularity on the Red. The river features great northern pike and walleye fishing but it's probably best known for its huge catfish. *In-Fisherman Magazine* calls the Red River of the North the single best place in the world to catch trophy Channel Catfish. Today the North Dakota record for a Channel Cat is 33 pounds, 4 ounces. But early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, local character "Catfish Charlie" Feist swore he caught one that was 50 pounds! (It's possible, but then Charlie was a fisherman...) Most fisherfolks fished for food in the 1800s. "Baked Catfish" and "Vinegar Pie" were the specialties of the house at Moorhead's Bramble

Continued next page...



their swim suits. Some didn't bother with swim suits. That bothered the neighbors! In response to their complaints, the city built a swimming area at Sixth Avenue complete with a changing booth, diving tower and rope swing. Local Boy Scouts provided life guards. Later, the swimming area migrated downstream toward the dam and Dommer's Boat House. Improvements included a better diving tower and a floating diving platform.

Most folks today find the Red's murky water unappealing as a swimming spot, but kids in the past didn't seem to mind. In terms of pollution, the Red is today a very clean river. The sediment we see is just good, clean Red River Valley clay. It wasn't always that way, however. The river 100 years ago, 50 years ago or 20 years ago was much more polluted than now. Until 1936, both cities dumped raw sewage directly in the Red! The cleanup of the stream is a major modern success story. At least the swimming area near the water intake, was, even in the 1930s, in a relatively clean part of the river.

In the 1930s, '40s and '50s a series of events caused local residents to change their attitudes toward the river and cease recreating there. After the disastrous flood of 1897, the river settled down with no major flooding for decades. In 1943, the waters returned with a vengeance inundating neighborhoods that had remained dry for many years. Fargo's St. John's Hospital had to be evacuated. It was a shock for residents.

Likewise, drought through the 1930s had turned the Red into a stinking ditch. For several months in 1936 the only flowage in the river was raw sewage. In response, local authorities built more dams. These were a new design. In 1910, builders had placed rocks below the old mid-town dam to create rapids which would mix oxygen into the water. As pollution decays it removes oxygen from the water. To keep the river healthy for fish air needs

to be mixed in. The new "low head" dams did so differently. Water flowed down a slope and tried to go downstream. But water already downstream blocked its path. This forced the flowing water back up to the surface creating a recirculating current.



A man crosses the Red between downtown Fargo-Moorhead on a plank in 1936. In the 1930s the river ran to just a trickle. For several months no water flowed over the midtown dam at all. Forum Communications Company Collection.

This current aerated the water effectively but made the dams death traps. Swimmers and others caught in the currents often drowned. The river, like any body of water, had had its dangers but these dams made the situation much worse.

Also in response to the droughts of the '30s, Fargo opened the Island Park Swimming Pool in 1940. Other pools followed. Improved roads and cars made Minnesota's lake country more accessible. River swimming disappeared.

But in 1944, a series of tragedies seriously changed people's attitudes. On January 14, four-year-old Charles Olich fell through the ice near 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue South and drowned. It had been many years since a child had been lost in the Red. Over the next year, four more children died in the river. Horrified residents responded with an effective education campaign that kept kids from the Red for decades.

Continued next page...



## Recreation, continued

Early in 1945, the newly organized Moorhead Jaycees joined with their Fargo counterparts and took on river safety as a project. The groups offered local kids prizes to come up with a slogan reflecting the Red's dangers. They received over 1,000 entries. Twelve-year-old Moorhead student Sonja Blegen won the top prize (a \$25 War Bond) for her entry, "Taking chances doesn't pay, the river is dangerous night 'n' day." That summer the Jaycees placed over 200 signs emblazoned with the slogan along both sides of the river. The Fargo and Moorhead park departments started "diversion programs" to keep kids from the stream. The project was a success. Children of the 1940s (and, later, their children) came to see the river as a place to be avoided.

In 1959, the final blow to river recreation occurred. The flood of 1952 induced Fargo officials to build a dike to protect St. John's Hospital and the area around Island Park from future floods. The

Army Corps of Engineers decided the best place for the dike was just east of the hospital. That meant cutting off a bend in the river. Many folks don't realize the Red used to flow in a long loop all the way to Fargo's Fourth Street South. (See our *Newsletter* of September/October 1990 for the complete story of this fascinating project.) The river change resulted in the demolition of several homes and the recreation area above the old dam. Dommer's Boat House and the swimming hole disappeared. (Just changing the river did not change the border with North Dakota. Nearly two years after the dike construction, President Kennedy signed a "compact between the states" and 13 acres in Moorhead became part of North Dakota.) A new, dangerous low-head dam replaced the old structure. Over the next forty years several people died there. Except for a little fishing, river recreation practically ceased.

Residents' new attitude about the Red proved hard to shake. In 1985, Fargo Deputy Fire Chief

Continued on page 15...

## New CCHS Memberships & Renewals

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

### NEW MEMBERS

Jeanne E. Aske, Moorhead  
Bill DesSaint, Moorhead  
Daniel & Dorothy Fandrich, Moorhead  
Judy Ree Hensle, Mayville, ND  
Robert J. Hill, Inglewood, CA  
Delayne Karls, Fargo  
Jeff Longtine, Moorhead  
Eldon & Sandy Wollmann, Moorhead

### UPGRADES

Harold Helmeke, Moorhead

### RENEWALS

Herbert & Clarice Aakre, Hawley  
Ace Hardware, Moorhead  
Arthur & Bernice Arett, Moorhead  
Paula W. Bauck, Moorhead  
Jim Bergquist & Jane Eastes, Battle Lake, MN

Dorothy Carey, Moorhead  
Kenneth Christianson, Detroit Lakes  
Florene Culp, Audubon, MN  
Paul DesJardins, Felton, MN  
Dilworth/Glyndon/Felton ISD  
Maybelle Dinsmore, Ulen, MN  
Gordon & Carol Ekre, Hawley  
Duane & Joan Erickson, Moorhead  
Katherine Erickson, Moorhead  
Karen D. Evanson, Moorhead  
Edith L. Flaa, Moorhead  
Janet Fox, Hawley  
Robert L. Gerke, Moorhead  
James Gilbery, Yakima, WA  
LaVerne Larson Halverson, Minneap.  
Robert & Janet Hillier, Moorhead  
Mr. & Mrs. Earl Ingebretsen, Felton  
Richard Keeping, Hawley  
Vera Knapp, Moorhead  
Richard & Sharon Krabbenhof, West Fargo  
Keith & Lorraine Langseth, Glyndon  
Don & Alvina Lein, Glyndon  
Gretchen M. McDonald, Moorhead

Solveig Mead, Moorhead  
Karen Myran, Hawley  
Lloyd & Bev Paulson, Moorhead  
L. Diane Pickett, Dilworth  
Elsie Pitsenbarger, Fargo  
Larry & Elsie Quam, Hawley  
Bonnie Rehder, Moorhead  
Capt. Peter A. Rice, Newport, RI  
Joe & Betty Richards, Georgetown  
River Keepers, Fargo  
Gary & Nancy Ronsberg, Hawley  
Vilera Rood, Moorhead  
Terry Shoptaugh & Deborah Janzen, Moorhead  
Stanley Skogen, Fargo  
Patrick & Orpha Smith, Fargo  
Rachel Smithwick, Barnesville  
Don & Rose-Mary Strom, Moorhead  
Bruce N. Thorson, Waite Park, MN  
Myrtle Tufton, Moorhead  
Olaf R. & Rhoda E. Wicker, Hawley  
Tom Williams & Diane Wray Williams, Moorhead  
Marlis Ziegler, Georgetown

# 1870 Bergquist Log Cabin Open House "Christmas at the Cabin"

June 24 & 25 • 1-4 p.m.

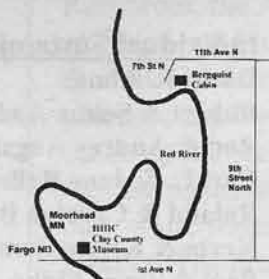
*Guided Tours by  
CCHS Archivist  
Mark Peihl*

Free Admission  
1008 7th St North, Moorhead



*Swedish* ♦ Music ♦ Crafts  
♦ Refreshments

Register to win a bobbin lace Swedish Heart

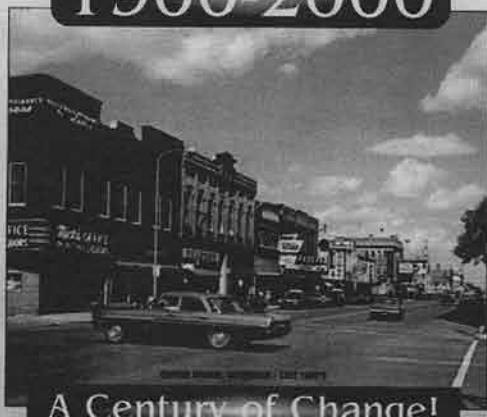


Limited Parking:  
take the Shuttle Bus  
from the Hjemkomst Center,  
202 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue North,  
Moorhead  
Sponsored by State Bank of Moorhead

Hosted by Swedish Cultural Heritage Society & Clay County Historical Society, 299-5520

## The Last One Hundred Years in **MOORHEAD** MINNESOTA

**1900-2000**



**A Century of Change!**

Published by Heritage Publications in collaboration  
with the Clay County Historical Society

## ***A Great Gift for 2005!***

*Moorhead, 1900-2000: A Century of Change* is packed with historic photographs and stories that transport you into the city's colorful past. See how much Moorhead has changed!

Also available: *Fargo, ND, From Frontier Village to All America City, 1875-2000* is a unique collection of photos and stories chronicling Fargo's first 125 years.

These high-quality, paper cover books, published by Heritage Publications of Hendrum, MN, are fundraisers for the Clay and Cass County Historical Societies.

Pick up your copies today at the Clay County Museum & Archives in the Hjemkomst Center, 202 1st Avenue North, Moorhead, or send your check or money order for \$23.00 to CCHS, PO Box 501, Moorhead, MN 56561.

Call CCHS at 218-299-5520 for more information.

## Sponsor, Patron, Sustaining and Supporting Memberships

This segment of our newsletter continues to grow! Thank you to all of our wonderful members for your tremendous support. Please help us thank these members for supporting the Clay County Historical Society by patronizing their businesses:

### **SPONSOR (\$500+)**

**Please consider supporting CCHS at this prestigious membership level!**

### **PATRON (\$200-\$499)**

Mac's, Inc.

### **SUSTAINING (\$100-\$199)**

Chamber of Commerce of Fargo  
Moorhead  
Dilworth/Glyndon/Felton ISD  
First National Bank of Hawley  
Hawley Public Schools  
City of Hawley  
Korsmo Funeral Service  
Moorhead Antique Mall  
Moorhead Area Public Schools  
Moorhead Drug Company  
Moorhead Kiwanis  
Rigels, Inc.  
Sellin Brothers, Inc.  
State Bank of Hawley  
State Bank of Moorhead  
Vikingland Kiwanis

### **SUPPORTING (\$50-\$99)**

Ace Hardware  
City of Barnesville  
Bentley & Bentley, DDS  
Eventide  
Fargo-Moorhead Heritage Society  
Harmon Glass Doctor of Moorhead  
McLarnan, Hannaher & Skatvold  
Melberg Church Supply  
Moorhead Area Retired Educators  
Moorhead Midday-Central Lions

Richtman's Press Club  
Stenerson Lumber  
Wells Fargo Bank MN, N A, Mhd  
Wright Funeral Home

Sincere thanks goes to these individuals in the Patron, Sustaining, and Supporting membership levels:

### **Individual Patron (\$200-\$499)**

Darren & Jane Leno, Moorhead  
Richard T. McMurray, Annandale, VA  
Katherine Mentjes, LeCenter, MN

### **Individual Sustaining (\$100-\$199)**

David R. Alme  
Robert & Selma Anderson  
Rod & Audrey Angstman  
Carl L. & June Bailey  
Roland & Carolyn Barden  
Kevin & Kristy Campbell  
Paul & Joyce Eidbo  
John & Audrey Elton  
Rodney Erickson  
Burton & Catherine Grover  
Andre & Emily Hougum  
E. Robert & Donna Olson  
Esther Olson  
Lynne Olson  
Charlotte Onstine  
Elaine G. Oss  
Lloyd & Bev Paulson  
Elsie Pitsenbarger  
Donna M. Richards  
Davis A. & Hazel Scott  
Bill & Evelette Snyder  
Ron & Deanna Ulven  
Tom & Sherry Watt  
Eldon & Sandy Wollmann

### **Individual Supporting (\$50-\$99)**

Marjorie Aakre  
Sharon Benzel  
Gary & Rose Bergan  
Jim Bergquist & Jane Eastes  
Al & Meredith Bloomquist

Peter C. Brown  
Ben E. Brunsvold  
Richard & June Chenoweth  
Dr. Yvonne Condell  
Jim & Portia Danielson  
Dorothy Dodds  
Carroll & Joan Engelhardt  
Howard R. Geng  
Greg & Mary Alice Gillispie  
Patty Gulsvig  
Ann P. Gytri  
Harold Helmeke  
Ethel & Ralph Hest  
Dr. John Jenkins  
Audrey Z. Jones  
Paul & Florence Korsmo  
Richard & Sharon Krabbenhoft  
James H. Landblom  
Don & Alvina Lein  
Bob & Phyllis Litherland  
Jeff Longtine  
Ethel R. Medalen  
Larry & Jan Nelson  
Orlow & Bev Nokken  
Robert & JoAnn Nyquist  
Sherwood Peterson, Jr.  
James & Dorothy Powers  
Paul Pratt  
Larry & Elsie Quam  
Jon & Kristine Riewer  
Mel & Margaret Ristvedt  
Helen Rudie  
Lois Selberg  
Terry Shoptaugh & Deborah Janzen  
Nels & Myrtle Snustad  
Carol Spichke  
Jim & Chris Stenerson  
Ray & Erma Stordahl  
Olin & Ruth Storvick  
Alvin & Diane Swanson  
Kenneth & Mary Tangen  
Mary Ellen Thompson  
Bruce N. Thorson  
Phyllis W. Thysell  
Chris & Ellen Velline  
Mark & Donna Voxland  
Dale D. White  
Dick & Kathy Zaylskie



**Recreation, continued**

Harold Martinson declared the river "too dangerous to allow recreation," specifically stating that canoeing should not be allowed. The *Fargo Forum* quoted a Fargo Park District official as saying, "maybe the Red River isn't a place that you should have canoes on." In the late '80s attempts to "clean up" the river removed some dead trees (and Catfish habitat) but didn't change many minds.

In 1989, local officials brought the Rural/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) to the area to study the Red and tell us how we could improve the river. These architects from all over the U.S. and Canada submitted a report which surprised many people. They suggested there was nothing wrong with the Red. Compared to many cities' rivers they had studied, where heavy industry and pollution created serious problems, Fargo and Moorhead were lucky to have this slow moving waterway with park land on each side. What needed to change was locals' attitudes toward the river. Central to making this happen would be doing something about the safety of the dams. They also suggested starting a non-profit river advocacy group, a move which had proved successful in other places.

The next year area residents formed RiverKeepers to do just that. The group promoted recreation; started Riverfront Days; placed an excursion boat, the S. S. Ruby, on the Red and generally tried to change people's minds. In the mid-1990s, RiverKeepers helped institute a series of studies of the mid-town dam which resulted in a

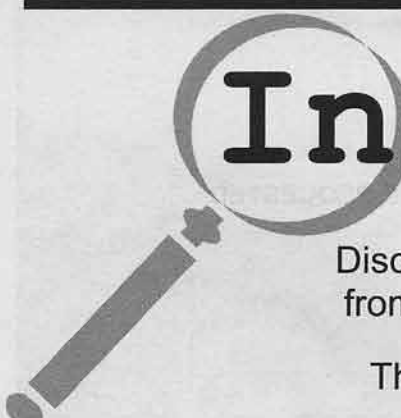
**Calendar**

June 24-26	Scandinavian Hjemkomst Festival, Hjemkomst Center Fri. & Sat. 10-7, Sun. 10-4
June 24-25	Bergquist Cabin Open House, 1-4
July 14-17	Clay County Fair, Barnesville
Sept. 22 & 23	CCHS History Tour—Duluth
Fall 2005	Inside History Lecture Series
December	Holiday Open House Volunteer Appreciation Party

Schedule subject to change

breakthrough. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Army Corps of Engineers, the cities of Fargo and Moorhead and others took a clue from the folks back in 1910 and retrofitted the dam by placing huge boulders below the dam face. This broke up the recirculating currents, allowed fish to migrate upstream to spawn and created some of the only white water canoeing opportunities in North Dakota! The project was a resounding success and has undoubtedly saved lives. Plans are underway to retrofit all the river's remaining low head dams.

It's taken time to change long held attitudes about the Red and there's a way to go. But people are returning to the river and learning to appreciate it. Give it a try!



# Inside, Outside, episodn Down

Discover Clay County history  
from a different perspective!

Through March 26, 2006

**Clay County Museum Hours: 10-5 Monday-Saturday, 10-9 Tuesday, 12-5 Sunday**  
**Hjemkomst Center, 202 1st Avenue North, Moorhead, MN ♦ FREE ADMISSION**



# CLAY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

YES! I would like to become a member of Clay County Historical Society

- ☐ Individual\* \$20      ☐ Sustaining \$100  
☐ Family\* \$35      ☐ Patron \$200  
☐ Supporting \$50      ☐ Sponsor \$500

\*Businesses are not eligible for Individual and Family membership levels

### CCHS MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS:

- ◆ Support preservation of your heritage
- ◆ Bi-monthly newsletter
- ◆ Discount on Acid-Free Preservation supplies
- ◆ Discount on photo reproductions from archives
- ◆ \$1 off admission to Hjemkomst Center Exhibits
- ◆ Access to CCHS history tours
- ◆ Voting Privileges

In addition to the great benefits listed above, Supporting, Sustaining, Patron and Sponsor members a certificate ready to frame and display, and a listing in all CCHS bi-monthly newsletters.

To become a CCHS Member please complete and return this form or a copy of this form with check for dues payment to:

CLAY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
PO Box 501, Moorhead, MN 56561-0501  
Visit our website! [www.info.co.clay.mn.us/history](http://www.info.co.clay.mn.us/history)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Business (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

### CLAY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Hjemkomst Center

202 1st Ave N

PO Box 501

Moorhead MN 56561



Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Moorhead, MN  
56561  
PERMIT NO. 494

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

We're on the web!  
[www.info.co.clay.mn.us/history](http://www.info.co.clay.mn.us/history)