

# Our Times: Lake City in History

“Preserving Yesterday’s Memories for Tomorrow”

Published by The Lake City Historical Society, Lake City, MN ■ June, 2017 ■ \$1.00 for Non-Members (Suggested)

## PRESIDENT’S CORNER

BY CONSTANCE ANDERSON

The Lake City Historical Society, today, continues to honor a past established by community folks from years ago. The purpose as written is "to collect, preserve, and disseminate knowledge about the history of Lake City and the area."

History is about understanding the order of events. It is about communicating the connections between events. It is about helping folks understand the relationship between the causes and consequences of events. It is about inspiring people to draw from past experiences to shape present endeavors.

"All things history" are for the aged and the young. As president my goal is to bring history to youth and youth to history. We recently helped underwrite a field trip by Bluffview School sixth graders to the Minnesota Historical Society and State Capitol. We will follow up by bringing students to City Hall where we can introduce them to our artifact collection and expose them to Lake City's meaningful history.

Our ongoing initiatives include:

\* A mini-museum at the Pearl Button Company, 226 South Washington, where items are for sale that benefit the Historical Society. A DVD about clamming on the Mississippi River orients visitors to an exciting aspect of local history.

\* Our artifacts display at City Hall in the third floor Ballroom, Monday through Friday from 8:30 AM to 4:00 PM. Guided tours are available upon request.

\* Research to produce historical DVD's of famous early residents. Currently in production is a 40-minute DVD on the "Father of Water Skiing," Ralph Samuelson.

\* A brochure facilitating a self-guided walking tour of historic homes. We also lent support to LCHS member Denny Robertson's initiative to create a brochure for a self-guided tour of historic trees. Both brochures are available at the Pearl Button Co.

## How the Mazeppa Area Historical Society Came into Existence

*[In early August of 2016, Ben Threinen and I went to Mazeppa to visit the archive of the Mazeppa Area Historical Society. Although the building wasn't open when we arrived, we were told that Society President Helen Reiland lived just down the street. Within minutes, with Helen as our guide, we were in the midst of Mazeppa artifacts, a huge collection of photographs, and hard copies of the local newspaper that had miraculously survived, some more than a century old. When we learned that a mere ten years before there was no MAHS and no central storage or display venue for the material we saw around us, we asked Helen to write the backstory for this newsletter.—Bob Norberg.]*

### By Helen Reiland

The late Elmer Miller (1929-2014) was the individual most responsible for preserving the history of Mazeppa. Elmer had been photographing landscapes and events in the area of Zumbrota, Goodhue, Mazeppa, Bellechester, and Zumbro Falls since the late 1990s. His keen interest in area history went to a new level in 2000 when he was entrusted with a collection of glass plate negatives dating back to 1915.

In 2006, Elmer came to me and Mike Holtorf with the rumor that two caches of old newspapers had been found, one in a closet upstairs of the town's 1<sup>st</sup> Street liquor store and a second upstairs of the City Hall. The three of us proceeded to check things out. We gasped with disbelief to learn the papers had been returned to Mazeppa by the Minnesota Historical Society and then thrust into grocery bags and deposited in the two locations with little regard for their immense historical value. Instantly the newspapers were retrieved and thus began the larger project to preserve as much as possible of local history.

Gradually, Elmer brought the old photos to life again by developing the glass negatives in his darkroom. He was enthralled with the high quality of the photography of that era and the careful attention to detail. Elmer's own photos numbered in the thousands and they were meticulously labeled, placed in coolers, and shelved. This called out for long-term preservation. **MAHS (Continued on Page 2).**

## MAHS (Continued from Page 1)

As interest snowballed, we arranged history sessions and local people portrayed early settlers. Mark Seeley, a climatologist with the University of Minnesota, spoke at one session and said that it wasn't until he moved to Minnesota from his home state of California that he learned that his great-great grandfather Ira Seeley was responsible for having named Mazeppa. Ira Seeley was a fan of Lord Byron's poetry and "Mazeppa," a 28-pager about a young man's life story, was his favorite poem. As news of the history programs spread, people whose families had settled in the Mazeppa area came from in-state and afar to take wagon rides up and down the streets of Mazeppa and reminisce about who lived where and when.

In 2010, we set out to establish a non-profit with the mission of preserving Mazeppa history. Our board of directors was determined to acquire a building by 2015 to coincide with the community's All-School Reunion. The long-vacant People's State Bank, built in 1909, had been on the market for some time and in 2013 we purchased it. With the last payment in January of this year of a \$40,000 loan, the property is now ours free and clear.

Our archive is wide ranging: local authors, genealogy, a newspaper "morgue" with issues going back as far as 1887, memorabilia of past and present businesses, a section on schools, plat books for three area counties.

We were disappointed to learn that at this point, because of alterations over the years, our building doesn't qualify for the National Registry of Historic Places. However, we have received a \$7,000 grant from the People's Co-Op in Oronoco for exterior restoration, so that could change.

When we went to repair the exterior, we were told that identifying signs of previous occupants were probably not under the fascia, but we were determined to find out. There were tears and sounds of joy when we uncovered the words "Peoples State Bank" and "Mazeppa Journal" in beautiful condition! No one knew what had happened to the stone bearing the year, 1909, when the building was built and opened as a bank. As our local contractor, Mike Marsh, was driving to Lake City to get some supplies a light bulb went off in his head. He thought he might have seen it in the yard of the Howard McDonough home. Mike Holtorf confirmed the supposition. "I believe you are right as I delivered mail there for 35 years and saw it every day!" Howard was pleased to



**Home of the Mazeppa Area Historical Society, a 1909 building that once housed People's State Bank and the Mazeppa Journal newspaper. — Photo courtesy of Ben Threinen.**

see it returned to its original home.

*[Editor's Postscript: Helen Reiland, whose ancestors homesteaded in the area in the 1860s, had a more material role in the creation of the MAHS than she admitted to in her first draft. Beginning in the mid-1980s, she aggressively sought out artifacts relating to local history at auctions and on eBay, spending \$26,000 in the process and piling it all into her home. "I wanted to make sure things were here where they belonged. I had albums, boxes of pictures, furniture, hutches and cases filled with memorabilia. Some rooms had book cases running right down the middle." She could hardly have known back then that eventually her collection would form the core of the exhibit material now housed in the old People's State Bank building.]*

## More About the MAHS

Location: 181 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue North

Operating Schedule: Memorial Day to Labor Day, Saturdays, noon to 3 p.m.

Mailing Address: 124 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue South

Website: [www.mazeppahistoricalsociety.org](http://www.mazeppahistoricalsociety.org)

Motto: "No-One Shall Be Forgotten." History to a Community is like memory to an individual. If a community loses its history, it is debilitating.

Directors: Helen Reiland, president; Jim Siems, vice president; Brenda Wiech, secretary, Diane Gilsdorf, treasurer; Tom Stahman, webmaster; Bev Poncelet, trustee.

# Downtown Red Wing Hides Ancient Creek

There are, even today, some long-time Red Wing residents who are unaware that an active creek, the Jordan, flows beneath the epicenter of the downtown. In the distant past, the Jordan's confluence with the Mississippi made it a convenient parking spot for Dakota canoes. For some time after the Sheldon Theater opened in 1904, ushers dipped refreshing cool water from the creek flowing through the basement to satisfy the thirst of audience members.

For many decades after the first settlers arrived, the Jordan was an obstacle, often treacherous after heavy rains and snow, to people crossing the ravine it created in Red Wing's infant commercial center. Wood trestle bridges were installed to facilitate movement, but a more permanent solution was pursued after high water swept a young woman from a bridge and into the river, a nearly fatal accident.

As Red Wing began to thrive in the late 1800s, the solution was to gradually fill in the ravine and build above the creek. What were at one time the first floors of businesses in its path became, by default, the new basements, with results that can be seen today.

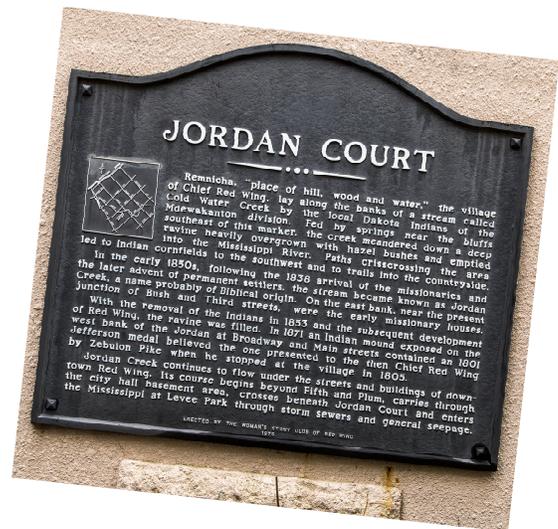
The course of the creek runs toward the Mississippi from 4<sup>th</sup> Street and City Hall across 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Main and Levee. Water run-off from surrounding bluffs is an obvious source of the Jordan water. There is speculation that a spring near City Hall also contributes to the flow. The centrality of the City Hall location in the creek's history is recognized in the designation of its broad lawn as "Jordan Park."

Although the "Jordan Creek" name ("Jordan River" to some locals) was commonly considered a Biblical reference, there is evidence closer to home that it takes its title because the property of James Jordan, an Irish immigrant to Red Wing in 1856, sat astride the waterway.

The Jordan Creek story is told in a documentary commissioned by the Goodhue County Historical Society and narrated by staff members Casey Mathern and James Clinton. Ben Threinen of Lake City, a professional videographer who has produced several documentaries of Lake City history under the auspices of the Lake City Historical Society, filmed and stitched

together the narration and era photos that make up the 8-minute production. In a nod to the cooperative spirit between the two societies, LCHS is mentioned in the closing credits. The documentary and an "information wall" on Jordan Creek are part of the "Downtown Stories" exhibit at the Goodhue County History Center, 1166 Oak Street.

The Goodhue County Historical Society will offer a walking tour of the Jordan Creek on Saturday, Sept. 9. Tickets go on sale May 15 through the Society's website ([goodhuecountyhistory.org](http://goodhuecountyhistory.org)) or by phone (651.388.6024).



## The Plaque in Jordan Court

In 1975, the Woman's Study Club of Red Wing placed a marker to ensure Jordan Creek's existence would not be forgotten. Jordan Court is just off the beaten track, although located right downtown. To enjoy its tranquil setting, proceed to the southeast side of West 3rd Street, between East Avenue and Bush Street.

"Fed by springs near the bluffs southeast of this marker," reads the text, "the creek meandered down a deep ravine overgrown with hazel bushes and emptied into the Mississippi River. Paths crisscrossing the area led to Indian cornfields to the southwest and to trails into the countryside."

Brigadier General Zebulon Pike was charged by President Thomas Jefferson with exploring the origin of the Mississippi. Later, an Indian mound exposed on the west bank of the Jordan at Broadway and Main produced a "Jefferson medal" cast in 1801 and thought to have been given to Chief Red Wing by Pike when he stopped at the village in 1805.

# Here's Where You'll Find Lake City's Most Venerable Trees: Hug Them Gently



## From the Heritage Tree Brochure . . .

- The large Cottonwood Trees that hug the Mississippi River shore in Ohuta Park would have stood witness in 1922 when Lake City's Ralph Samuelson became the first person to ski on water.

- Ginkgo trees (two in front of Lake City Public Library): Sole surviving species of a tree known to have existed 250 million years ago. In some monasteries they have survived 1,500 years. Six were among the few living things to survive the Hiroshima atomic bomb blast despite being within 1 to 2 kilometers of ground zero.

- Kentucky Coffeetree: Planted in Patton Park to honor John Nordine, a nationally known arborist who worked with Jewell Nursery. Seeds, when roasted, can be substituted for coffee beans. However, unroasted pods and seeds contain toxins.

- Burr Oak in Patton Park: Historic because it was part of the Oak Savannah that predated the development of the park. A larger Burr Oak, the largest in Lake City, is located about 100 yards away at 220 South Oak.

- The Heritage Tree Trail has been endorsed by the Lake City Historical Society, Lake City Tourism Board, Lake City Chamber of Commerce and Lake City Kiwanis.

- "A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they will never sit in."—Greek Proverb.

What is thought to be Minnesota's first Heritage Tree Trail was dedicated in Lake City on May 18. Gathering first around a cottonwood tree in Ohuta Park on the Lake Pepin shoreline, the inaugural tour group, led by Dennis Robertson, then proceeded on foot to visit other heritage trees outside the public library and in Patton Park. Mayor Mark Nichols read out the dedication proclamation in a brief ceremony in the park.

Dr. Robertson borrowed the idea for a Heritage Tree Trail from what he first saw in his wife's hometown of Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada, in 2012. He tested the idea out with the Lake City Historical Society in 2013, and the LCHS board encouraged him to follow through with development and subsequently provided modest financial support.

A Heritage Tree can be any tree that has special qualities. The designation can be applied if it is uniquely old, large, unusually shaped, associated with a particular history or commemorative event, or distinguished for other reasons, such as thriving in an unusual locale.

In local consultations with Katie Himanga, a certified arborist, and Bruce Wallerich of the Lake City Public Works Department, ten trees qualifying for the "heritage" designation were selected, all within easy walking distance of each other.

Key to the project was the creation of a map precisely locating each tree. Robertson credits Maggie Theis of Creative Minds with perfecting that graphic over a period of many months. (See the result on the adjoining page.)

A tri-fold brochure, printed with substantial funding from the Lake City Tourism Board, features the map and contains factoids about each tree. A self-guided tour along the trail, "is an attraction," said Robertson, "that combines an outdoor activity with an educational experience for both school-age youngsters and older adults. It is therefore more than just a walk. It is a walk with learning." Brochures can be picked up at no charge at the Lake City Public Library and City Hall.

Tree

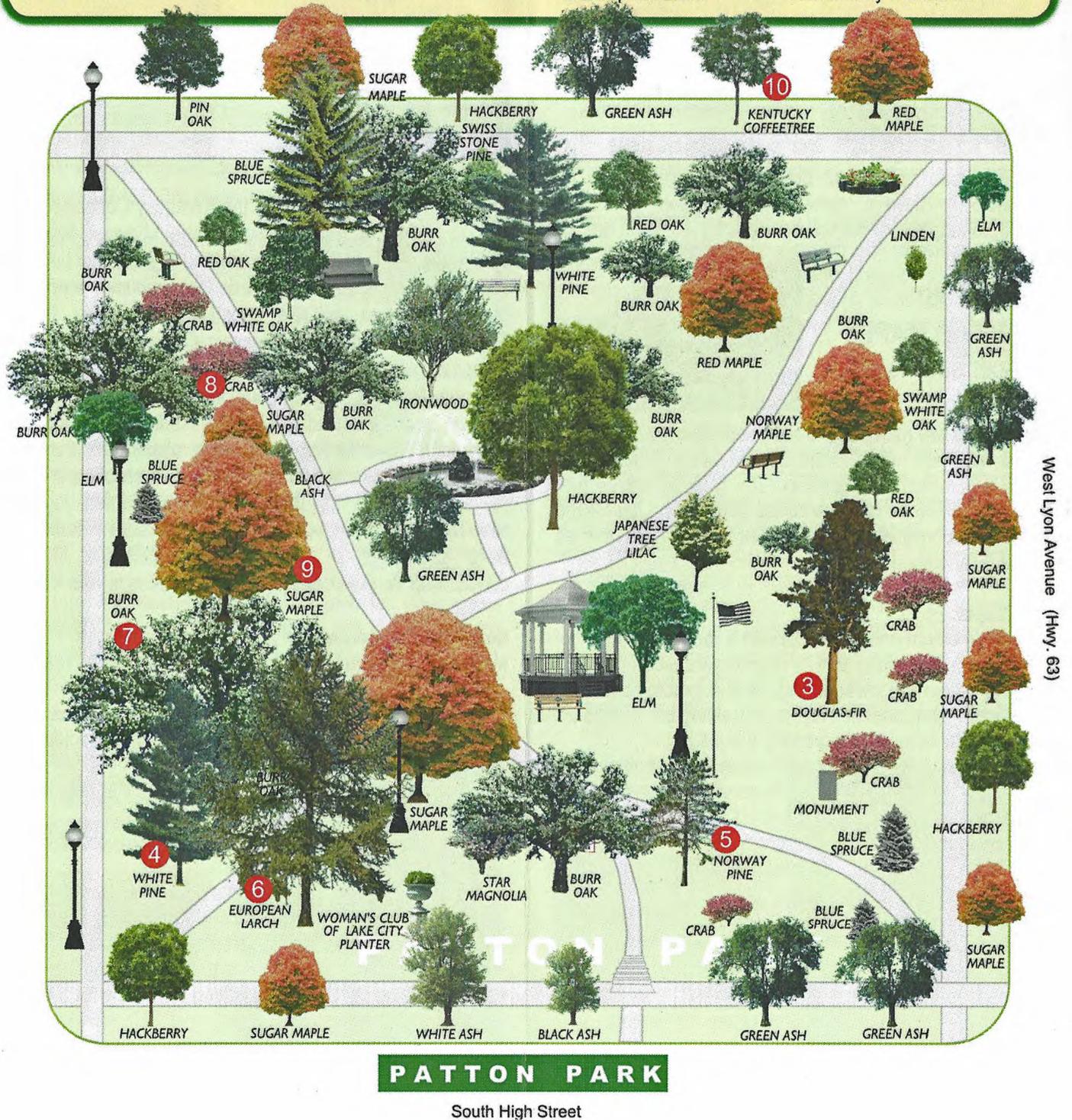
- 1. Cottonwood
- 2. Ginkgo

Location

- Mississippi River Shore in Ohuta Park
- South High Street at City Library site

Trees 3-10 located in Patton Park

- 3. Douglas-fir
- 4. White Pine
- 5. Norway Pine
- 6. European Larch
- 7. Burr Oak
- 8. Crabapple Memorial Tree
- 9. Sugar Maple Memorial Tree
- 10. Kentucky Coffeetree



# Sarah Kimm: Devoted Keeper of the Flame

By Eloise Blattner

Sarah Ann Maire, born in the year 1859, was one of 13 children of immigrants from France who settled in a log cabin in Bear Valley, a few miles from Lake City. She was 19 when she and Theodore Kimm were married in 1878 and two years later, when she was 21, they moved to Lake City. Their home, a cottage on the lakefront, offered an exceptional view of the hustle and bustle of the Mighty Mississippi's river commerce and its daily impact on the small town.

Two decades later, in an era when few women held jobs outside the home, Sarah Kimm, at 41, was thrust into a position of great trust and occasional peril. For 37 years, from 1900 to 1937, captains navigating the lake by night depended on her to make sure warning lights were in place and operating.

The record is silent on why she applied for the job when lamplighter John McMillan had to retire because of disability. There was no question that she knew from first hand observation about river commerce, its inherent dangers, and the dependence that mariners had on warning signals operated by allies on shore.

We can guess at a steely self-confidence because she would have been aware, too, of the sometimes violent nature of the lake and river. She had, after all, been an eyewitness to the most tragic maritime accident on the Upper Mississippi when, in 1890, 98 people from the surrounding area, mostly women and children from Red Wing, were lost in the sinking of the excursion vessel "Sea Wing" only two miles upstream of Lake City.

When she began, there was only a long wooden breakwater jutting out from shore. At its end point a glowing red lantern signaled where the pier offered a safe landing. On City Point, downtown Lake City's furthestmost projection into Lake Pepin, a marker light was placed to warn steamers, barges and boaters against coming aground and to aid their navigation up and down river. On more than one occasion she was nearly toppled into the dark waters by high winds as she negotiated the rickety timbers on her way to and from the pier's end.

Eventually the old pier gave way to a new one constructed of concrete with a fine walkway on top. However, as the years advanced, ice damage and relentless waves broke up the stonework and Sarah would have to negotiate gaps and rough stones as she made her way along the pier. By now, this dedicated and conscientious civil servant must have known every inch and danger point along the path.

At first she deployed kerosene hand lamps. Every evening at sunset, she would journey out to light the lamps, and then return each morning to put them out. The process evolved to stationary lamps fueled by oil, which could be precisely measured so they would extinguish themselves at dawn, a savings in both fuel and labor. For her efforts, Sarah was paid \$22 a month—representing \$11 per lamp. She was compensated only during the period of navigation when the lake was not frozen over, a span that could encompass fewer than six months.

Sarah hoped she could discuss her pending retirement with none other than the United States President himself since Franklin Roosevelt had announced his plan to visit Lake City on August 8, 1934. As many as 15,000 people packed both sides of Lyon Avenue for its full length, all but some 3,000 from outside the town. The President stayed just long enough to dedicate new harbor and dock facilities and to wave to his well-wishers from the open backseat of a touring car. Then he was gone.

"I did so want to talk to him about my pension," she told a local news reporter. "I am sure if he tried to scramble out over the rocks to the end of that long breakwater as I've been doing night and morning for 34 years, he'd see that I got my pension."

There was no harbor when Sarah moved to town at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She could have walked almost in a straight line from her front door, where the Nosh Restaurant is today at 310 South Washington, to City Point. In 1916 an opening was cut through the north bank of the point and an existing pond was dredged to create the first boat harbor. When she went about her work on the point during the 1930s, there was the Brown Hotel, six cabins and two homes, one of which was occupied by long-time harbor master Hank Breuer.

Although reluctant to leave the job before being assured of her pension, she nevertheless sent a letter of resignation—only to have it rejected. Approval was later granted in 1937. But one week after she left the job, she



*Sarah Kimm, circa 1915*

### Please Join Us ...

... in our mission to preserve yesterday's memories for today. We meet the fourth Tuesday of each month, 2 p.m., second floor conference room of City Hall. Your input is welcome.

she died of a heart attack at her home at the age of 78. For 37 years she had never missed a night of lighting the lamps except for illness.

Two current residents, Katie Schmidt and Donna Halverson, remember Sarah Kimm as a figure in their childhoods. Halverson lived then at what is now 714 South Lakeshore (Main Street at that time) and Sarah was a familiar sight as she went about her daily duties. Schmidt recalls that she had a personal encounter when she was about 8 years old and was walking along the lake when she saw Kimm starting out to light the lamps. Schmidt asked if she could come along and they went together, first to the point, then to the pier. "That would have been about 1934," she recounts, "when Sarah was hoping to discuss her pension with President Roosevelt."

Photos and other information relating to Sarah Kimm were recently offered to the Lake City Historical Society by descendants Dawn Frieberg, a great-great-granddaughter who lives in Hayfield, MN, and Brad Heins, a great-great-grandson, who lives in Morris, MN. Dawn credits her father, John E. Heins of Grand Meadow, MN, of putting her on the trail of the memorabilia. Otherwise, the old trunk—encrusted with bird droppings and virtually forgotten in an old barn—might have escaped notice and its contents lost to history.

## The Lake City Historical Society

### Board Members/Officers

Constance Anderson, President  
Ben Threinen, Vice President  
Don Schwartz, Secretary/Archivist  
Dave Dueholm, Treasurer  
John Albright, Board Member  
Bob Parrott, Board Member  
Bob Norberg, Board Member & Newsletter Editor

Website: [www.lakecityhistoricalsociety.org/](http://www.lakecityhistoricalsociety.org/)

## History at Your Fingertips On the LCHS Website

Dean Kaartinen of Creative Minds is the master technician behind the Lake City Historical Society website (see address in box above). As the LCHS has expanded the wish list of what it would like to see displayed on the site, Kaartinen has responded with the necessary expertise.

The most recent addition to the website provides access to Sharon Nelson's excellent research on businesses in Lake City from its earliest days. With one click, the document downloads quickly and its historic photos, news clippings, and ownership histories are easily navigated on a street-by-street basis.

Also revisit the past in the pages of telephone directories from the Dwelle Telephone Company, founded in 1909 by descendants of pioneer Abner Dwelle.

The brochure for a self-guided tour of historic homes and recent newsletters are also available on the site.



**This image from a 1910 postcard illustrates just how challenging the round trip was for Sarah Kimm in maintaining the beacon at pier's end. The scene does not capture the times when darkness, high winds and heavy waves prevailed.**

## Seeking Memories Of "The Terrace"

In today's dollars, the Terrace Night Club that opened on April 15, 1947, cost \$2.5-million to build and equip. Today there is no evidence of the elegant and widely popular dining and dancing spot that drew an opening night throng of 1,000 to its location one mile south of the downtown on Highway 61. Submit your memories of The Terrace to [bob-norberg@earthlink.net](mailto:bob-norberg@earthlink.net) for an article in the next LCHS newsletter.

## LCHS Membership (May, 2017)

\* Designates Life Member (H) Designates Honorary LM

*The Lake City Historical Society appreciates the support and encouragement of the members listed below. Annual dues support projects and programs that preserve local history for the education and enjoyment of present and future generations. See membership application form at right.*

Marsha Alexander	Jean & Dave Mathenev
Alice Atkinson	Myrna McCullough
Jim & Betty Albright	Mike McDaniel
John Albright	Pat McDonald
Constance Anderson	Richard Meincke
Sigurd & Sharon Anderson	Monica Michenfelder
Toni Anderson	*Mary Ellen Miller
Georgene Arndt	(H) Ethel Moyer
Amanda Baldwin	Stefanie Murphy
Janette Benson	Kathleen Murray
Jean Benson	Tim & Lisa Myers
*Eloise Blattner	Brad & Mary Nelson
Ed Borner	*Dolores Nelson
Thomas H. Boyd	(H) Sharon Nelson
Willard & Susan Boyd	Bob & Shari Norberg
*Dave & Patti Bremer	Neal & Marianne Olson
*Judy Burfeind	*Casey O'Neil
Sarah Cabot	Bob Parrott
Ken & Sue Caron	Teri Pepin
Jenn Cobb	Andru Peters
Janet Conrad	Margaret Peterson
Faye Conway	Todd & Lynn Peterson
James & Roberta Craig	Denny Robertson & Andrea Mackie
Shelly Danielson	Christine Roussopoulos
David Danckwart	John & Karen Ryan
James & Dawn Danckwart	Jim & Audrey Sass
(H) Charles Denny, Jr.	Marcia Savela
David Dueholm	Katie Schmidt
Jack & Carmen Edwards	Greg and Deb Schreck
*Pernille Flesche	Dori Schmauss
Kelly & David Flo	Rollie & Karen Schumacher
Jil and Paul Garry	Don & Alice Schwartz
Juanita Glander	Steven Schwen
Joel & Sandy Grettenberg	John and Judy Selck
Bob & Nancy Herron	Howard & Rhoda Siewert
Katie & Larry Himanga	Susan Wald Sink
(H) Marj Hanson	David & Lucy Sontag
Ron & Billie Hunt	(H) Lowell TerBorch
Marianne Kaufmann	Ben & Lola Threinen
Gilda Kay	Cheryl Vaughn
Ralph Lentz	Carol Warfel
Cheryl Luettinger	Laurie Weyant
(H) Shirley Luettinger	Dave Wenzel
*Mark Lutjen	Terri Zessman
Jim & Darlyn Lyons	

### Yes, I Would Like to Join the LCHS

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ ST \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

#### Annual Membership:

**\$10 Per Individual, or  
\$25 Per Family**

**I also want to support the Society's Annual Fund. My contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ will be added to annual membership(s).**

**I have included in my payment gift memberships for the following persons at the individual rate:**

#### Gift Membership For:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ ST \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

#### Gift Membership For:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ ST \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**My check for a total of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed and made payable to the Lake City Historical Society.**

**Mail to: Lake City Historical Society  
POB 246  
Lake City, MN 55041**

*The LCHS is a non-profit organization and contributions are deductible for tax purposes.*