

# Our Times: Lake City in History

“Preserving Yesterday’s Memories for Tomorrow”

Published by The Lake City Historical Society, Lake City, MN ■ Issue 1, September, 2010

## PRESIDENT’S CORNER

Hi, Did you see us? We were there.

Yes, our Society had a booth at Patton Park during Water Ski Days and we thank so many of you for stopping to say “Hi” and to share some of your memories as you leafed through our wonderful history book, Lake City photos, etc.

That’s exactly why we exist, to encourage the expression of those memories and to preserve them for future generations. Artifacts are another important facet of remembering the past. That’s why we are truly grateful to everyone who considers the Lake City Historical Society as a repository for their treasures that tell Lake City’s history.

We look forward to seeing many of you again, this time at our booth at Lincoln High School during Johnny Appleseed Days, October 2 and 3. This is an opportunity for you to purchase some reminders of what has gone before in Lake City. But whether you open your pocketbooks or not, please stop by to say hello and look around.

This is our inaugural newsletter and in this and future issues we will inform you of upcoming history-related activities and present some of the artifacts that have been donated to the Society.

In closing, I want to encourage your support of our efforts. Current members are listed on page 4. Our dues are quite modest. Please join and add your name to our membership roster.

Eloise Blattner

## Local Businesses Make LC History Book Possible

In early 2007, the Lake City Historical Society embarked on what appeared at first to be a project beyond its means—the production of a 100-plus page, hard-cover history of the community. The total cost, more than \$30,000, could not be financed from a bank account that seldom showed a balance exceeding \$2,000.

Then four local enterprises stepped forward with loans to finance the production, Lake City Federal Bank, Lake City Medical Center—Mayo Health System, Hearth and Home Technologies, and The Lake City Graphic. Their decision to invest constituted a “yes” to key questions they had to consider: (1) Could “local talent” compile and process the large volume of information and photographs the publication required? and (2) Would sales be sufficient to repay the loans?

The first of the quarterly loan repayments began within six months after the books were delivered by the printer in December, 2007. In the Spring of this year, sales had produced revenues sufficient

for full repayment two years sooner than the sponsors had expected. In addition to making additional contributions to the LCHS, some of the sponsors also waived a portion of the final payment.

The remaining inventory of books will generate up to \$12,000 in future revenue for the Society in support of its work to underwrite historical preservation and the dissemination of historical information. “Lake City, Minnesota: Our Historical Journey” is 128 pages of text and pictures. Copies are available through Treats and Treasures, The Antique Shopper, Mississippi Mercantile, and Lake City Candle Company. They also can be ordered from the Society (call Donis Boss or Jeff Kuznia, 345-2276).



The book was published by The Donning Company of Virginia Beach, VA, which was responsible for scanning photos, design, printing and facets of the marketing effort.

*Jeff Kuznia, pictured here ringing the bells at City Hall, is treasurer of the LCHS and directs the marketing of “Lake City, Minnesota: Our Historical Journey.”*

## The Lake City Historical Society (LCHS)

The present day Lake City Historical Society was established in 1986 to collect, preserve, and disseminate knowledge about the history of Lake City and relate it to the history of Wabasha and Goodhue counties and the state of Minnesota. Membership is open to the general public. Meetings are held the fourth Tuesday of each month at 2 p.m. on the second floor of City Hall.

### Officers and Board Members, 2010-2011

Eloise Blattner, President  
Don Schwartz, Secretary  
Jeff Kuznia, Treasurer  
Katie Schmidt, Board Member  
Donis Boss, Board Member  
Lucy Sontag, Board Member

### Archive and Displays

The Society welcomes contributions of photographs, artifacts and other items relating to the history of Lake City. Some of the Society's holdings are on display in cabinets located in the second floor Ballroom of the City Hall. The archive of photographs and written material can be made available to researchers and other interested parties upon application to the Society's secretary, Don Schwartz, telephone 651-345-2692.



An American Legion uniform worn by Lake City's "Skip" McGinnis of the McCahill team was donated to the LCHS by Charlie Holter of Frontenac.

**During** World War II, the most dreaded figure approaching the front doors of American homes was the Western Union deliveryman, whose knock often meant that a serviceman from the family had been killed in action. For decades, Western Union monopolized the delivery in writing of urgent messages sent by telegraph and, later, teletype. The Lake City office of Western Union was in the Lyon Hotel, built circa 1855 and taken down in 1972. It is now the site of the Rivage on Washington Street. The trademark Western Union sign displayed at the Lyon Hotel was rescued during the demolition by Dr. David Sontag, who recently presented the artifact to the Lake City Historical Society.



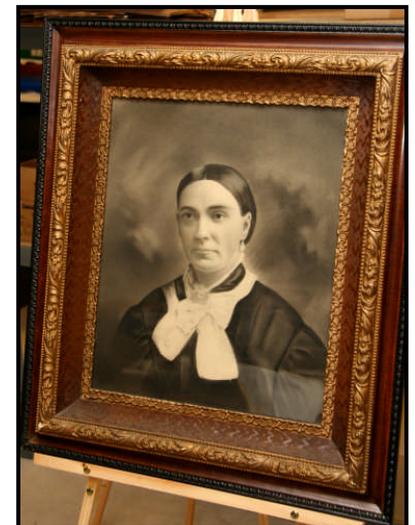
### Johnny Appleseed Days

The LCHS will sell note cards, postcards, photographs and its 128-page history book at a booth in the Lincoln High School lobby from 9-5 during Johnny Appleseed Days, Saturday and Sunday, October 2 and 3.

Items and prices include:

- "Lake City, Minnesota—Our Historical Journey," a 128-page, richly illustrated book published in 2007. Leather bound, \$89.95, regular hard cover, \$34.95.
- One dozen note cards w/historical photos, \$10.
- City Hall ornament, \$10.
- Postcards, \$2 each.
- Historical photos: \$5, 8x10; \$3, 5x7, \$5, digital.

*Marcene Herron of Lake City donated this elegantly framed picture of her great-grandmother, Anna Meincke, to the LCHS. Anna and her husband, Henry, were born in Germany, and emigrated to Minnesota in 1870, where the family grew to include seven children and their Mt. Pleasant township farmstead to 600 acres. The "History of Wabasha County" (p. 447) describes Henry as "a man of strong and rugged physique, and as a citizen useful and respected." Henry had been a widower for 14 years when he died in 1919.*



# Pearl Button Restoration Recaptures Former Beauty

Although the building at the corner of Washington and Marion Streets has served as a dry goods store, shirt factory, car repair garage and warehouse, it is best known as the “Pearl Button Factory,” its incarnation for only six of its 144 years, from 1914-1920.

Now local residents have the opportunity to see the building much as it was when James C. Stout constructed it in 1866 for his general merchandise business. When the restoration is completed, the building will serve in two capacities, retail emporium and museum.

Partners in the building, which was purchased from Pat Wise of Lake City, are Dave Close and his wife Juleen, who are doing the restoration, and Rene Lawson and Lora Schwartz. The new owners planned to put a button-making museum in the basement, but requirements of the Americans with Disability Act and zoning restrictions made that impossible. Instead, the museum display will take up a portion of the main floor.

All windows and the Washington Street storefront are being replaced, but the building will retain as much of the original design as possible. Two cast iron pillars in the front are not original, but from the same period.

In the 1850s, Lake City’s principal assets—access to the Mississippi, a vital trade artery, and Lake Pepin—attracted businessmen who came from the East and South looking for investment opportunities. Stout, the son of a judge, came with his family from Middletown, New York, in 1856. Built for \$8,000, the structure currently being restored was the first in town to be constructed with cream colored brick, which came by steamboat from Chaska on the Minnesota River. It survived two destructive fires.

When Stout died in November, 1909, a local newspaper reported that “the deceased .... was identified among [Lake City’s] progressive businessmen, he having conducted a general merchandise store in the building now occupied by the shirt factory. His passing removes another pioneer.”

The building was purchased by Clarence Finch in 1875 who operated a dry goods store there until 1907. The Gut-



**The former Pearl Button Factory undergoes restoration at the corner of Washington and Marion Streets in downtown Lake City.**

terman Brothers Shirt Factory was in the building from 1907 until 1914.

Using shells from locally harvested clams, the Lake Pepin Pearl Button Company manufactured buttons by the thousands for shipment throughout the U.S. The business thrived from 1914 to 1920, when depleted clam stocks led to its demise. The building was used as a Chevrolet garage from 1920 until 1926, and thereafter as a warehouse for Wise Hardware.—Article based on recent article in the Lake City Graphic and research by Don Schwartz.

## Origins of The Lake City Historical Society

The effort to preserve local history began in the late 1800s with the Old Settlers organization, which claimed 50-60 members. Later, artifacts were collected by the Lake Pepin Valley Historical Society, which displayed them in the basement of the since-demolished Carnegie-Tyrone Library.

The present day Lake City Historical Society was formally established in 1986 as a chapter of the Wabasha County Historical Society. It inherited many of the items previously held by the Lake Pepin group, passing some of county interest to the Wabasha County Museum at Reads Landing.



*Often referred to over the years simply as “the foundry,” the longtime manufacturer of pistons and other engine parts was owned in 1993 by the AE Geotze enterprise. This commemorative coaster observing the local company’s 125th anniversary was donated to the LCHS by the late Art Gray.*

## LCHS Membership (Oct., 2010)

\* Designates Life Member

*The Lake City Historical Society appreciates the support and encouragement of the members listed below. Although the annual dues are modest by any measure, they support a number of projects and programs that preserve local history for the education and enjoyment of present and future generations. See membership application form at right.*

Alice Atkinson	Virginia Holst
John Albright	Ron & Billie Hunt
Georgene Arndt	Ila Jacob
Amanda Baldwin	Marianne Kaufman
Nancy Banks	*Onalee Kramer
Jeanette Benson	Susan Leuer
*Eloise Blattner	Shirley Luettinger
Doug Blondell	*Mark Lutjen
Ben & Monica Boege	Jim & Darlyn Lyons
Dick Boettcher	Richard Meincke
Ed Borner	Monica Michenfelder
Donis Boss & Jeff Kuznia	*Mary Ellen Miller
Virginia Bowers	Ethel Moyer
*Dave Bremer	Laurie Neinast
Jon Bremer	*Dolores Nelson
*Judy Burfeind	Bob & Shari Norberg
Barbara Comstock	Donald O'Brien
James & Roberta Craig	Neal & Marianne Olson
Pat Coyle	*Casey O'Neil
Shel Danielson	Eleanor Palmer
Deirdre Flesche	Dennis Partyka
*Perneille Flesche	Andru Peters
Kelly & David Flo	Ruth N. Rael
Margaret Galiardi	Katie Schmidt
Juanita M. Glander	Don Schwartz
Lorraine Glander	Lu Simons
Cara A. Grisim	Betty Smith
Wayne Hammer	David & Lucy Sontag
Thomas Hanlon	Dona Vay Sprick
Marj Hanson	Henry & Carolyn Stelling
Jean Heidenreich	Robert Storing
Bob & Nancy Herron	Lowell TerBorch
Robin Highum	Carol Warfel
Lindsey Himanga	Ethel Zimmerman
Sam A. Holcomb	

### 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.*