

Our Times: Lake City in History

"Preserving Yesterday's Memories for Tomorrow"

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

BY CONSTANCE ANDERSON

Today the Lake City Historical Society continues to honor a past carefully recorded by people of the community since the early 1850s. Our purpose is clearly spelled out: "To collect, preserve, display and disseminate knowledge about the history of Lake City and the area."

The spring of 2019 has been a time of Society initiatives to do just that. A new display featuring the former Lake City/Frontenac Airport was unveiled in the City Hall ballroom at a public open house during April. "Old timers" related memories of early local aviation and younger folks couldn't believe such an airport ever existed. The exhibition will be available for viewing Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. The ballroom is also home to a display of objects and information drawn from the Society's extensive archive.

In May a joint venture of the Historical Society, the 125-year-old Woman's Club of Lake City, and the recently formed Lake City Arts Association showcased the mixed classic Chamber Ensemble Troost in the historic ballroom. The group made use of the vintage grand piano. During the early 1900s this very venue was frequent host to music and dance events.

A couple of years ago the Society began a project to clean grave stones and markers in local cemeteries to restore their readability. Research about the deceased was then shared in the *Graphic* along with a photo of the marker.

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Steering Group Leads Effort To Establish Heritage Center

A non-profit corporation has been established to create a History and Cultural Heritage Center in Lake City, possibly in the old Hanisch Opera House building downtown. The goal is to create an informative, educational and entertaining interpretive center focused on the geology, history, cultural heritage, ecology, and future of our unique area and city.

Already, Lake Pepin, the bluffs, and our marina attract thousands of visitors each year. The Center will also serve as a drawing card for the "Destination Lake City" initiative to enhance local economic development. The Center will host residents and their guests, school children, field trips, tour bus groups, and "accidental tourists" who, once in town, look for interesting activities.

A Steering Group is meeting monthly to formulate plans and solicit community support in a common cause to establish a Center that tells the full story of Lake City's rich history and cultural heritage. For additional information, please contact Wayne Quist at 952-270-8764 or waynequist@comcast.net.



Hanisch Opera House building, about 1874, at corner of Lakeshore Drive and West Center Street.

Of Ice and Men: Records Saved, Records Lost

Ice on Lake Pepin—its fall arrival and spring disappearance—has been a critical component of upper Mississippi River commerce since the first outsiders settled on its shores. It would seem that a simple recording of open and closed would be a part of a continuing historical record. But without local observations by ordinary folks about 50 years of data would not exist.

Even the very existence of the earliest history might have disappeared were it not for W. J. Richardson, who took issue with a Graphic-Republican report in 1919 that the lake that year had closed at the latest ever date on Dec. 24 and 25. Not so, said Richardson, who wrote in a letter to the paper that in 1877 the lake had frozen over on November 29, but then had reopened. Some settlers of the era were still alive, he wrote, and recalled an excursion on the lake on Christmas day. Capt. Murray was at the helm of the steamer Pepin and excursionists came aboard wearing linen dusters and straw hats and using palm leaf fans to cool themselves. Richardson's commentary was accompanied by a year by year tabulation of openings and closings.

Mr. Richardson began compiling data in 1864 and had it given to him for the three preceding years. No running record of local observations exists after 1918, although it might be constructed by consulting the Graphic archives year by year. The U.S. Corps of Engineers has provided the Lake City Historical Society with its running record, which begins with 1969. Thus there is a 50-year gap with no readily available information.

A spreadsheet combining the local observations and Corps data is available at the LCHS website. (Google Lake City Minnesota Historical Society or go to lakecityhistoricalsociety.org.)

The Corps of Engineers first became involved in improving navigation on the river in the 1830s and in the 1930s it began installing locks and dams. A system of 27 locks and dams has created a “stairway of water” as the river falls 420 feet from the Falls of St. Anthony to Granite City, Illinois, in the south. The Corps keeps an unofficial record of when the navigation season starts and ends; it is based on when the first tow reaches Lock and Dam 2 at Hastings in the spring and the last tow leaves that same point in the fall.

Flooding this spring along the Mississippi resulted in the latest start to navigation in the last 50 years, April 24. It broke the record set the year before when it was ice on Lake Pepin that kept barge traffic at bay until April 11.

However, going back to the first 50 years of records, the latest opening date was April 26.

For a number of years in the 1950s and 60s, a car was placed on the lake and people would register their guesses on when the ice would melt and the car would sink. We've been unsuccessful in identifying the sponsor of this contest and what prizes went to the winner. Rand Conway recalls that it was called “Dunk the Clunk” and that the chances were sold. John Olson tells us that there was a cable attached so the vehicle could be retrieved after it sank. The cars were stripped out and the transmissions removed, he recalls.

“Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, what we pass on to our children and future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration.”

*Modified by LCHS member Wayne Quist
from UNESCO's World Heritage program.*

President's Corner (*from page 1*)

Other initiatives include:

- * Completing historical DVD's of "Famous Names of Lake City" and "The Life of Ralph Samuelson," the inventor of waterskiing.
- * Managing our entire archive collection and selecting artifacts and themes to display in the City Hall ballroom. The exhibits are available for viewing Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m to 4:00 p.m.
- * Maintaining the Pearl Button Company mini-museum, where items relating to city history are for sale.
- * Responding to research requests from folks outside the area.
- * Working with community groups to plan the Lake City sesquicentennial and the 100 year celebration of water-skiing in 2022.

We invite our “old” members to recruit new ones. A wide variety of skills and experiences can be put to good use in the service of our mission—research and writing, project management, budget formulation and oversight.

Remembering “Donna Mae,” Her Builder and Captain

BY ELOISE BLATTNER

We all have special childhood memories that never leave us. Mine is growing up in Lake City and living just blocks from Lake Pepin on the mighty Mississippi. In summer, my twin sister, Mary Ellen, and brothers David and Wendell would go swimming in the lake after Mom had made sure we had taken our swimming lessons. In winter, we skated in the harbor ice rink. Dad used the winter short cut to Stockholm and would drive us across the lake to visit Mom’s Swedish parents, Carl and Amelia Wahlstrom. Now and again, if we would plead enough, Dad would pull us on a sled behind the car, proceeding slowly with a long rope from the back bumper to the sled.

And I remember the joy I felt in walking up the gang plank to board the ferry steamer Donna Mae. The vessel seemed immense! We sat on first floor benches as boarding continued, with Capt. E. W. Holstrom there to greet everyone. The life preservers were at the ready, neatly tucked in ceiling spaces. Soon we would hear the engines began to throb down below as the boat began the journey.

Mom let us climb the stairs to the second floor where there were more benches as well as tables and chairs. We watched as the marina faded in view behind us and the Wisconsin shoreline neared. For a few wonderful hours, while Mom was tending to her mother, we played on the streets of Stockholm with a friend, Caroline, whose parents ran the Skelly station. Far too soon, Mom summoned us to the beach to meet the incoming Donna Mae for the return home.

These memories came flooding back as I paged through a three-ring binder of news articles, reminiscences and pictures of the many adventures of the excursion vessel. The book, now a prized part of the Lake City Historical Society archive, was a gift of the boat’s namesake, Donna Mae Holstrom (now Jensen) of Minneapolis, a daughter of the renowned captain. Here is some of the history recounted in its pages:

Capt. Holstrom’s career on the water began in 1907 when he was hired as a licensed engineer by Capt. Lenhart to work on the steamer Verana. He acquired half interest in the enterprise in 1907 as Capt. Lenhart’s health began to fail, and he purchased the business outright in 1916. He expanded by building a large ferry barge to accommodate automobiles.

In 1929, Holstrom built the ferry Lake City, also outfitted for automobiles. When the city stopped paying a monthly subsidy of \$65 in 1933, Holstrom ended the service. “These were depression days, you know, and there wasn’t that much business,” he was quoted as saying, “so

I rebuilt it as an excursion boat.” In 1934, the “new” Lake City was rechristened as the “Donna Mae” in honor of one of the captain’s daughters. It resumed service between Lake City and Stockholm for a few years, but Holstrom saw more demand for excursion bookings and refitted the first deck as a dance floor and an upper deck with chairs, tables and benches. The first year it took on parties from Stillwater to LaCrosse, and, at a capacity of 225 passengers, it was among the few large excursion boats working the upper Mississippi. From as far south as Hannibal, Missouri, and as far north as the Twin Cities, the Donna Mae hosted company outings, tourists and people along the river’s banks looking for quality time with family and friends.

In the 1960s, ownership of the Donna Mae passed from Elmer’s son Vernon and the vessel wound up in Yankton, South Dakota. Vandals struck the boat on several occasions, trying to sink it while at mooring, and in 1965 an act of arson destroyed the Donna Mae, leaving only the gangplank.

Library Activity in 1929

A century ago, J. E. Baker, the local librarian, submitted a monthly report of activity to the Graphic-Republican.

At the time, the library was known as the “Carnegie-Tryon Public Library.” Andrew Carnegie of Pittsburgh made a vast fortune in steel and in the last 18 years of his life he gave away some 90 percent of his money, more than \$300-million, a portion of it to build some 2,500 libraries, including Lake City’s. The Tryon reference is to the family’s estate that donated the land on which the library was built in 1921.

In the report for Feb., 1,794 books, magazines and pamphlets were accessed, \$10.17 was taken in from fees and fines, and 399 visitors availed themselves of reading tables. The most popular categories were fiction, 1,374 books checked out; travel, 66; biography, 32; and sociology, 23. Other categories were philosophy, religion, useful arts, fine arts, language and natural science.



The Carnegie-Tryon library was built in 1921 and demolished in 1966 to make way for an expanded facility. The most recent remodeling and expansion was completed in late 2015.

"You Grew Up in Lake City"

In December of 2004, Jay Marking established a page on Facebook called "You Grew Up in Lake City." It serves as a bulletin board of news and nostalgia about Lake City and its interests overlap with those of the Lake City Historical Society.

To reach the page, head onto Facebook and type "You Grew up in Lake City" in the search box. Once you "join" the group, you'll answer a few questions before Jay submits you onto the page. Most of the page's 2,500 members have Lake City origins and there are participants from as far away as Sweden.

Newsletter editor Bob Norberg put the following questions to Jay:

BN: Let's start with the obvious, Jay. When were you growing up in Lake City?

JM: I was born in Lake City in 1971, and my parents are John and Dinah Marking. We lived in Frontenac for a couple of years when I was younger, and then returned to Lake City when I was about 5 years old.

BN: Do you continue to live in Lake City?

JM: I left Lake City after I graduated from the Red Wing Technical College program in HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) in 1992. I moved to Faribault and worked for an HVAC company there for two years, and then came back to Lake City where I worked at Fiesta Foods. In 2001 I moved to Rochester and I am working there with Home Depot as a Kitchen Designer.

BN: How do you gauge the interest in the page?

JM: Lots of the members enjoy seeing old photos and sharing stories of Lake City's past. That was the original idea behind starting the page. The site is great for young people and people new to Lake City. They can learn a bit about local history. Or just walk down memory lane!

BN: Would you give us an idea of some of the topics introduced by you and the page followers?

JM: My most recent personal post was about the house on the corner of Lakewood Avenue and Oak Street. The house was a gas station back in the day. Many people, including myself, learned that Oak Street used to be the "main drag" before things changed with Lakeshore Drive and the new Highway 61 from County Road 4. Members enjoy sharing photos from their family collections. Recently Anne Nibbe posted her dad's slides of the Flood of '65. The most enthusiastic recollections revolve around "Zump" Adolph and his popcorn wagon (see photo.)

Old Frontenac's 160th Coming Up in Sept.

Old Frontenac, MN--Located 5 miles north of Lake City and 10 miles south of Red Wing, on the shores of beautiful Lake Pepin on the Mississippi River, the community of Old Frontenac is planning a gala celebration of its 160th anniversary, on Saturday, Sept. 21.

Visitors can take self-guided tours of the village's historic sites and buildings. The stories of immigrant families will be presented at gravestones in the Old Frontenac Cemetery. The 2nd MN light Artillery and the 3rd MN Infantry and Medical enactors will participate in an artillery salute to Civil War veterans, including native son Gen. Israel Garrard.

Visitors can have their antiques appraised at the Frontenac Antique Road Show in the parish hall of the 150-year old Christ Episcopal Church.

Other events will include live enactments of period skilled workers and craftsmen, including blacksmiths, wood workers, Indian post trader, surveyors and stone masons. Authors of books about Frontenac will be on hand at the book fair.

The Prairie Island Indian Community will demonstrate the Native culture with lacrosse, dances, and information about Indian Civil War participation.

Other attractions will include an 1800's cornet band, German and Norwegian folk music, baseball with 1880 rules, and a quilt show at the historic church.

Saturday evening will feature a candlelight tour through a Civil War camp. On Sunday morning, September 22nd, at 9:30 a.m. a "Civil War pastor" will lead a "revival service." Attendees are invited and encouraged to wear vintage clothing.

At 11:30 a.m. the events will conclude with a community potluck picnic in Wakondiota Park. The celebration will take place, rain or shine. For additional information and photo downloads visit www.frontenac160.com.



"Zump" Adolph and his "Jolly Time" popcorn wagon were fixtures in the downtown during warm weather. Like movie-going today, no Patton Park band concert was quite complete without a bag of popcorn in hand.



Gifts Expand Our Archive

By policy, the Lake City Historical Society does not pay for artifacts or historical records. Generous donors have made our extensive archive possible. We wish to express our appreciation to the following individuals who have enhanced our holdings during the past 12 months:

Pernille Flesche of Lake City, a metal "shingle" advertising the medical practice of her father, B. A. Flesche.

Donna Mae Jensen of Minneapolis, a three-ring binder of photos, clippings and writings originating with her father, excursion boat Captain Elmer Holstrom. (See article by Eloise Blattner on page 3.)

Virginia Oliver, Frontenac, a diploma and pilot's license belonging to her husband, Ken Oliver.

Karen Moham of Athens, Alabama, a collection of Lake City postcards belonging to her parents, Don and Lois Palmer.

Chad Kruempel, Lake City, photos and a cash box relating to the pioneering aviation activities of his father, Jack Lowrie.

Lucy Sontag, Lake City, a Campfire Girl's vest from the 1950s.

Eloise Blattner, Lake City, and Dawn Frieberg, Hayfield, pictures and research related to Sarah Kimm, who tended to Lake Pepin navigational lanterns for 37 years.

Jim Cushing, Red Wing, photographs of Lake City airport.

Katie Schmidt, Lake City, photographs of the P.A. Ra-hilly farm.—*Don Schwartz, archivist*

Help With Our Mission

Meetings of the Lake City Historical Society are held on the fourth Tuesday of each month in the second floor conference room, City Hall, at 2 p.m. You do not have to be a member to attend. Feel free to join in the discussion and share ideas relevant to our mission of "collecting, preserving, displaying and disseminating knowledge" about local history.

USA 100 Years Ago: 1919

Only 8 percent of homes had a telephone. Average wage: 22 cents an hour (\$3.35 in today's dollars). Ninety-five of 100 births took place at home. Only 5 percent of doctors had a college education. Car fuel was sold exclusively in drug stores, along with marijuana, heroin and morphine. Las Vegas had a population of 30. Only 6 per cent graduated from high school. Most women washed their hair once a month, employing borax or egg yolks as shampoo. There was neither a Mother's or Father's Day. Women, on average, lived 56 years; men, 53.



Visiting Season Underway At County Museum

The Wabasha County Historical Museum in Reads Landing is housed in the oldest surviving brick schoolhouse in Minnesota. The structure was built in 1870 for \$8,200 (\$160,000 in today's dollars). The visiting season, now in progress on Saturday and Sunday afternoons from 1-4, extends to mid-October. Artifacts of all kinds are on display in the two-story building and a separate barn is loaded with vintage machinery illustrating the story of agriculture in Wabasha county. Reads Landing, a vital shipping point on the Upper Mississippi in the pioneering era, was once home to 27 hotels, 21 saloons and 15 mercantile stores.



Plants Dakota Employ For Food and Medicine

BY KATIE HIMANGA

The traditional food ways of indigenous people are enjoying a renaissance of sorts, especially here in Minnesota. Indigenous chefs are bringing Dakota cuisine into mainstream culture. Within Dakota communities, elders pass along traditional knowledge. Historians scrutinize written records to understand how plants were used for food and medicine before Dakota homeland became U.S. property in the mid-1800s. Why all the interest? In part because Dakota food ways are remarkably healthy and sustainable, and in part because they are intimately linked to the landscape of southern Minnesota.

Not all Dakota foods are native to Minnesota. Important cultivated foods originated in other parts of the Americas, the result of plant breeding done over centuries by indigenous people. Breeding began with wild plants that often bear little resemblance to the important foods they ultimately produced: potatoes, tomatoes, corn, beans, squash and others. Of the hundreds of varieties developed, some were grown in the area that is present-day Lake City.

Corn was developed from its wild ancestor thousands of years ago in present-day Mexico and Central America.

As seeds were carried north and south, so was knowledge of nixamalization, a technique used to remove the hull from dry corn and make its protein and niacin more bioavailable to humans. The Dakota used an alkali solution of water and wood ash for nixtamalization. The result is hominy which can be used whole or ground to produce grits or masa flour.

Corn, beans and squash are traditionally grown together and known as the *three sisters*. By growing these plants together, each supports the others: bean vines grow tall up the sturdy corn stalks; corn uses the nitrogen that beans put into soil; squash leaves fill up the space between corn and bean plants, helping suppress weeds.

Along with tending the *three sisters* and other crops each summer, Dakota people gather food, seasoning, medicinal and sacred plants from the natural landscape. Once abundant, these plants may be found in the few healthy remnants of natural landscape in and around Lake City, or grown in gardens. Because the Dakota used fire to

manage the landscape, a practice that was sustainable indefinitely, the bluffs around present-day Lake City were primarily prairie and oak savanna until the mid 1800s. Rather than blanketing the bluffs as they do today, woodlands were found primarily adjacent to the Mississippi River and on the sides of cool, north-facing bluffs.

Edible plants of the prairies, savannas and woodlands in the area include fruit, nuts, fern fiddleheads, leafy greens, seeds, roots, sumac and acorns. While the three sisters are leaders in the garden, other vegetables dominate in the wild-collected category. Prairie turnip is often collected. Its alternate name of breadroot hints at

one of its uses. Its roots can be eaten raw, added to stews, or ground into a flour. The sunchoke, another potato-like root that is eaten, was renamed by Europeans as Jerusalem artichoke. Plants in the onion family are popular in Dakota food preparation. Wild leek (ramps) and wild onion both have culinary and medicinal uses.

Leaves of amaranth, also called pigweed, are eaten as a raw vegetable and the small seeds as a grain. As dandelion, curly dock, and plantain, all exotic invaders, spread across America, their leaves began to be eaten as well. From roots to flowers, all parts of cattail plants are edible at some time of the year.

Arguably, the best wild rice in Minnesota grows in the lakes of northern Minnesota, but a variety of wild rice grows in the backwaters of the Mississippi as well. The kernels are smaller on plants in the river, but one imagines that

it was harvested and eaten here as well as upriver. Since wild rice only grows in clean water, it no longer grows in all the places where it was found prior to the mid-1800s.

Locally, wild plants produce fruit available for harvest throughout the summer and fall. This includes various kinds of cherries, cranberries, juneberries, strawberries, elderberries, raspberries, gooseberries, grapes, rose hips and plums. The Dakota make wojape, a berry sauce or pudding, by simmering berries in water until they thicken. The mixture is then sweetened, traditionally with maple sugar. Fruit is preserved by drying. It can be mixed with dried meat and seasonings to make an energy-rich and nutritious food that is easy to carry when traveling.

Roses are a category of fruit unto themselves. There are many varieties of native roses that grow in Minnesota. They all produce rose hips that are rich in vitamin C

(Continued on Page 7.)



Black raspberries have a long history locally and are still abundant in natural, unmown areas in and around Lake City.

when eaten fresh off the plant. Indigenous people know when to harvest and how to preserve rose hips so that they retain vitamin C into the winter as well.

Dakota people collect many species of plants for making tea. Staghorn sumac flowers produce a refreshing, lemony beverage. Both *Echinacea*, the purple coneflower, and the more common prairie coneflower were commonly used for beverage tea and as ingredients for medicinal remedies. *Echinacea* is said to have once been the most widely used medicinal plant of the Plains Indians. It is used as a painkiller and for a variety of ailments including toothache, coughs, colds, sore throats and snake bites. Wild mint is used for tea, as a medicinal and as a deodorant.

The native landscape provides herbs and seasonings for Dakota cooking. Bergamot, sage, cedar, mint, juniper, staghorn sumac, mustard, and rose hips are grown in the garden or collected in the wild. Ash is prepared from corn, sage or juniper for seasoning. Historically, Dakota people collected mineral salt for cooking from locally known sources.

Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of other plants are used to prepare traditional Dakota remedies. Tea from the leaves and small tops of common ragweed are used to stop vomiting and cure some intestinal diseases. Butterfly-milkweed is used to induce vomiting. Yarrow has many uses, especially for healing wounds. *Liatris*, which goes by the names blazing star or gayfeather, has a variety of uses. Both field sagewort and white sagebrush are used for treating ailments. The bark of chokecherry and wild black cherry are collected, stripped and dried in the fall, when they are most medically active, and stored in airtight containers for later medicinal use.

Sage, cedar, sweet grass and tobacco are Dakota sacred plants, used in various rituals and ceremonies. In this area, the Dakota make tobacco from the inner bark of the red-osier dogwood plant.

It is said that Dakota people, the indigenous residents of Minnesota, believe that food is medicine and that every plant has a gift to share. Over the course of centuries, Dakota people amassed tremendous knowledge of the native plants of their homeland. They also cultivated gardens filled with crops developed from wild plants found in the Americas. The traditional diet of Dakota people is healthy, nutritious, and sustainable.

Sources include: *Medicinal Wild Plants of the Prairie: An Ethnobotanical Guide*, by Kelly Kindscher, 1992, University Press of Kansas; and *The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen*, by Sean Sherman with Beth Dooley, 2017, University of Minnesota Press.

Author Katie Himanga is a University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener and a forester by profession. This article is adapted from a presentation she has given to several community groups. She also has spoken on a number of other topics, including the

The Lake City Historical Society

Constance Anderson, President
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history and ecological health of Lake Pepin, the Lake Pepin Half-Breed Tract, the Jewell Nursery, pioneer orchardist and community improvement activist Anna Underwood, how to research family history, the natural history of Villa Maria, gardening for wildlife, and shoreland restoration. Ms. Himanga was mayor of Lake City from 2004 to 2008 and currently chairs the Lake City Heritage Preservation Commission.

1929 Studebaker Commander

For \$22,000 (in today's dollars), F.C. and A.W. Fick were offering this Studebaker model for sale in 1929. That was the factory price and bumpers and the spare tire were extra. The ad extolled its hydraulic shock absorbers and "amplified action 4-wheel brakes." Central Garage was located at 106 North Washington, space subsequently owned by Robert Fick (1934), McKenzie Implement (1934), Lake City Motors (1940) and, today, by the VFW as its parking lot.



Burned in Fall Down Glacier

William Meaney, a high school boy of Portland, Oregon, and grandson of Michael Meaney of Lake City, was severely burned from heat resulting from friction when he slid down Mount Hood Glacier for a distance of 2500 feet and landed in a crevasse. No bones were broken but he was burned as if he had been in a fire and was in serious condition at the hospital.—*Lake City Graphic-Republican*, June 5, 1919.

LCHS Membership (May, 2019)

LM=Life Member, HLM=Honorary Life Member.

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Yes, I Would Like to Join the LCHS

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ ST _____ Zip _____

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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:

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