

MEEKER MEMORIES

AUTUMN 2021

MEEKER COUNTY
MUSEUM
QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER

Roland Dille

*The Boy from Dassel
Who Loved to Read*

The mission of the Meeker County Historical Society is to enhance and preserve the Meeker County Museum, Civil War Building Complex, and its growing collection of artifacts of local historical and genealogical significance. We also serve to provide educational programming and other means for dissemination of local historical and genealogical information for present and future generations

WITHIN THESE
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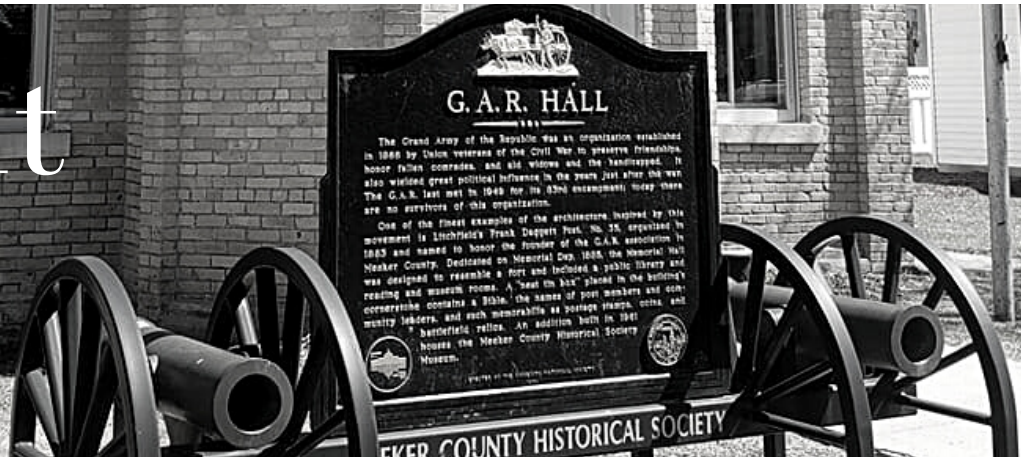
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About Us



Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall

308 N Marshall Ave
Litchfield, MN 55355
320-693-8911

www.meekercomuseum.org

Admission

Adults - \$3

Members & Children Under 12 - FREE

Board of Directors

Sid Wilson - Bruce Nelson - Ken Zachman -
Jeff Niedenthal - Jessica Bondhus - Auggie
Anderson Barb Penk - Sam Feistner - Theresa
Nelson

Tom Westrum - Mark Cashman

Volunteers

Connie Lies - Auggie Anderson
Pam Dille - Mark Cashman

MCM Hours (Masks Required)

Tues - Fri : 10am-4pm

Sat: 12pm-4pm

Appointments are required for use of the
Research Library (Admission is Free)

Research Library

Free access to materials

\$0.25 per B&W copy

\$1.00 per Color copy

\$2.00 per Copy on Large Paper

Staff

Bayley Schluter - Executive Director
director@meekercomuseum.org

Sandy Johnson - Research Librarian
staff@meekercomuseum.org

Go to
www.meekercomuseum.org/volunteer to learn
about you can be a
volunteer today!

Director's Notes

BY BAYLEY SCHLUTER

These next few months are going to be a busy time at the Meeker County Museum, let's dive in.



Over the summer, one of our Board Members built a beautiful double-sided shelf for the MCM to have an official Civil War Library near the front of the building. The 8-foot-tall shelf is filled to the brim with books that cover a variety of topics relating to the American Civil War. These books are available for members of the MCM or Civil War Roundtable to borrow for free. Guests can visit the Museum during open hours and consult a staff member about borrowing a book. In the meantime, the now empty space in the Research Library will

soon be filled with research material that tells the story of Meeker County. There are several primary documents that need to be copied before they can be made available for public perusal. If anyone is interested in volunteering to copy and sort the documents, or organize our Library, fill out a contact form on our website (www.meekercomuseum.org/volunteer).



During the month of October, ten small pumpkins will be hidden in plain sight throughout the museum as a child-friendly scavenger hunt. Guides will be provided, and special Halloween treats will be given to those who find all ten! Special thanks to Nelson Farm for donating the pumpkins for the Hunt.

The Museum's Annual Meeting will be held on November 18th at 6pm. Dinner will be provided for a freewill donation. The meal will be followed by a short business meeting that include the nomination of three new board members. If you're interested in getting involved with the MCM as a Board Member, reach out to myself or President Sid Willson. After the meeting, there'll be a presentation by 2021 Princess Kay of the Milky Way, Anne Euerle. She'll speak about her journey to becoming the 68th Princess Kay and her commitment to the dairy industry.

Finally, December will feature the **Fourth Annual Christmas Tree Village**. If any nonprofit organizations would be interested in competing for the cash prize that comes with "Best Decorated Tree," please reach out to myself directly with the contact information provided near the front of this newsletter.

MEEKER MEMORIES



October

1st-30th - Pumpkin Scavenger Hunt at the Meeker County Museum during Open Hours - Pumpkins Donated by Nelson Farms

14th at 1:30pm - Litchfield G.A.R Civil War Roundtable - *Bugle Songs During the Civil War* by William Crowder - In person Event - Free for CWRT Members & \$3/guests



November

1st through 18th - Give to the Max 2021 - A Virtual Fundraiser

11th at 1:30pm - Litchfield G.A.R Civil War Roundtable - *Walt Whitman and the Civil War* by George Romano - In person Attendance - Free for CWRT Members & \$3/guests

18th at 6pm - Meeker County Museum Dinner and Annual Meeting - Freewill Donation for Members of the MCM - Featuring 2021 Princess Kay of the Milky Way, Anna Eurerle



MEEKER MEMORIES



Upcoming Events

December

Nov 30th - Dec 30th - 4th Annual Meeker County Museum Christmas Tree Village - Cash Prize for "Best Decorated Tree" made possible by a donation from the Schnell Family

No Civil War Roundtable Meeting



Look at our website or follow "Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall" on Facebook and Instagram for event details and updates



Roland Dille

The Boy from Dassel Who Loved to Read

One of the perks to being a student at most college or universities is the free admission that you receive to many student events. While I was a student at Minnesota State University - Moorhead (MSUM or Moorhead State), I would use this perk to attend on-campus theater productions. Moorhead State would produce three shows every year, and I rarely missed one. Another frequent visitor to the student theater was an older man who always had a reserved seat in the front row. Dr. Roland Dille.

Dr. Dille was the longest serving President of MSUM from 1968-1994, and still supported the college for years following his retirement. Notable moments during his tenure include the construction of five new buildings, the expansion of the school from "college" to "university," the purposeful integration of students and staff of color, and the creation of the Tri-College University. However, before he became a champion of the public university system, he was a country kid in Dassel who loved to read.

The original "Dilles from Dassel" were Roland's paternal grandparents, Peter and Christina (Pearson) Dille who immigrated from Sweden in the 1870's and settled eight miles south of Dassel. Roland's maternal grandparents, John and Elizabeth Johnson, lived nine miles north of the village. Both families were members of the Swedish Covent Church, which means that Roland's eventual parents, Oliver Dille and Eleanor Johnson, grew up together. The two were married in their home church and purchased one hundred acres of farmland two miles north of Dassel, and then eventually rented another forty. Their first born, Donald, was born in 1921 (d. 1974) . Followed by Roland on September 16, 1924 and sister Elaine in February 1926. The family lived within a country school district, but when it was time for big brother Donald to begin Kindergarten, his father thought it best to move into the Dassel school district. It would mean higher taxes, but also that the children could use the bus instead of walking to and from school, and so they went.

Roland's love of literature and education began as a young child. He wasn't required to spend as much time working the farm as other children, and there were few playmates who lived nearby. This left Roland with quite a bit of free time to do a beloved family activity, reading. Both parents encouraged the activity for their children, and spent their own free time reading favorite novels. In an interview with the Northwest Minnesota Historical Center in 1985, Dille remembered reading by "sunlight or kerosene lamp" before the house upgraded to electricity when he was 12 years old. He also credited his teachers for his love of literacy. *"I've always thought that the extraordinary luck I had in English teachers, beginning in 7th grade, had something to do with my wanting to be an English teacher because I really did have three remarkable English teachers for those six years of school."*

Roland began his senior year of high school in September 1941. When Pearl Harbor was attacked in December,

he and his classmates knew that their number would likely be called, but no one could say when. With that in mind, Roland chose to plan for college, but remain open to the possibility of the Army. In August 1942, he and four other Dassel graduates began attending the University of Minnesota (U of M). In his English 101 course, the professor introduced Dille to novels from the turn of the century and novelists such as Thomas Hardy. An interest that would follow him for the next several decades.

Dille enjoyed school, but the Second World War quickly caught up with him, and the Army called his name in early May. He was allowed to complete the Spring semester, but by Memorial Day 1942, Roland Dille was in the Army. He reported to Fort Snelling, Minnesota and then was transported to Fort Riley, Kansas in mid-June for basic training and two semesters of general course education at the University of Nebraska. From Kansas, Dille was shipped to Fort Rucker, Alabama, where he remained from April-October 1944. In November, the platoon spent approximately ten days at sea and landed in Plymouth, England. They remained in England until the New Year and then spent time in the region of Brittany in Northern France. German armies were still encamped in that part of the country, and Dille was a part of many skirmishes there until the end of the war in 1945. After the conclusion of the war, Dille spent the remainder of his time in service with the Army of the Occupation in Austria.

When Dille was honorably discharged in 1946, he returned to the U of M to complete a bachelor's degree. Dille spent much of his free time in the Army reading the classic European publications and perusing French and English bookshops for books that weren't available in America. This likely influenced his decision to change his plans and pursue a double-major in Composition (now known as Creative Writing) and English. He graduated in 1947 and got married one year later to Moorhead native, Beth Hopeman. Hopeman began teaching Home Economics at Dassel High School while Dille was still a student, and the two met during one of his visits home. According to Roland, Dassel's Superintendent wished to motivate Hopeman to continue working at the school by recruiting Roland Dille as her new coworker. Unfortunately, Dille didn't have a teaching license, but the school needed an English teacher and offered him a temporary license. Dille was attracted to the idea of working in his hometown with people that he had grown up with, so an English teacher is what he became.

For those first few months, Dille found it difficult to balance assigning homework, preparing for future lessons, giving tests, and motivating students. He renewed his own motivation to be a skilled educator during the December break and began the task of making himself a good teacher. *"...it was the kind of experience that determined I was going to be a teacher. There was no turning back after that year..."*

Unfortunately, the lack of a proper teaching license meant that Roland Dille wasn't able to remain at Dassel High School for more than that single school year. He and wife Beth moved to Minneapolis where she worked as a substitute teacher and he pursued a graduate degree while working as a teachers assistant. He taught briefly at St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN and at the California Lutheran College before a trip to Moorhead sealed his fate. In 1963, Dille was hired as an English professor for Moorhead State College; in 1966, Dille became the Dean of Academic Affairs and; in 1968, was promoted to President. He remained there until 1994 and remained a resident of Moorhead until his death in 2014. "Loyal" is a term often used to describe Dr. Roland Dille. Loyal to his students, to his family, to the pursuit of education, and to his hometown.



Donations and Memberships

FINANCIAL DONATIONS

Bernard Schlute	Elaine Lenhard
Pamela Dille	Holmquist Fund
Steven Payne	Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic
Meeker County Board of Commissioners	Connie Lies
	Ken Zachman

ARTIFACT DONATIONS

Litchfield Public Library	Ann Peterson	Doug Angier
Pat & Terry Thomas	Carolyn Sowinski	Cecila Darmar
Margaret Johnson	Brad Bird	Jay Christensen
		Ladies of the G.A.R

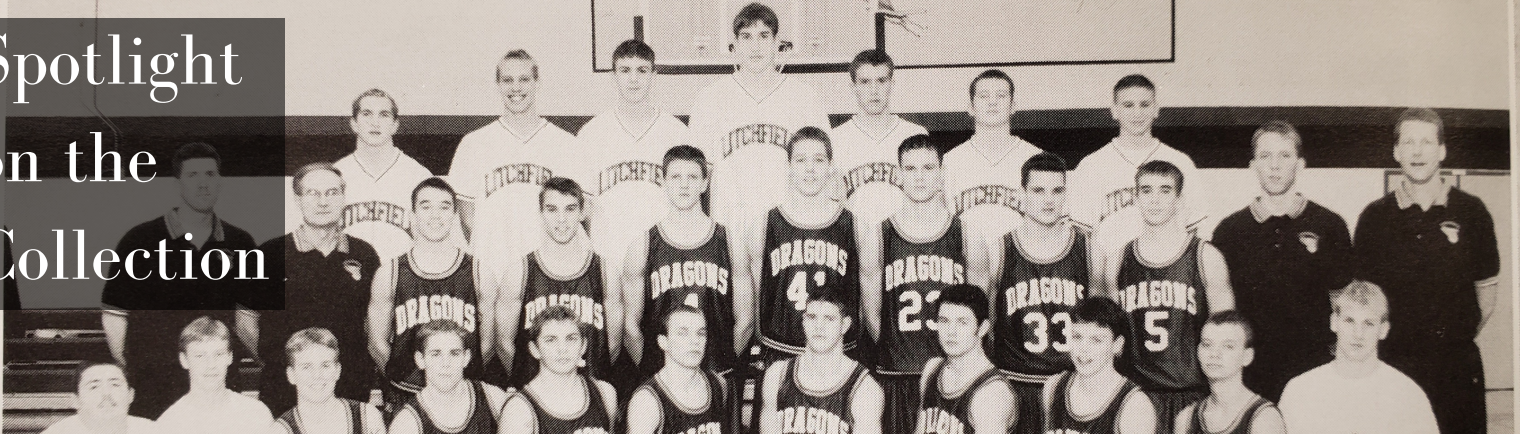
NEW & RETURNING MEMBERS

Jerome Johnson	Mike Brook	Chuck Pease
Tom Westrum	Jim and Joyce Hinderks	Floyd Lindall
Michael Brooks	J. Haag	
Jamie Phelps	Allen County Library	
Merle Hanson	Ken Zachman	

Visit meekercomuseum.com/become-a-member to create or renew
your MCM membership today!

MEEKER MEMORIES

Spotlight on the Collection



It's still remembered as one of the greatest times in Litchfield High School sports history. Chris Patten, co-owner of the Patten Chiropractic Center in Litchfield, said to the Independent Review in 2020 that patients still talk about that 1999-2000 season. Patten was co-captain of the boys basketball team in 1999, the year when the Litchfield Dragons finished their season with an undefeated record and a AA State Championship.

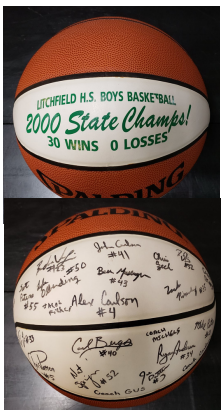
The team finished the previous season 25-1. That single loss occurring during the Section 5AA final, denying Litchfield a chance to play in the state tournament. This loss proved to be a powerful motivator at the beginning of the next season, but they may have had a winning formula before the season even began.

Coach John Carlson was entering his twelfth season as the boys basketball head coach in 1999 with a 181-84 record, but no section or state championship. In that same 2020 article from the Independent Review, Carlson said that the key to a championship squad was veteran leadership from the high school seniors. In 1999, eleven out of the sixteen players were facing their final season with Litchfield High School, and their last chance to earn a championship trophy. Most of those young men had been playing together since seventh grade, and a core group had been playing on the varsity team since ninth grade. While Patten was recalling the team's mindset during that time, he said that it *"was our ultimate goal was to get to the state tournament and to win the state championship. We knew it was doable."*

And "doable" it certainly was. About halfway through that season, the TV program "Minnesota Sports Connection" reported that the Dragons were beating their opponents by an average margin of thirty-four points per win. The Dragons dominated over their section 5AA opponents, won that cursed sectional tournament and prepared for

Litchfield's first appearance in the boys basketball state tournament since 1918. The final game was against Waterville-Elysian-Morristown High School. Litchfield was well conditioned, equipped with strong players, and determined to take advantage of each second of gameplay. When the play clock reached 0.0, the final score was 42-28 in favor of the Dragons.

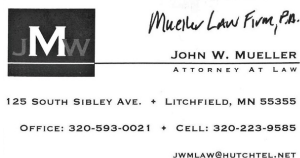
A commemorative basketball was created to memorialize the efforts of the coaches and players from that historic season, many of whom signed their names on a section of the ball. It's understandable why people still discuss that '99-'00 season over twenty years later, and we at the Meeker County Museum will happily do our part to continue sharing the story of sixteen young men who beat the odds and brought a state trophy back to their hometown.



Business and Nonprofit Memberships

BUSINESS MEMBERS

Mueller Law Firm, PA



Litchfield Family Dental



Insurance Solutions of Litchfield



Nelsan-Horton American Legion Post 104



Admiral Benson Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2818



Spirit of Ripley RV and Campground



Conway, Deuth & Schiesing, PLLP



Stockman's Greenhouse and Garden Center



NONPROFIT MEMBERS

Greater Litchfield Opera House Association



American Legion Post No. 381



Visit
[meekercomuseum.com
/business-membership](http://meekercomuseum.com/business-membership)
to learn about Business
and Nonprofit
Membership benefits



The benefits of a membership with the **Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall** include: Free or reduced priced tickets to MCM events, a free copy of the quarterly "Meeker Memories Newsletter" sent to your home or inbox, free admission to MCM exhibits, and the knowledge that you are an active supporter of the preservation of the unique stories from Meeker County.

Submit the form below with a cash or check payment to create or renew your MCM membership. You can also pay online at

www.meekercomuseum.org/become-a-member

**Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall
Regular Membership**

This is a ___ **Renewal** ___ **New Membership**

Name: _____

Address: _____ **City:** _____ **State:** ___ **Zip Code:** _____

Phone Number: _____ **Email Address:** _____

Add Me to the Email List: Y/N

I'd Like to Make a Tax-Deductible Donation: \$ _____

Meeker County Museum Membership Levels

___ Single (\$25) ___ Family (\$40)

___ Senior Single Annual (\$20) ___ Senior Single One-Time (\$500)

___ Senior Family Annual (\$35) ___ Senior Family One-Time (\$500)

Litchfield Civil War Roundtable Annual Membership

___ Single (\$30) ___ Family (\$40)

NOTE: Annual memberships expire the same month as the original enrollment. See the mailing label on each Newsletter to check your renewal date