

MEEKER MEMORIES

SUMMER 2024

MEEKER COUNTY
MUSEUM
QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER



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.

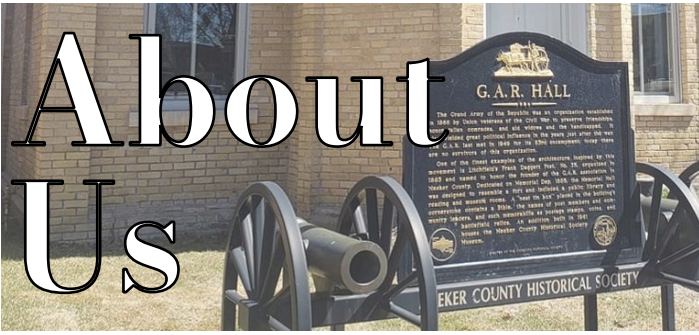


Meeker County Museum
at the G.A.R. Hall

Sharing Our Stories Since 1885

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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
Free admission to view the G.A.R. Hall

Board of Directors

Jessica Bondhus
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Staff

Danelle Erickson - Executive Director
director@meekercomuseum.org
Sandy Johnson - Research Librarian
staff@meekercomuseum.org

July

- 11 **Civil War Roundtable: Finding Your Civil War Relatives** with Terry Davis. 1:30.
- 13 **Museum and G.A.R. Hall extended hours for Litchfield Watercade.** Open 10 am to 4 pm.

August

- 1-4 **Meeker County Fair**—Stop by our booth and say “hi!”
Visit www.meekerfair.com for info.
- 8 **Civil War Roundtable: Rioting in Cincinnati, 1862** with Prof. Shannon Smith. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/general admission
- 14-24 **Civil War Spy Mystery**, an interactive mystery with clues to find and puzzles to solve. Free! Open during regular museum hours. More details on the next page.

September

- 12 **Civil War Roundtable: General Sibley’s Contraband Teamsters** with Stephen Osman. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/general admission

Summer is a great time for history! Be sure to check out the August events for our friends at the Forest City Stockade, Forest City Threshers, and Little Red School House.

Director's Notes

Collection Spotlight

Danelle Erickson
Executive Director



Thank you to everyone who attended this year's Memorial Day Picnic! The threat of rain moved the cemetery program to the Opera House which was followed by the picnic. Thanks to David Stottrup for providing some great historic music.

We also want to thank the Golden Fleece Lodge #89 for the grant funds to purchase additional G.A.R. cemetery markers. Over the years, some of the markers have been damaged or disappeared. This past Memorial Weekend, volunteers placed markers at three of our local cemeteries. Did you know there are over 80 Civil War veterans just in Litchfield's Ripley Cemetery? We hope to include more cemeteries in future years. Thanks to everyone who helped!

We are excited to announce the return of our Civil War Spy Mystery! This brand new mystery will run from August 14 through August 24, and is great for school-aged kids to adults. You can solve the puzzles individually or work as a team. There are no time limits and clues are available if you get stuck. Can you solve the mystery?

Civil War Spy Mystery
Solve the puzzles and crack the code

August 14-24, 2024
Tuesday-Friday 10-4
Saturday 12-4
Available anytime during regular hours

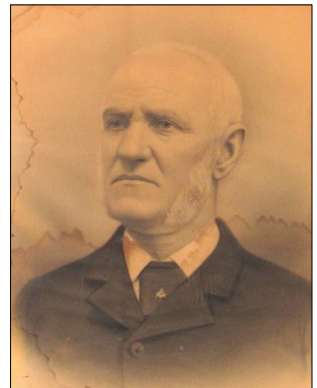
If you enjoy escape rooms or puzzle solving, you won't want to miss this interactive history mystery!

Meeker County Museum
at the G.A.R. Hall
Sharing Our Stories Since 1885

FREE!

In connection with our upcoming spy mystery, here are some artifacts with some secrets of their own!

Edward Murphy was a spy for the Union Army during the Civil War. He was arrested on suspicion several times and had many narrow escapes. What we wouldn't give to know more of his story!



A big part of any military is communication, especially communication that can't be easily detected by the enemy. During WWII, this light (left) was used on the USS *Pillsbury* to signal to the carrier *Guadalcanal* while hunting for German



submarines. The donor's husband was aboard the *Pillsbury*. He was probably the original owner of the Morse code card and signal cards as well.

Thank you to our
Memorial Day Supporters

American Legion Post 104
Extended family of Bert and Lorraine Thulin
and Thulin Bros Construction
Tim and Deb Bergstrom
Frank Daggett Circle, Ladies of the G.A.R.
Sandy Johnson
Thrivent Financial



Members



Donors

New* and Returning Members April–June 2024

Auggie Anderson	Tim & Carol Lundstrom
Mark Cashman	W D McQuay
Conway, Deuth & Schmiesing, PLLP	Gerry Moen
Merle Hanson	Stockmen's Greenhouse
Sandra Johnson	Robert Sylvester*
Chuck Lavallee	Wanda Urdahl

Financial Donations April–June 2024

Acton Township	Litchfield Township
Auggie Anderson	Dennis & Nina Rutledge
Tim & Deb Bergstrom	Bob and Beth Schnell
Golden Fleece Lodge #89	Swede Grove Township
Harvey Township	VFW Post 2818
Jerome & Anita Johnson	In Memory of Diane Rosenow: Wanda Urdahl
Sandra Johnson	
Pati Kachel	
Chuck Lavallee	

Business and Nonprofit Members



American Legion Post 104



Conway, Deuth & Schmiesing, PLLP



Litchfield Opera House



Litchfield Rotary



VFW Post 2818

Artifact Donations April–June 2024

Cheri Affeldt	Jason Mons
Susan Barrick	Meeker Co Vet Services
Jeanie Doran	Robyn Richardson
Renee Dougherty	Joe Voyer
Litchfield Area Chamber	Barbara Wischman
Kendra McKeen	Kari Zins
Gerry Moen	

If you are considering donating an artifact to the Meeker County Museum, please contact us first. all items must be from Meeker County and will be evaluated based on condition, history, and uniqueness to the current collection. Thanks!

Help share local history!

- Bring someone to the museum
- Forward our monthly email or share your newsletter with someone
- Organize a group tour or talk to us about group presentations
- Comment on and share our Facebook posts

Township Tales

Dassel & Collinwood

Main Street, Dassel

Come along as we continue to tour Meeker County in our Township Tales series.

Dassel

Did you know there was another Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) Post in Meeker County besides the one that still stands in Litchfield today? Colfax Post No. 133 was organized in Dassel in March 1885. There were 21 charter members of the post. Edwin F Proctor was elected the first Post Commander. The first meeting was commemorated with coffee and cake presented by the women of Dassel. The Post was also presented with a box of tobacco and one hundred pipes. Perhaps the number of pipes was symbolic, or perhaps the men simply enjoyed their tobacco.

The first meetings were held at Rudberg's Hall, a popular meeting place in Dassel. By January 1886, the men were meeting at their G.A.R. Hall. This was probably a rented space as later documents don't include a building among the assets. The Post did own their own decoration flags, banners, and furniture, as well as four lots in the cemetery.

The first meetings were held weekly, but later the post met on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of each month. At the same time, the Women's Relief Corp (W.R.C.) held their meetings at the Dassel Town Hall. The W.R.C. was the auxiliary to the G.A.R., with most members being wives of the G.A.R. Members.

Like all G.A.R. Posts, Memorial Day was important to Dassel's veterans. Memorial Day was started by the G.A.R. and was created to honor Civil War veterans. Since then, the day has

come to honor all military service people. As part of their Memorial Day traditions, the members would travel to the local cemeteries to decorate the graves of their fellow Civil War soldiers.

In 1890, for example, the members traveled five miles north of Dassel to Swan Lake Cemetery to decorate the grave of Isaac Russell who had died the year before. The men returned to Dassel and being led by the Dassel band, marched to the Dassel Cemetery to decorate four other graves. If heavy rains the night before hadn't made the roads treacherous, the veterans would have also paid a visit to the cemetery in Collinwood. In 1898, select members visited four local cemeteries before all joining together for a service at the Dassel Cemetery.

The G.A.R. Post had its share of social activities as well. Besides their regular meetings, the men would invite local posts to Dassel. For example, members from Howard Lake, Cokato, and Litchfield were invited in January 1894 for the installment of new officers. After the installation, there was

supper at the skating rink followed by "campfire hilarities" at the town hall. A "campfire" was what the G.A.R. called a gathering of members, sometimes around an actual campfire, other times inside a G.A.R. Hall or someone's dining table. The men would remember their comrades, sing songs, and swap stories.

Each G.A.R. Post was required to send regular reports to the state G.A.R. Paperwork, it seems, was not one of the Dassel Post's strong suits. The post's second report was submitted with an apologetic note for the tardiness of the report "I hope you will not scold. We will try and do better in the future." Some of the following



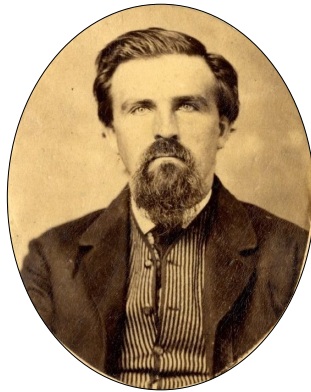
Main Street in Dassel

reports were also late or missing entirely. The post tried to hang on, and would occasionally gain a new member or two. Their last official report was from December 1897, and it shows the post as having fourteen members and a bank balance of \$2.81. The exact date of closure remained a bit of a mystery until we came across a handwritten note in one of the Litchfield G.A.R. books that said Dassel was “annulled” in 1902. Some of the members joined other Posts, including Litchfield.

Collinwood

As we move south to Collinwood, it wasn't long before our research led us to Timothy Harrison Pendergast, often referred to as Harrison, or T.H. in the newspapers. Pendergast was born in New Hampshire and came to Minnesota in 1856, setting first in Hutchinson. In August 1861, Pendergast joined the Civil War, enlisting in Co. K, 2nd Minnesota Infantry. The regiment included several Meeker County men Pendergast had met while living in Forest City for a short time. In November 1863, he was shot in the right shoulder at the Battle of Missionary Ridge. Despite his injury, Pendergast reenlisted in the 2nd Minnesota less than a month later. His enlistment record describes him as having blue eyes and brown hair and was one of the tallest men in the regiment at over 6 feet. Pendergast was part of Sherman's "March to the Sea" and served until the end of the Civil War.

Upon returning to Minnesota, Pendergast remained in McLeod County for a few years before moving to Collinwood Township. It wasn't long before he was considered one of the prominent citizens of the area. Another leading man was H.C. Bull who had settled on the north shore of Collinwood Lake with the dream to form a thriving city. Pendergast, along with his brother Lloyd, shared that dream. They built a grist mill along with “one of the most pretentious [houses]



Timothy Harrison Pendergast

in the entire county.” The up-and-coming village also boasted a hotel, store, post office, and two-story school. One can imagine the men's excitement when the railroad wanted to include Collinwood on their route. Unfortunately for the future “metropolis” of Collinwood, one of the neighboring landowners refused to sell and the railroad shifted north to present-day Dassel.

Aside from the Collinwood mill, Pendergast also took over Bonniwell's Mill in 1873 on the north side of Lake Jennie and was later proprietor of a steam sawmill in Dassel. Pendergast was also a teacher, teaching in several places including Bonniwell's Mill, Collinwood, Dassel, and Glencoe. He appeared to have been a forward-thinking teacher, letting his students focus on more practical problems in the world with “less confinement to books and forms.”

Pendergast is also credited with being the first to promote the local seed corn industry, placing an ad in 1884 offering his high-quality seed corn out of his Collinwood mill. The corn industry soon caught on and is still a major crop in the area.

As a Civil War veteran, it's not surprising that Pendergast was a member of the G.A.R. In fact, he was a member of at least four different posts. He was listed among the charter members of the Litchfield Post in March 1883. When the Dassel Post started in 1885, he transferred his membership there and was elected Post Commander the following year. Later in life, Pendergast moved to Minneapolis and then Bemidji, joining the G.A.R. Posts in both locations.

One can't wrap up an article about Pendergast without mentioning his writing. In November 1886, the *Litchfield Saturday Review* announced that “Mr. T.H. Pendergast, of Collinwood, well known throughout Meeker County” was going to be writing a series of



Pendergast home, Collinwood

articles about his four years in the Civil War. Pendergast's writing is a great combination of soldier life, battle stories, and his personal feelings, as well as commentary on the war, the military leaders, and current events. The articles were printed in the Litchfield paper from December

1886 until April 1887. We know they continued elsewhere (possibly in later Litchfield issues or in the *Cokato Observer*) because we have a full transcript of over sixty articles at the Museum. The book is part of our Civil War Library and is available to be lent out.

TH Pendergast died in 1921 at the Veteran's Home in Minneapolis. He was 83 years old and is buried in the Dassel Cemetery next to his wife Sybil and one of their two sons. His obituary remembered him as "One of the best men that this community has ever known."

Sources:

- *Condensed History of Meeker County*, Frank B Lamson
- *Meeker County Memories*, Meeker County Historical Society
- Minnesota G.A.R. Records, FamilySearch.org
- *Pen Pictures from the Second Minnesota*, TH Pendergast, transcribed by Diane Rosenow
- Various newspapers

Special thanks to our friends at the Dassel Area Historical Society and McLeod County Historical Society for sharing photos of Dassel and TH Pendergast respectively.

Meeker Memos

Monthly email



Each month, we will send you a short and to-the-point email with the latest news and events from the Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall.

To signup, just send an email with subject "email signup" to Director@meekercomuseum.org

Wish List

4 to 6 metal bookends



THANK YOU to the Greater Litchfield Opera House Association and their in-kind donation of printing this publication.

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

Name _____

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Email _____

Annual Museum Membership

- Single \$25
- Family \$40
- Senior Single \$20
- Senior Family \$35

Annual Litchfield Civil War Roundtable Membership

- Single \$30
- Family \$40

I'd like to make an additional donation \$ _____

Membership Matters!

Your membership to the Meeker County Museum not only gives you some great benefits, including free/ reduced admission and a subscription to *Meeker Memories*, but you are also supporting the ongoing work at the Museum. **Thank you!**

Members can find your renewal date on your mailing label.

Meeker County Historical Society, 308 N Marshall Avenue, Litchfield, MN 55355

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Litchfield, MN 55355

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