

# *MEEKER MEMORIES*

WINTER 2025

MEEKER COUNTY  
MUSEUM  
QUARTERLY  
NEWSLETTER



Farmers Elevator and Litchfield Produce, 1939



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

*Sharing Our Stories Since 1885*

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

[www.meekercomuseum.org](http://www.meekercomuseum.org)

Tuesday-Friday 10:00-4:00  
Saturday 12:00-4:00  
*Closed major holidays*

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MEEKER  
COUNTY"**



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

308 N Marshall Ave  
Litchfield, MN 55355

### 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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Dave Pease

Barb Penk

Jessica VanLanduyt

### Staff

Danelle Erickson - Executive Director  
director@meekercomuseum.org

Sandy Johnson - Research Librarian  
staff@meekercomuseum.org

## January

- 9 **Civil War Roundtable—John Ericsson: Inventor and the Civil** 1:30.

Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/  
general admission

## February

- 6 **Genealogy Hour**, 5:30. An informal, monthly gathering for genealogists and family researchers. Free.

- 13 **Civil War Roundtable—Sherman's Woodticks: 8th Minnesota Volunteers** presented by author Paul Hodnefield. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/  
general admission

## March

- 6 **Genealogy Hour**, 5:30. An informal, monthly gathering for genealogists and family researchers. Free.

- 13 **Civil War Roundtable—The Destiny of the Capitol . . . Suspended by a Hair, Washington, D.C.** presented by Daniel Hoisington. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/general admission

Don't miss the Museum's regular spot on KFLD's Newsmaker the first Thursday of each month.

We are also included in the *Litchfield Rail*, with history articles in the 2nd and 4th issue of each month. If you've missed any of the articles, you can find them on our blog.

Meekercomuseum.org/blog

# Director's Notes

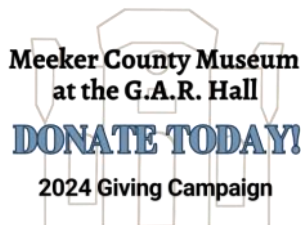
# Collection Spotlight

**Danelle Erickson**  
Executive Director



Looking back at 2024, there is much to be thankful for here at the museum. One of our favorite things in when you—our members and donors—bring guests to the Museum and G.A.R. Hall. It's obvious that you feel as much pride and love for this place as we do! We are also so thankful for all of the encouragement and kind words you share with the staff and board. This place would be nothing without your ongoing love and support!

Thank you to everyone who donated to our 2024 Giving Campaign. Because of your generosity, we ended the year just shy of a balanced budget for 2024. Thank you for your support of local history!



As we look at 2025, one of our projects for the year is to focus on our artifact collection. This will include a deaccession project, the formal removal of items from the Museum. We will start with removing duplicate items, especially items that have no history attached to them. This will also help to clear some of our limited storage space.

Happy New Year!

**Civil War Roundtable**

2nd Thursday at 1:30pm

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

Museum/G.A.R. Hall  
308 N Marshall Ave, Litchfield  
\$3/Adults; Free/Members

When visiting the Meeker County Museum, it's hard to take in every single artifact. So let's take a closer look at a few items. Pictured here are artifacts from a medical display upstairs at the Museum.

## German "Bleeder"

This object might be one of the more

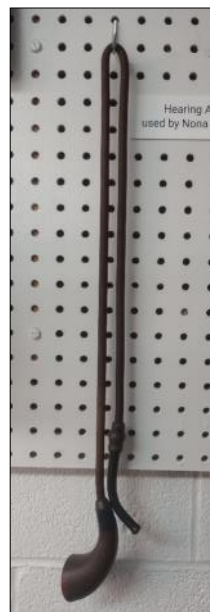


gruesome items on display. It is labeled as a bleeder, but there's more to it than that! One end of the device opens to reveal more than a dozen needle-like spikes. The spikes are connected to a spring that runs inside the wooden tube. The doctor would pull back on the spring and send the needles into the patient's skin. A toxic oil was added to the punctures so blisters would form. It was believed that as the blisters drained, the sickness would also drain away. The device at the museum was brought to the United States from Germany by the Kruger family in the 1850s. It was later donated to the museum by Nona Eberts.



## Conversation Tube

Another item from Nona Eberts is this conversation tube, a type of hearing aid. The person who had trouble hearing would place the small end into their ear, and the person speaking would talk into the small horn at the other end.



This article is a segment from our history blog. To read more, visit [meekercomuseum.org/blog](http://meekercomuseum.org/blog)



# Members



# Donors

## New\* and Returning Members October–December 2024

Ryan & Amy Anderson*	Litchfield Downtown
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## Financial Donations October–December 2024

Sarah Anderson	Judy Oestreich
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American Legion Post 104



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Litchfield Downtown Council



Litchfield Opera House



Litchfield Rotary



VFW Post 2818



### In Memory of Einer Lundin

Gerry Moen  
Elaine Lenhard

### In Memory of Donald Rick:

Gerry Moen

### In Memory of Mark Wood:

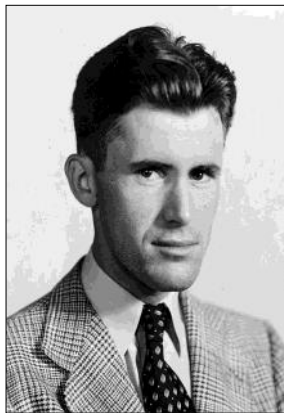
Heidi Schellhas

# Picturing Meeker County

During the Great Depression, the government created many new jobs and many new divisions. One of those was the Farm Security Administration. It was first called the Resettlement Administration and the original purpose was to help farmers relocate to more productive farmland. Not surprisingly, this wasn't a popular idea. Its primary mission was changed and it became known as the Farm Security Administration in 1937. The FSA helped provide loans, worked with banks and farms to head off foreclosures, offered some medical care to farmers, and more.

One of the divisions of the FSA was the Historical Section. Some of the section's work included research and data analysis, but it is best remembered for its photography project. At first, the agency set out to document the poverty-stricken farms to show the need for government assistance. By the late 1930s and into the 40s, the worst of the financial crisis had passed, and the overall scope of the photo project shifted to include a wider view of what one FSA photographer called "the heart of the American people."

One of the FSA's photographers was John Vachon. He was born in Minnesota and hitchhiked to Washington DC to continue his college education. He was dismissed from school after one semester on account of a drinking violation. Not looking to return to Minnesota, the twenty-two-year-old applied for a job with the FSA's Historical



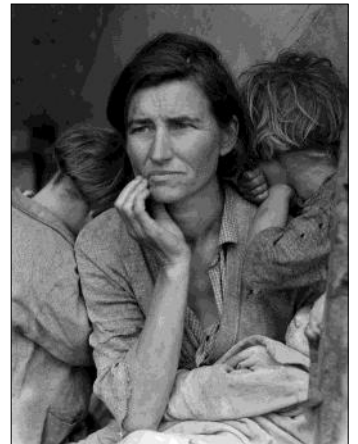
John Vachon, 1942

Section. Despite having little career experience, and no experience with photography, Vachon was hired to catalog the incoming photos.

Perhaps one of the photos Vachon cataloged was the photo seen here by Dorothea Lange from 1936. It has become the most recognized photo of the Depression Era.

Vachon's work with the photos sparked an interest and at the encouragement of his supervisor, he began taking photos. It started out as a hobby, but gradually he was given field assignments and by 1941, he was a full-time photographer for the FSA. Three of Vachon's assignments took him to Meeker County.

During his first photographic visit in September 1939, Vachon captured what were probably some of the last days of the *Litchfield Independent* before it merged with the *Litchfield Review* to



Florence Thompson and children, photo by Dorothea Lange, Historical Section of the FSA.



Linotype operator, *Litchfield Independent*, 1939

become the *Litchfield Independent Review*. There are photos of the editor's desk, setting the type, printing auction bills, and even helping the young editor of the high school newspaper.

Vachon also captured images of Litchfield Produce, the Farmers Elevator, and some of the road signs during his 1939 visit.

A few years before Vachon started his photography career, his younger brother Bob started working summers at the McRaith farm in southeastern Meeker County.

To get the best photographs, John Vachon believed the photographer had to be able to connect with his subjects. Having heard much about the McRaiths from his brother, Vachon convinced his boss to send him back to Meeker County in October 1940 and again in February 1942. His goal was to truly capture farming life and community, thanks in large part to the McRaiths openly accepting his brother to their farm and into their lives.

With his trusty camera, Vachon photographed things few thought to capture – sweeping the floor, making a phone call, fixing



Bob Vachon and Pat McRaith (foreground) wash up before dinner. 1942

machinery, loading the milk cans in the truck, and simply sitting down for the noon meal.

During his 1942 visit, Vachon also followed some of the McRaiths to the Crossroads store, which was located on the west end of Lake Stella, just across the road from the creamery. On this particular Friday night in February, the store had become a dance hall, complete with live musicians.

This second visit to the McRaiths would be Vachon's last major assignment with the FSA. He would later become a photographer for *Look* magazine, a position he held until 1971. He died in 1975 in New York City.

John Vachon is credited with over 13,000 photos of the FSA's collection of over 170,000 photos, a project Vachon himself called "monumental." How fortunate for some of the everyday life in Meeker County to be included.



Early morning milk pickup, McRaith Farm, 1942

All of the Meeker County photos included in this article, plus many more, can be viewed as part of the Library of Congress' online photo collection. [LOC.gov/photos](https://www.loc.gov/photos)

Another resource is *Picturing Minnesota 1936-1943: Photographs from the Farm Security Administration*, edited by Robert L Reid. The book is out of print but you might be able to find second-hand copies available online. You can also stop by the Museum to look at our copy of the book.



Friday evening dance at the Crossroads store near Lake Stella, February 1942.

# GENEALOGY HOUR

1st Thursday of the month  
5:30 p.m.  
Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall

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

Visit our website or  
Facebook page for details.  
MeekerCoMuseum.org

## 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](mailto:Director@meekercomuseum.org)

## History Blog

Learn more about Meeker County history with our blog  
[Meekercomuseum.org/blog](http://Meekercomuseum.org/blog)

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

## Artifact Donations October-December 2024

Joyce Burgstaler  
Cokato Museum  
David Gould  
Rick Hanson  
Litchfield Area Writers Group  
Mickey Speck  
Kathleen Warmbier

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

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### 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

Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall  
308 North Marshall Ave  
Litchfield, MN 55355

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