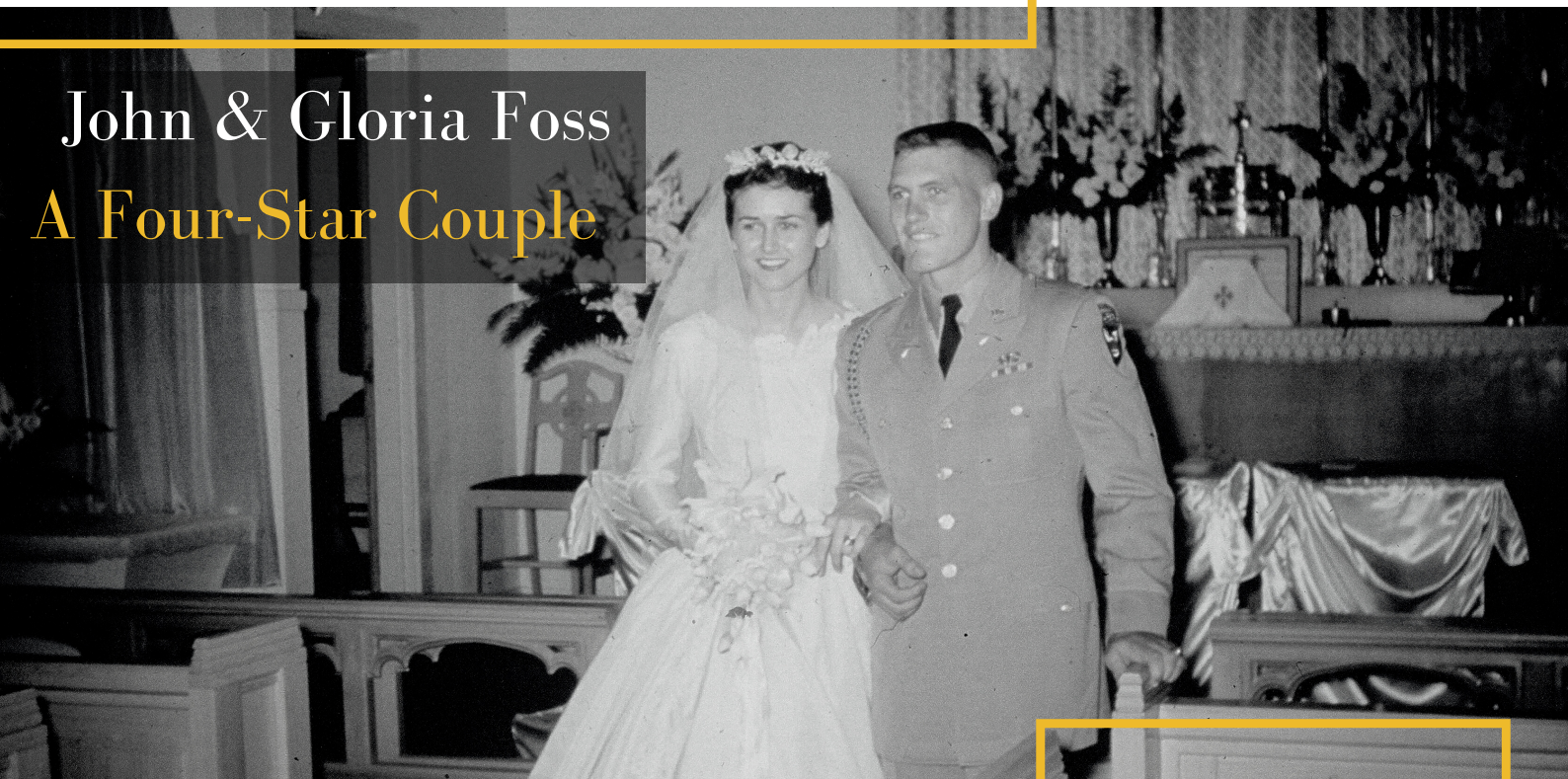


MEEKER MEMORIES

SUMMER 2021

MEEKER COUNTY
MUSEUM
QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER

John & Gloria Foss *A Four-Star Couple*



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

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MEEKER MEMORIES

About Us



Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall

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

www.meekercomuseum.org

MCM Hours

Tues - Fri : 10am-4pm
Sat: 12pm-4pm

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

Admission

Exhibit Admission

Adults - \$3

Members & Children Under 12 - FREE

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\$0.25 per B&W copy

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Go to
www.meekercomuseum.org/
volunteer to learn about you
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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

BY BAYLEY SCHLUTER

Summer time is here! Everyone at the Meeker County Museum is thankful for the gorgeous weather, the return of out-of-town visitors, and that the business of preserving and sharing the stories of Meeker County Museum has returned to status quo. The first sign of things "returning to normal" was the resumption of field trips. The 3rd Grade students from Lake Ripley Elementary School visited the MCM throughout the month of May with their curiosity and excitement for local history at full capacity. My personal favorite comment made by a student was in reference to the G.A.R Hall, *"It looks like a church, but better!"*



**One couple
enjoying**

George's

Concertina Band

Although fantastic return to normalcy was the Annual Memorial Day Picnic. Meals and music from George's Concertina Band were served to 190 people at the Litchfield Opera House. The event was an incredible success, and I want to take this time to thank everyone who weren't able to attend the event, but still make a contribution to the MCM and those who gave a little extra at the Picnic. I want to especially thank the volunteers who stood on their feet for hours to ensure that everything ran smoothly.

We've also added something new to our giftshop. Before his passing, MN State Senator Steve Dille completed most of a memoir that highlights his life as a farmer, rodeo cowboy, civic leader, veterinarian, college instructor, family historian, policy maker, public speaker, and state legislator. His family completed the remaining sections of the book, and is now available to purchase at the MCM or Dassel Area Historical Society. Proceeds from the sale of the first printing will be donated to both organizations. We want to thank the entire Dille family for their generosity and support of the preservation of local history.



July

3rd - Fourth of July Weekend - The MCM is will be Open on Saturday

8th at 1:30pm - Litchfield G.A.R Civil War Roundtable - *Mythologies of Command: A Comparison of Southern and Northern Generalship* by John Raymond - In person & Virtual Attendance Available - Free for CWRT Members & \$3/guests

August



4th through 8th - Come find our booth at the Meeker County Fair!

12th at 1:30pm - Litchfield GAR Civil War Roundtable - *Milliken's Bend: A Civil War Battle in History and Memory* by Linda Barnickel - In Person & Virtual Attendance Available - Free for CWRT Members & \$3/guests



September

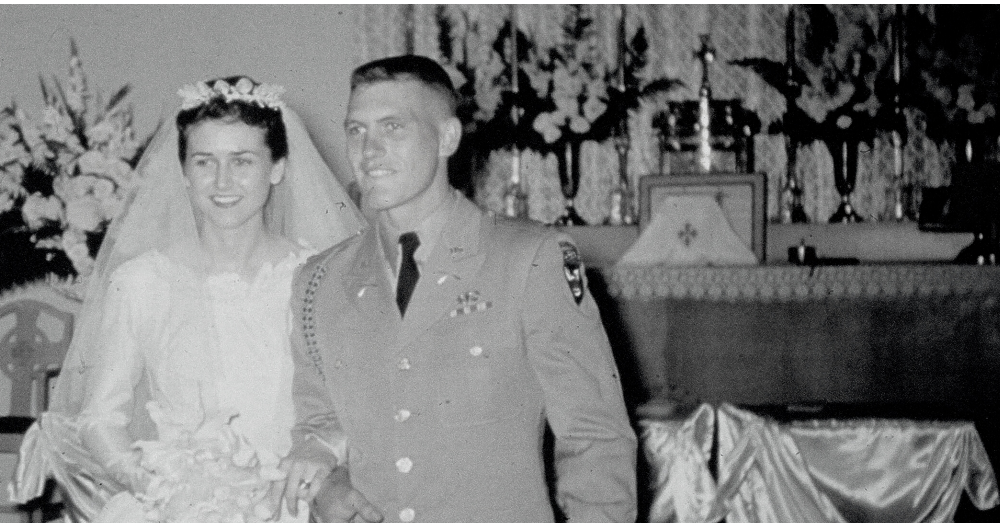
9th at 1:30pm - Litchfield GAR Civil War Roundtable - *Heading Farther South: Confederate Mercenaries and Emigrants* by David Page - In Person and Virtual Attendance Available - Free for CWRT Members and \$3/guests



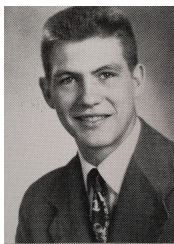
Look at our website or follow "Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R Hall" on Facebook or Instagram for event details and updates

MEEKER MEMORIES

John & Gloria Foss **A Four-Star Couple**



What are the characteristics of a lasting marriage? A strong friendship and good communication, sure. One term that doesn't always get brought up is "perseverance." John and Gloria Foss are an ideal example of the type of perseverance required in a marriage, especially when that marriage is shared by the United States Military.



**John's Senior
Class Photo**

John William Foss grew up Litchfield, MN. His father, Peter, worked as a car salesman. His mother, Mary (Connole) stayed home with John and his eight siblings. Throughout high school, Foss was a member of numerous sports teams and the school newspaper. At age 17, John signed up to join the MN National Guard, 136th Infantry Regiment as a driver. After graduating high school in 1951, he joined the Regular Army and became a rifleman with the 101st Airborne. That next year, John was accepted into the West Point Military Academy. After graduation in 1956, he was assigned to Fort Benning, Georgia for Advanced Military Training, Airborne, and Ranger School. While there, John became close friends with a Scottish nurse-in-training named Gloria Anna Mains Flinter.

Gloria was born to Henry and Isabella Mains in Glasgow, Scotland in 1936. Gloria and younger brother George "helped" run the family hotel until 1940, when a German air raid destroyed a nearby business. Her parents moved the family to what would hopefully be a more peaceful spot, East Anglia in County Norfolk, England. Her father worked as a mechanic on American bomber bases, giving Gloria a small taste of military life. She would share memories of practicing gas mask grills and supplementing the family meals by hunting rabbits or foraging for edible plants when rations became strict. The family was dealt a hard blow when Mr. Mains died of tuberculosis in 1945. The family persevered in England before returning to Glasgow when Isabella was diagnosed with cancer in 1948. The children enrolled in primary school and the Mains attempted to live a normal life while Mrs. Mains received treatment. Unfortunately, the children faced more tragedy when their mother passed away in December 1951.

The teenaged Main children had already endured a World War and the death of their father. Now not only were they faced with the loss of their mother, but would need to leave their treasured Scotland for a second time. The next of kin was a paternal Aunt Margot, who had married an US Army Doctor, Marcus Flinter and was living on an Army base in Venezuela. After making appropriate arrangements, Gloria and George boarded a ship to cross the Atlantic and prepared for their new life as military brats. After a year, the foursome were transferred to Fort Benning. Gloria graduated from Columbus High School in 1954 and enrolled in nursing school the following autumn.

The romance between Gloria Mains Flinter and John Foss was a fast one. After only two months of courtship, the two were married in 1957. Shortly after the wedding, John was assigned as a platoon leader with the 187th Infantry Regiment in Germany while Gloria remained in the States to complete her nursing degree. Once reunited, the couple spent their free time exploring Europe, often saving money by sleeping in tents. Their travels slowed down, however, after their first son, John jr, was born in Germany.



In 1958, the family returned to Fort Benning where John was an Instructor with the Ranger Department. It was there that a second son, Kevin, was born, and where he remained with Mother and brother while John served a time in Korea as Company Commander, C Company, 7th Infantry Division. When he returned to the US, John was assigned to West Point as an instructor in Tactics. In 1965, John became the first exchange instructor at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, England. The children were enrolled in a British school and enjoyed two years of a fairly quiet military life, and celebrated when baby sister Julia was born into the family in 1966.

That year, sadly, wasn't entirely without its difficulties. Gloria's Aunt and adoptive mother Margot passed away and John was assigned to the 4th Infantry Division in Vietnam. With two young children and a new baby, Gloria moved to Florida to be close to her widowed Uncle and John traveled to Vietnam. Gloria entertained the children by baking in the kitchen and weekend trips to Cocoa Beach. The family reunited for a year and a half while stationed in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The proximity to Minnesota made it possible for the Foss children to often visit their grandparents in Litchfield, and everyone enjoyed being a family of five once again. As his time in Kansas was coming to an end, John approached Gloria about volunteering for a second tour in Vietnam. He was confident that it would be an important boost for his career, and felt strongly that he could do some real good for the men stationed there. Gloria had misgivings about sending him to such a dangerous place, but could tell that he was determined to serve and decided to persevere through another year apart.

John returned to the 4th Infantry Division and his family returned to Florida. While the children spent their days in the pool and their nights watching Apollo missions launch into space; John saw intense combat from the North Vietnamese Army. Once the year was complete, John returned home and would never again be stationed without family by his side. In 1970, the family returned to Germany where John was assigned to the VII Corps G3 Office, but still made time to go skiing in the Alps and take vacations to England. After two years in Germany, the family then enjoyed three years at Fort Monroe, Virginia, their longest post to date.

By this time, John was promoted to Brigadier General and Commander of the 3rd Brigade; sons John jr. and Kevin were promoted to college students; and daughter Julia was promoted to only child at home. John was assigned to the Joint US Military Advisory Group in Manila, Philippines, a humid country with hostile neighbors and citizens. The family house was gated with 24-hour guards because Communist and the Moro National Liberation Front were making frequent attacks on American and Philippine interests. However, the family pushed through. Julia formed new friendships with children of members of the Diplomatic Corps and almost the entire family became scuba certified (Gloria preferred to remain on land).

The next (and final) overseas tour was Nuremberg, Germany with the 7th Army Training Center. The milder climate and a return to familiar territory made the posting more comfortable for all. While there, Gloria became active with the Red Cross, an association that would like for years to come. In 1984, the family returned to Fort Benning, Georgia. John began his military career there as a Lieutenant and was returning as a Major General, Commanding General of the Infantry School and Chief of the Infantry Branch. The lives of the Commander and Commander's Wife were comfortable, but not without its demanding schedule. At a New Years Eve party, they were given 1-weeks notice to pack up and report to Fort Bragg, Texas. The Commander of the 82nd Airborne had been injured and needed an immediate replacement.

This turned out to be John's favorite posting of his career because he could interact with troops of every rank on a regular basis and best of all, jump. John had trained with the Airborne, and took every opportunity to parachute with the soldiers. Whenever he complained about bumps or bruises from jumping, Gloria would calmly remind him that he volunteered to jump and then suggest an aspirin. Less than 9 months later, John was promoted to Lieutenant General and given command of the XVIII Airborne Corps (also at Fort Bragg). Approximately 110,000 troops across several states were under his command.

From Texas, the empty nesters then moved to Washington, D.C for John's first assignment to the Pentagon. His title there was Deputy Chief of Staff of Operations, and would participate in the Presidential Daily Briefings with President Bush. John's final posting came in 1989 in Fort Eustis, Virginia as Commanding General of the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command. There were 27,000 soldiers and 11,000 civilians across 21 installations that were under the General's command. His promotion made Foss only the 3rd person in the history of the Army to rise from Private to Four-Star General.

In 1991, John retired after 35 years in the military. The couple settled in Kingsmill, Virginia, and took comfort in the idea of a permanent home. However, neither liked to sit still for long. The couple often traveled to their favorite spots throughout Europe and Asia, while also making time for their three grandchildren with fishing expeditions, trips to Busch Gardens, and time spent reading favorite books. In 2013, Gloria was diagnosed with cancer, which claimed her life in June 2014. John worked as a consultant at the Joint Forces Staff College for two more years until meningitis made it impossible to work. He spent his last years living quietly in Virginia with frequent visits by family before succumbing to his illness in April 2020.

Gloria and John Foss were married for 57 years. When examining the lives of John and Gloria before marriage, it's difficult to imagine that they had much in common. However, they shared a love and built a relationship that persevered through separation by oceans, wars in Asia, and periods of isolation. While in the same room or different countries, they remained loyal to each other and their children. Their story is one for the ages.

Thank you to Julie Foss Dunn and Kevin Foss for sharing photographs and memories of your parents.

**MEEKER
MEMORIES**

MEEKER MEMORIES



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Spotlight on the Collection



BY BAYLEY SCHLUTER

It isn't often that a United States Naval battleship is named in honor of your home county...

The *USS Meeker County* was constructed in December 1943 at the Boston Navy Yard as an 524-class tank landing ship. Landing ships were vessels first designed during World War II to support amphibious operations by carrying tanks, vehicles, cargo. They also were able to land troops directly onto shore without the use of docks or piers. The *Meeker County* did not receive a proper name until later in life, and was originally referred to by it's hull designation, *LST-980*.

LST-980 was launched out of Boston on February 10, 1944 with Lieutenant W.F. Westfall in command. After completing "shakedown exercises" (a variety of tests) in Chesapeake Bay, *LST-980* was loaded with equipment and sent out to England. Upon arrival, she underwent further training and was prepared for battle by early June. On June 5, 1944, *LST-980* and other ships that were member of "Operation Overlord" left the English coast. The next day, June 6, they stood ready for D-Day. The ship landed it's allies on the beaches of Normandy and were bracketed by bombs. One of which was a 125-pound dud that penetrated the hull and two bulkheads, killing one man and causing minor damage. After the Allied troops on land were able to begin defending the beach, *LST-980* remained in the area to provide transportation services between France and the United Kingdom. After bringing prisoners of war to England, she would return to France with reinforcements of men, supplies, and equipment.

Between 1945-1955, *LST-980* was used mainly for amphibious training of Naval and Marine Corps personnel. On July 1, 1955, she was renamed to *USS Meeker County*. Around this time, a Silver tea set was gifted to the ship's Commander by "the citizens of Meeker County, Minnesota." The tea pot, creamer server, sugar bowl, and serving tray remained with the ship for the rest of her "working life."



In 1965, the *Meeker County* was reactivated to active duty when amphibious types were needed for the Vietnam War. After intensive training and shakedowns, the *Meeker County* sailed to her new home port in Guam, and then on April 7, 1967, once again set sail to War. Between then and 1970, she operated out of Da Nang in South Vietnam. Providing crucial and almost constant support to combat operations across Vietnam.

The final Commanding Officer, Commander James C. Van Slyke, decommissioned the *Meeker County* in December 1970. He stated that the ship was outstanding and he was reluctant to give up command of her. The tea set was donated to the MCHS in 1972. In a letter that accompanied the collection, he said that "*LST-980* was a ship of which *Meeker County* could be very proud."

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