

# *MEEKER MEMORIES*

FALL 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.

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

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TALES"**



# About Us

# Events

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

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

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

Mark Cashman

Pam Dille

Jesse Fuchs

David Holle

Keith Johnson

Connie Lies

Theresa Nelson

Chuck Pease

Dave Pease

Barb Penk

Jessica VanLanduyt

### Staff

Danelle Erickson - Executive Director  
[director@meekercomuseum.org](mailto:director@meekercomuseum.org)

Sandy Johnson - Research Librarian  
[staff@meekercomuseum.org](mailto:staff@meekercomuseum.org)

## October

10 **Civil War Roundtable: Carrying the Colors: With Courage, Pride and Honor** presented by Brian Pease. 1:30.

Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/  
general admission

## November

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

14 **Civil War Roundtable: MythBusters: The True Story of Civil War Medicine** presented by the National Museum of Civil War Medicine. 1:30.

21 **Give to the Max Day** Visit [GiveMN.org](http://GiveMN.org) to donate to your favorite local nonprofits, including the Meeker County Museum.

28-30 **Closed** – Thanksgiving Holiday

## December

5 **Annual Meeting**, 6:30, G.A.R. Hall. Watch for details!

12 **Genealogy Hour**, 5:30. An informal, monthly gathering for genealogists and family researchers. *Note the date.*

12 **Civil War Roundtable** No December Meeting

24-  
Jan 1 **Closed** – Christmas Holiday



# Director's Notes

# Collection Spotlight

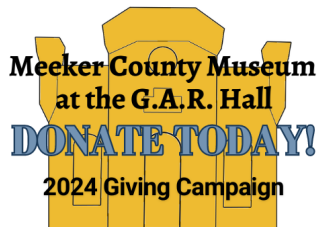
**Danelle Erickson**  
**Executive Director**



We had a busy summer at the Museum and G.A.R. Hall with our spy mystery, county fair, and so many wonderful visitors!

We are excited to announce a new monthly event at the Museum—Genealogy Hour. This is an informal gathering for genealogists and family researchers. Use this time to work on your own family tree or to connect with other researchers. All are welcome, no matter your skills or where your family roots are from. See the events calendar for dates and times.

It is that time of year when the Museum focuses on budgets, finances, and our year-end giving campaign. Please consider a financial gift to the Museum and G.A.R. Hall. Look for more ways to give in the coming months, including “Give to the Max Day,” the day of state-wide giving on November 21. GiveMN.org



The Museum and G.A.R. Hall wouldn't be what it is today without your support. Thank you!

**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

If you haven't heard, there is a lot of transition going on at the Meeker County Courthouse. This includes clearing out old records, including hundreds of tax books. When the county first asked the Museum if we wanted the records, the huge number of books made us pause. Storage at the museum is already tight. But the more we thought about it, we knew if we didn't take the books, they would be lost forever.

Thankfully, the Litchfield Opera House made some space available to us as we work through the best way to handle the books. There is still plenty of sorting ahead, not to mention figuring out shelving and proper storage. In the meantime, if you are curious about these records, we do have the years ending in “5” from 1905 to 1945 at the Museum. Most years have two books per town and township, one for real estate and one for personal property. In our opinion, the personal property books are especially interesting as they include tallies for things such as livestock, machinery, and household items.

A HUGE “thank you” to the Meeker County staff and our volunteers for hauling the books to the Opera House basement and to the Opera House for making the space available.



From the Courthouse to the Opera House.



# Members

## New\* and Returning Members July–September 2024

Allen County Public Library	Jason Meyer*
Margaret Baker*	Therese O'Fallon*
Karen Beckers*	Chuck and Merna Pease
David Johnson	Shirley Vivion
Steve and Leanne Kess*	Tom and Candy Westrum
	Stephen Whitaker*

## Business and Nonprofit Members



American Legion Post 104



Conway, Deuth & Schiesing, PLLP



Litchfield Opera House



Litchfield Rotary



VFW Post 2818



# Donors

## Financial Donations July–September 2024

Auggie Anderson	<b>In Memory of Mark Wood:</b>
Karen Beckers	Gary and Joy Agren
Meeker County	Dianne and Dan Barka
Einar Lundin	Tim and Deb Bergstrom
Beverly Meyer & David Johnson	John and Bonnie Boe
Bernard Schulte	Ron Dingmann
Shirley Vivion	Jilean Harding
Stephen Whitaker	Rita Hennen
Josiah Wig	Tyler Kinny
	Griffin Kinny
	Litchfield Kiwanis
	Joel and Andrea Leafblad
	Elaine Lenhard
	Dirk Lutz
	Linda Miller
	Gerry Moen
	David and Sandy Mutch
	James and Julie Rick
	Jeanette Stottrup
	Ken and Mary Zachman

**In Memory of Larry Swenson:**  
Wanda Urdahl

## Artifact Donations July–September 2024

Cindy Barrick	Ronald Keller
Jim Beckstrand	Elaine Lenhard
Pamela Dille	Meeker Co. Courthouse
DeeAnn Gritti/Booth family	Meeker Co. Extension
Sylvia Holtz	Don Nelson
Dan Hovland	Lois Sosenheimer
	Robert & Edna Wagner

**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!



# Township Tales

## Kingston

MAIN ST. KINGSTON, MINN.

Main Street, Kingston

The following stories are from Kingston Township, the largest township in Meeker County. This brings us to the end of the Township Tales series. Thanks for coming along!

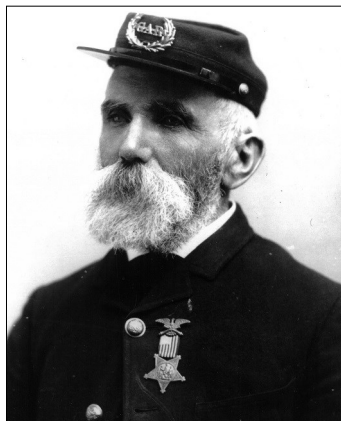
It was in 1856 that the first white settlers came to Kingston, Meeker County. The township and village were named after Kingston, Ontario, the birthplace of J.B. Atkinson, an early settler and prominent citizen.

### J.B. Salisbury

Prior to settlement, however, Meeker County had been surveyed in 1855 by Jonathan Burnett Salisbury. J.B. liked what he saw and staked a claim for himself in Kingston Township that same year. The following year, Salisbury and his family moved to Kingston from east-central Iowa. There were no roads for much of their journey, so going was slowed by the need to cut down trees as the family traveled north. It took a month to travel the distance that today would take a little over six hours to drive.

Once in Kingston, Salisbury, along with his in-laws, the Weymers, constructed one of the first homes in the county. About twenty years later, part of the cabin was moved to Litchfield. One of J.B.'s sons built a model of the cabin out of some of the remaining wood. The model can be seen at the Meeker County Museum.

With the start of the US-Dakota War of 1862, the Salisburys sought refuge in the village of Kingston along with many of the other local residents. J.B. helped to fortify the grist mill



Jonathan Burnett Salisbury, 1888

which was used as a fort. Most of the Salisbury family would move back to Iowa for a few years while J.B. joined the First Minnesota Cavalry in the fall of 1862. These "Mounted Rangers" served in Minnesota and the Dakota Territories. This wasn't Salisbury's first military service, having served a year in the Mexican War in the late 1840s.

Salisbury reenlisted in 1863 in Hatch's Battalion which also served in Minnesota and the Dakota Territories. He would muster out in March 1866 as a 2nd Lieutenant. He and his family returned to Kingston that same year.

By 1868, Salisbury was involved in local politics and was elected County Surveyor in 1870. In 1875, the family moved to Litchfield. He and his wife Lydia Margaret (Weymer) had eight children. When J.B. died in 1901, the funeral was conducted by the Litchfield G.A.R. Hall where he had been a member since 1884.

### Tornados

Ninety-five years ago, a deadly tornado struck Kingston Township. Three years later, a similar storm hit much of the same area. The first of the storms was on the evening of Monday, June 10, 1929. It began to build around Forest City and headed east. The intensity picked up not far from the farm of US Senator Magnus Johnson, located about two miles northwest of the village of Kingston. The farm lost some trees but escaped any major damage.

From the Johnsons, the tornado meandered



Kingston Grist Mill after it was moved to Kimball in 1899.

south and east, passing just south of the town of Kingston. Several farmsteads were destroyed or partially destroyed. As it is with tornados, the storm was indiscriminate. Charles Tormanen was in the process of building a new barn to replace the one he had lost in a storm the previous year. Unfortunately for him, the tornado not only took the new barn, but a second barn and nine cows as well. Their house, however, was spared from any major damage.

As the twister approached Big Swan Lake, it took a deadly turn. The John P. Wanttaja farm was located on the northwest corner of the lake. Two days before, John's mother arrived from North Dakota. She was on the porch when the tornado struck, killing her instantly. Her daughter-in-law was upstairs in the house and received several cuts and bruises. Mr. Wanttaja had been in a nearby pasture and was only slightly injured. Many of the farm buildings were also destroyed, an estimated loss of \$2,000 in property.

The tornado crossed the lake where its next victim fell. Henry Wuornos was at a neighbor's farm when he was struck by a corncrib tossed by the storm. The corncrib was the only building damaged on the property.

The storm crossed through the northeast corner of Dassel Township before crossing into Wright County. Although the town of Cokato was spared, several other farms were destroyed and crops and livestock were lost before the storm died out. It was reported that the storm caused \$150,000 in damages, close to \$3 million in today's money.

Three years later, on July 27, 1932, another tornado caused major damage in Kingston Township. In fact, it was reported to have started in the same place, the farm of Magnus Johnson. The Johnson farm lost its windmill, and the house and barn were damaged. Once again the storm moved south, just missing the village of Kingston. About a mile south of Kingston, the tornado tore a path along present-day Highway 15 and then CSAH 4 before crossing over Big Swan Lake and continuing south near the Meeker and Wright County line.



Magnus Johnson farm, before the tornados.

Not only did these two storms threaten much of the same area, they were both rare in that they traveled south and southeast. Most of Minnesota's tornados move in a northeastern direction.

The newspapers called this storm a "true cyclone" with a very visible funnel. The storm moved fairly slowly, with reports of the 1930s cars being able to outrun the storm. The winds were fierce, destroying anything in the direct path and decimating the fields and crops anywhere in the vicinity. Large hail caused further damage.

August Nikka, lived on a farm three miles northeast of Dassel. He was caught up in the storm and carried some distance, killing him instantly. His wife, Mary, was also seriously injured. About fifty other people sustained injuries, some of them serious.

Because of the deadly storm just three years early, people were understandably wary of severe weather and many were quick to take shelter or flee the area in their cars. "No heed was given to speed limits."

At least ten farms were completely demolished and another ten suffered major damage. The South Kingston Mission Covenant Church, built in 1886, was hit and "vanished in air." It was estimated one hundred buildings were destroyed over a ten to fifteen mile stretch. Many livestock were also lost to the storm.

The National Guard was immediately deployed to the stricken area, working through



Approximate paths of the tornados through Kingston and Dassel Townships. 1927 in red; 1932 in blue.





John Amundson's farm, east of Dassel, following the tornado. *Star Tribune*, July 29, 1932

the night to assist in recovery, help the injured, and provide food. In the days after the storm, local communities joined in to help. More than 150 men from Litchfield, Kimball, Dassel, and Cokato gathered in Dassel a few days after the storm. From Dassel, the volunteers, with tools in hand, spread across the storm's path to help where they could. Lunch and dinner were provided by the Ladies Aid and women's church groups.

Like so often happens after tragedy, these storms of the past saw people coming together and lending a hand wherever they could.

**Sources:**

- Various newspapers and local history books

## 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)

### Seasonal Addresses

If you head south (or anywhere else) for the winter, please send us your seasonal address. This makes sure you receive your newsletters and keeps costs down for us.

**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 \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

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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