

MEEKER MEMORIES

WINTER 2023

MEEKER COUNTY
MUSEUM
QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER



Cosmos, Minnesota, c. 1920

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.

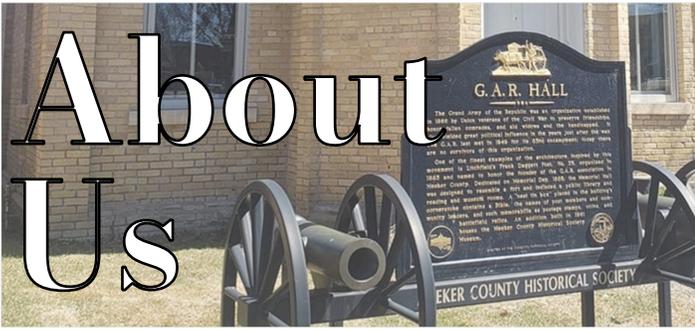


Meeker County Museum
at the G.A.R. Hall

Sharing Our Stories Since 1885

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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 Willson (President)
- Ken Zachman (Treasurer)
- Theresa Nelson (Secretary)
- Jessica Bondhus
- Mark Cashman
- Pam Dille
- David Holle
- Keith Johnson
- Connie Lies
- Chuck Pease
- Dave Pease
- Barb Penk

Staff

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

Events

January

- 12 **Civil War Roundtable: Major Michael Cook, 10th Minnesota Volunteer Infantry and The Battle of Nashville** with Darryl Sannes. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/ general admission



February

- 9 **Civil War Roundtable: Grant vs. Lee—Who Was the Greater General** with Andrew Ditlevson. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/general admission
- 25 **Uncle George: Life Story of George Daniels** Documentary film in celebration of Black History Month. 1:00. Free for members; \$3/general admission. See page 3.



- 1-28 **Presidential Scavenger Hunt.** Explore the Museum while learning some fun facts about U.S. Presidents. Free with Museum admission.

March

- 9 **Civil War Roundtable: U.S.-Dakota War** with Vince Botz. 1:30. Free for Roundtable Members; \$3/general admission

Follow us on Facebook or see page 7 on how you can sign up for our monthly emails "Meeker Memos"

Director's Notes

Collection Spotlight

Danelle Erickson
Executive Director



Happy New Year!

The New Year is always a good time to both look back and look ahead.

2022 was a great year! For me personally, it was the start of my time as director of this wonderful institution. I have loved my time meeting so many wonderful people and learning all I can about Meeker County history.

A huge **thank you** to everyone who donated over \$3,875 to our 2022 Fundraising Campaign. We truly would not be able to do what we do in sharing and preserving history without YOU!

Welcome to our new 2023 board members Keith Johnson, Connie Lies, and Chuck Pease. A very special "thank you" to our outgoing members, Sam Feistner, Jeff Niedenthal, and Tom Westrum. You will be missed! We said *welcome* and *goodbye* to our board members at our annual meeting in December, after which we were entertained by the wonderful Terry Shaw. Thanks, Terry!

As we look ahead to 2023, we are excited about what's to come. The Civil War Roundtable will continue to meet the 2nd Thursday of each month. Some of our exhibits will be receiving a bit of a "facelift." Keep an eye out for some returning favorites (including the Memorial Day Picnic) and new events that we have in the works. Stay tuned!

Occasionally, artifacts come to the Museum with little or no donor information. Such was the case with this photograph, mailed to us from



California. While we would love to know more of the photo's history, we do know it is Miss King and her students in June 1900. It was taken in Litchfield's Central Park and you can see a bit of the G.A.R. Hall in the upper left corner.

We know a bit more about other things donated since our last newsletter, including these items from the Mons family. The scale was used in the Mons Grocery store and the yellow coffee scoop advertised the business.



The tokens are from Johnny's Place. Both businesses were in



Cedar Mills and were owned by John and Ethel Mons.

Uncle George: Life Story of George Daniels

George Daniels has much in common with Meeker County's Albert Van Spence. Both men were born and enslaved in Georgia, were part of both sides of the Civil War, and came to Minnesota after the war. Come and "meet" George Daniels in this hour-long documentary film.

Saturday,
February 25, 1:00
Meeker County Museum
at the G.A.R. Hall



Members



Donors

New* and Returning Members October-December 2022

Patrick M. Campbell	Carol & Tim Lundstrom*
Richard and Elizabeth Carlson	Doug Meeker*
	Sid and Deb Willson

Financial Donations October-December 2022

Auggie Anderson	Litchfield Area Writers Grp
Sarah Anderson	Einar Lundin
Kate and Jen Andrews van Horne	Tom and Ila Macik
Tim Bergstrom	Beverly Meyer
Gary Blessman	Theresa Nelson
Jessica Bondhus	Ken R. Nordlie
Richard & Elizabeth Carlson	Judy Oestreich
Connie Cleary	Sherrie Risch
Terry & Patrice Davis	Dennis Rutledge
Gerald & Audrey Euerle	Mary Schlosser
Sarah Fjellanger	Bernard Schulte
Dennis Garoutte	Larry C. Sharpe
Christopher Hansen	James and Roberta Swenson
John & Jean Hartwell	Sid and Deb Willson
Dr. Daniel A. Johnson	Willson Carpentry
David Johnson	Ken & Mary Zachman
Floyd Lindahl	Anonymous Donor

Business and Nonprofit Members



American Legion Post 104



Conway, Deuth & Schiesing, PLLP



Ron Dingmann



Help share local history!

In the coming year, will be working to spread the word about the Meeker County Museum at the G.A.R. Hall. Here are some ways **you** can help:

- 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

Artifact Donations

Connie Cleary and family
Paul Flatt
Brian Johnson
Melrose Historical Society
Jason Mons
Rueben Nathe
Bob Pederson
Pioneer Museum of McKenzie County

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

Township Tales

Cosmos & Cedar Mills

Come along as we continue our "Township Tales" series. Each issue of *Meeker Memories* features a story from one or two of Meeker County's townships. Topics will vary – from people and places to businesses and events. This edition of "Township Tales" includes two true crime stories!

Cosmos

Around 1:00 a.m. on August 20, 1924, four unidentified men came to Cosmos, Minnesota. Quietly, they cut the town's telephone and telegraph lines and made their way to the First State Bank of Cosmos. They entered through a basement window and found their way to the safe. Using nitroglycerine, the men blew open the safe. Inside, they found two smaller compartments. They blasted their way into the bottom compartment, but before they could do the same to the top space, they were interrupted.

Across the street, Emil Hackbarth had woken up, hearing noises from the bank. He

grabbed his gun, and upon seeing movement in the bank, began shooting. The robbers returned fire, leaving eight bullet holes in Hackbarth's wall. Bank employee John Jerabek lived next door to Hackbarth and was also woken up. He too headed towards the bank but

withdrew when he was shot at by the retreating robbers.

The robbers, or "yeggman" as the papers liked to call them, escaped to their waiting car. "The night was dark and foggy" and the men disappeared into the night.

One can imagine the worried bank employees sighing with relief when they discovered

the robbers were unable to complete their evil deeds. The safe's lower compartment contained only paperwork. The upper compartment, still securely locked, contained over \$5,000 in cash. The money had recently arrived at the bank and was the payroll for the creamery. That would be about \$85,000 in today's money.

The Cosmos robbery was the second in a series of four local bank robberies. Earlier, a similar robbery had taken place at the State Bank of Prinsburg, about 10 miles southwest of Willmar. The robbers got away with \$1,200 in cash and



First State Bank of Cosmos



Emil Hackbarth's (right) and John Jerabek's (left) residences, across the street from the Cosmos bank.



Photograph from the *Willmar Tribune* of the destroyed safe at the State Bank of Prinsburg, July 30, 1924.

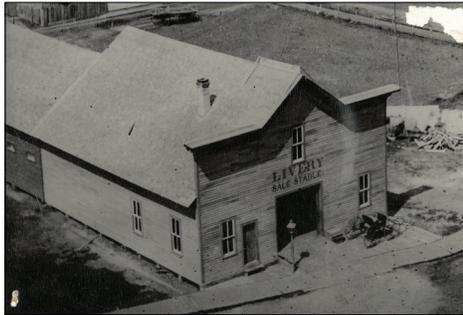
left behind a great mess at the bank. Shortly after the Cosmos robbery, Svea (south of Willmar) and Brownton (south of Hutchinson) were also hit. At Svea, the men got away with around \$600 and left \$3,000 in damages. The Brownton robbery, like Cosmos, was interrupted by a heroic citizen who fired at the bank, sending the robbers running.

Based on the proximity of the crimes and similarities in the methods used, law officials believed all four robberies were committed by the same crew. While the confirmed identities of the Cosmos robbers are unknown, two men, namely William West and James Steele, were eventually convicted in the Svea robbery and served time in the Stillwater Prison.

Cedar Mills

In July 1882, George Welch of Pelican Rapids, Otter Tail County, Minnesota, stole a local horse. Deputies set out to find Welch, tracking him across at least five counties. The horse thief rode into Litchfield on July 14. At the town's

livery, he had "his" horse fed and shared some gossip with the locals, before continuing south to Greenleaf.



Litchfield Livery, 1880s; present day 25 East Depot Street, Litchfield.

Upon arrival, Welch again visited casually with the locals and then started towards Cedar Mills. It was around this time that the Otter Tail deputies met Welch on the road. The officers, however, were unarmed, and so didn't attempt to capture Welch. Instead, they went to Greenleaf to borrow a weapon. Word about Welch spread, and Cedar Mills residents Charles Cross and Gustav Lindner were on the lookout for Welch.

Just outside of Cedar Mills, the two men came upon Welch and tried to detain him. As Lindner attempted to restrain Welch, he told Cross to shoot the thief. Cross hesitated, uncertain if he should shoot or not. Welch, on

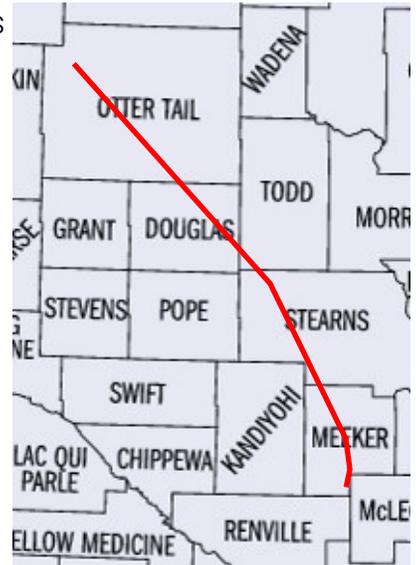
the other hand, was able to escape from the loose hold Lindner had on him and shot Cross in the abdomen.

Cross and Lindner shot at the fleeing Welch, but missed.

Soon sheriffs and deputies from Meeker and McLeod Counties joined in the hunt for Welch. He was captured the following day and delivered to the Litchfield jail.

Meanwhile, Cross was taken to his home. The bullet had entered just below his ribs. At first, Cross seemed to be recovering, but he took a turn for the worse a few days later. He died on July 22, 1882.

George Welch's trial for the murder of Charles Cross was held in February 1883. Upon testimony from Welch's neighbors and several physicians, he was considered "not of sound mind" and was sent to what was then known as the insane asylum in St. Peter, Minnesota where "he will not have any opportunity to shoot upright citizens like Charley Cross."



Approximate route of George Welch



Aerial view of Cedar Mills, c. 1975.

Notes:

The Cross family faced many tragedies. Charles' parents were Daniel and Esther Cross. Daniel, the original settler of Cedar Mills, was killed during the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. Daniel and Esther's son William died at the age

of 10. Daughter Abby died in 1871 in a tragic death. The young lady was sewing and knelt on a needle. By the time she told her mother about her injury, it was horribly infected. She died almost a month later.

The Charles Cross story was first brought to our attention when we were contacted by a Cross family member. Growing up, she was told that Uncle Charles Cross was killed while stealing a horse and asked us to help confirm the story. She was delighted to learn he wasn't a criminal but was instead trying to stop one. It just goes to show how family stories can sometimes take on a life of their own!

Sources

Various newspaper articles from *Litchfield Independent*, *Litchfield Ledger*, and *Litchfield News Ledger*.

The History of Cosmos, compiled by Amy Peterson

Photographs from: *The History of Cosmos*, *Willmar Tribune*, July 30, 1924; Meeker County Museum archives; and *Meeker County Memories*.

Meeker Memos

NEW 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

New or Seasonal Mailing Address?

Please help the Museum by informing us of any new or seasonal mailing addresses you might have. This not only makes sure you receive your newsletters, but also helps us save in postal fees. Thank you!

THANK YOU to the Greater Litchfield Opera House Association and their in-kind donation of printing this publication and in helping the Museum with its off-site storage needs.

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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