

CASS COUNTY CLIPPINGS

January 1, 2012

CASS COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

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The Pillager Fair

In our last October newsletter we covered Cass County fairs of the past. We also listed the Cass County Fair held at Pine River as the only county fair to survive on in to today. We apologize for our error as the Pillager fair was our first official county fair, and it was created in 1898, almost eight years before the Pine River fair. The site of the first fair was on property owned by W.B. Jones, who was president of the Cass County Agricultural Association.

John Donovan of the Pillager area was the first stockman to introduce Hereford cattle into Cass County. William H. Hallet of Stony Brook won many first and second prizes, but his sheep were the best entered. Mr. and Mrs. Seth Phillips won many awards over the years. Mr. Phillips was a Civil War veteran. He purchased a farm in Gull River in 1881 where he lived until his death from influenza at age 84.

One of the biggest and best balls ever held in Cass County was held at the W.B. Jones' Hall at Sylvan Lake on the evening of the last day of the fair. The Motley band was engaged to furnish the music. A good time was had by all!

In looking through our files and newspapers we see no advertisement of this fair until September of 1901. As you can see, 1901 was the third annual fair. The fair is still being held today, but again, we do not find any information in our county papers. If you can add information to our files about this fair, please contact us at the museum.

October 2 & 3
Are the days for
the 3rd Annual
FAIR
OF THE
Cass Co. Agricultural Association,
AT
Sylvan Lake

The fair promises to be the most successful ever held.
Prizes paid in full.
The previous list is the same as last year, which was a most liberal one.
You can make your entries at any time by writing to the secretary.

W. B. JONES, President,
* A. G. BERNARD, Sec.
- C. E. GRIFFITH, Trustee.

Cass County Historical Society
Calendar of Events 2012

**Cass County Historical Society
Board of Directors**

Dan Eikenberry, Pres.

Lois Orton, V-Pres

Karen Keener

Elsie Nelson

Sue Eikenberry

Don Beadle

Martha Winter

Alexis Hadrava - Treasurer

February 13, 2012 – Board Meeting, Museum, 4:00 p.m.

April 17, 2012 - program (to be announced)

May 15, 2012 - program (to be announced)

June 19, 2012 - program (to be announced)

July 17, 2012 - program (to be announced)

July 24, 2012 - 3rd Annual HISTORY WALK

Aug 14, 2012 - 3rd Annual HISTORY WALK

Aug 21, 2012 - program (to be announced)

Sept 18, 2012 - program (to be announced)

Oct 16, 2012 - program (to be announced)

Watch for a listing of speakers for the programs that will take place on the 3rd Tuesday of each month from April through October.

HISTORY WALKS

The History Walks will take you on a historic tour, complete with characters in costume, down the south side of Minnesota Avenue in Walker.

Cass County Research Center

The research center is staffed by the Cass County Historical Society at the Cass County Museum in Walker. Through the winter, research help is available by appointment. The research library, obituary indexes, newspaper microfilm, and other archival materials are accessible for a \$10 research fee for non-members.

To make an appointment during the winter hours, contact Renee at 218-652-4377.

Old Town Backus

The first evidence of the settlement in Backus is from a reference to Frank Cologne, who had a stopping place on the north side of Pine Mountain Creek, where the old trail used to cross about 3/4 of a mile south of current Backus. This stopping place was called 24 mile creek, due to the fact that it was just 24 miles from this point to the Leech Lake Agency, which was then a major headquarters for the Chippewa Indians of the area. The first road through the village was cut by soldiers from Fort Ripley. There was much unrest in the 1850s, and General Sibley ordered this road cut through the forest to Leech Lake.

The first store in Old Town was a general merchandise store built about 1888 by Edward Hurley. He was the first postmaster and built the first saloon. He sold it to Henry Dorr in about 1890 and Henry transformed the saloon into The Pioneer House, the first boarding and lodging house at the Old Town.

The Old Town had never been platted due to legal problems. J. S. Scribner decided on Lot 4 for the location of the new village. He had an agreement with the railroad to have sidetracks and a depot built in 1904. As this village grew and was organized in 1902, the old village site was abandoned.

BACKUS ATTRACTS HUGE RACE TRACK ATTENDANCE Sat., June 25, 1937

Backus officially opened its new race track, the only one between St. Cloud and Bemidji in 1937. A band led by John Rice started the day's festivities at 10:30 that morning. A ball game between Backus and Akeley followed and was a victory for Backus, 19-7. The crowd in attendance was estimated at between 650 and 750 spectators. They lined the race track on both sides. Every section of Cass County was represented. John Rohr of Pine River announced all the events through a loud speaker.

One of the features of the race that attracted considerable interest was the presence of George Garrity riding "Snowball", a grey gelding belonging to Ora Hillyer. George was attired in his old jockey uniform that he had worn while he was a jockey and raced throughout the United States. For many years George was considered at the top of his profession.

In 1939, the Backus 4th of July celebration was well attended. The parade, which got off to a late start owing to the late arrival of the Walker band, was a worthwhile exhibition of originality and ingenuity with 20 entries. First prize was won by the Backus Bank, second by the M & I railroad, and third by the Backus Boy Scouts. Other entries were from Backus Liquor and Livestock Exchange; Backus Lumber Co., J. R. Bailey, Harley Coffland, Frank Reynolds, Backus Post Office, Backus Creamery, Spillane Motor Co., Don's Service Station, Skelly Gas and Oils, Mickey's Dray and Ice, Farmer's Supply, Wagon Wheel Nite Club, Marlow Station and Miller's Dairy, the Pine Mt. Study Club; Alex McAllister's Children; McCormick-deering Tractor Co., and Longbow Magazine.

The fans jammed into the race track to witness some of the finest displays of equine speed and beauty. Pleasant weather aided a record turnout. The three two-year-olds owned by Hillyer were popular openers to a great racing program. Peanuts romped home first in both heats, with Twinkle Silk, 2nd and Minnie Einstein third. The jockeys were Les Duncan, Bumie Van Epps and Beans Fisher. There were five races including the popular chariot race in which the Bud Keeps and Tex Rideout teams split the honors.

One of the new innovations planned by Ora Hillyer for the Labor Day Horse races of September 5, 1939 was a 2½ mile furious race between "Model T" cars.

In 1940, heavy rains caused some concern, but they decided that the Backus Race Track was in good condition, and despite the inclement weather preceding the race, many attended. Harley Coffland announced the races. Ora Hillyer was track manager, Charles Wood, Otis Sheldon and P. Barthelemy were the judges. Gardner Eustis was the time keeper. Otto Haack and John Rohr took movies of the events.

Minnie Einstein, owned by Ora Hillyer, was a huge drawing card. She raced against a gray gelding owned by Bell of Pine River. The two had raced against each other in Pine River on the Fourth of July. In all there were about 20 racing horses entered for the nine races. An added innovation was a race by a riderless horse. The first race was between Sandy, the grey gelding, and Minnie Einstein. While sweeping into the last hundred yards to the judge's stand, Sandy turned in front of Minnie, evidently intending to go through the gateway of the picket fence and only the masterful riding of the two jockeys prevented a bad spill and possible injury. The judges termed it NO RACE and NO DECISION.

In 1940, Ora Hillyer was awarded the license for the Backus Liquor Store for another year. He had been manager of the Liquor Store since its inception as a municipal project. Work was begun to convert the back end of the liquor store into a dance hall and amusement place with floor space of 30 x 18.

In 1940, Ora Hillyer reported that he sold about 140 head of horses. In 1941, he sold 180 head of farm stock. He said in June of 1941 that since disposing of his business, he had devoted all his time to the work of the Backus Livestock Exchange and reported one of the best years he has ever had. Ora was well known throughout the entire area as a horse judge and breeder. His race horses were entered into all the large fairs of the state.

1941 was likely the last year of the races at the Backus Horse Track, as most of the racing was dropped during World War II. If anyone knows of racing beyond the races of 1941, we would like to add that information to our file at the Cass County Museum.

Obituaries and Cemeteries

If you aren't aware of it yet, there is a valuable research tool that is free if you are looking for the burial location of your relatives. The site is www.findagrave.com. There were 82,213,428 names listed last evening, and there are already 82,221,904 this morning. My math skills tell me that 8,476 names and sites were added overnight.

Volunteers from around the country have visited county cemeteries this year and added thousands of names and photos of the cemeteries and tombstones. As the historian of a small cemetery, I was surprised that two volunteers had been in my area taking photos and adding information to this website this summer. The process is ongoing, and there are presently 1830 names listed for Evergreen Cemetery in Walker and 451 for Evergreen Cemetery in Backus.

It has been the custom for the past twenty years or so for volunteers to do tombstone transcriptions and to identify abandoned and unused cemeteries and burial locations. Areas that had been forgotten and allowed to go to seed were located again, and many people made an effort to clean up the areas and identify the location. This new wave of volunteers are expanding that effort by adding information beyond the tombstone transcriptions. One of our former members, Richard Tappe, did a first-class job of recording cemeteries, as he not only wrote down the tombstone, he gathered data from the original records so that he could record as many burials as possible. He realized that pure tombstone transcriptions only tell a part of the story. Depending on the era, many families could not afford tombstones. Temporary markers placed by the funeral homes were lost, and wooden markers were either intentionally or accidentally destroyed. Richard Tappe did a thorough study of eight of the county cemeteries.

Many of the early records of a cemetery are sketchy at best, but every bit of information helps people of a later period fill in their family history. By using our museum's obituary file and the website, visitors have been able to find past relatives. Just yesterday, we heard from the great-granddaughter of the Carnahan family, and she was ecstatic that she had found the information and plans a visit to our area as soon as she can.



If your family is not listed, and you would like them to be, join as a volunteer on www.findagrave.com and list your own family members. Maybe a grandchild will thank you some day.

Membership - 2011

Friend (\$100-\$249)

Willard Arends
Carl & Judy Berg
Dr. Steve Bilben
Don & Margaret Brown
Dan & Sue Eikenberry
First National Bank, Walker
John & Thgelma Grimley
Betty Hutt
Gramma Jo's House
Leer Title Service
Kelly & Jeanne Nelson
Dick & Kathie Stoneking

Cities & Townships

City of Backus - \$50
City of Lake Shore - \$50
City of Walker - \$500
Blind Lake Township -- \$100
Fairview Township - \$200
Gould Township - \$100
Kego Township - \$500
Leech Lake Township - \$200
Pine Lake Township - \$200
Pine River Township - \$100
Powers Township - \$150
Rogers Township -- \$50
Salem Township - \$30
Shingobee Township - \$1,000
Smokey Hollow Township - \$100
Sylvan Township - \$85
Town of Loon Lakes - \$100
Torrey Township - \$50
Trelipe Township - \$250
Turtle Lake Township - \$500
Wabedo Township - \$50
Walden Township - \$50
Wilkinson Township - \$250

Individual (\$10)

Patricia Abraham
Karen Arsan
Bob Bean
Francis Bean
Vi Blackburn
Margaret Dewey
Barb Frederick
Rick Johnson
Karen Keener
Karen Kezele
Steven Mecklenberg
Elsie Nelson
Frank Olson
Robert Redfield, Jr.
Dr. Otto F. Ringle
Tom Salwasser
Arthur Shenk
Jeanette Silbaugh
Glenna Tappe
David Yde
Betty Zaffke

Family (\$15)

Don & Tanis Beadle
Bob & Dodie Burdick
Don & Karen Jensen
Glenna & Patricia Mechelke
Pat & Diane Pitzen

Sponsor (\$250-\$999)

Anderson's Cove
Chippewa Lodge
Bob & Nita Frink
First National Bank, Walker
Grand Vu Lodge
Ron Libertus
Northland Lodge
Lois Orton
Spirit of the North
Woodland Bank

Harry Winter Memorial

Benefactor (\$20 - \$99)

Virginia Abullrade
Dale Barto
Doug & Linda Birk
Audrey Chelberg
Robert & Florence Crow
Terrie Cornell
Tom & Sarah Cox
Gordy & Liz Dahn
Leland & Dorothy Delger
Jim & Shirley Dowsen
Richard & Joan Downham
Michael J. & Karla Elsenpeter
Dick & Donna Evenson
Don Flyckt
Tom & Lori Gamache
Jerry & Renee Geving
Nancy Jacobson
Bob & Shirley Jewell
Steve & Kay Johnson
Robert & Betty Kangas
Keith & Janice Matson
Cecelia McKeig
Noel Mills, M.D.
David Nieman
Norbert & Rosemary Ochs
James & Leona O'Neal
Chris & Dorothy Opheim
Hugo & Jana Pence
Carole Sargent
Richard & Elizabeth Sauer
Erma Schantle
Dana & Bev Sheldon
Gary & Margaret Trimble
Bob & Ann Winegar
Martha Winter

Business (\$50+)

Acorn Hill Resort
D. W. Jones, Inc.
Huddle's Resort
Little Apple Paperback Exchange
Orton Oil Co.
Alice Groth
Sandra (Hedlund) Spitzack

A Settler's Dream

A Settler closed his cabin door
The sun was down, his day's work was o'er
He settled down in his bed to rest
And his head in its soft pillow pressed.
A sleepy tune came from the old cow bell,
As a gentle rain on his cabin fell.
With hardly a thought this tired man
Had journeyed into the slumber land.
He dreamed he lived in a land bright and fair,
With beautiful pines so tall and green
And the finest lakes he had ever seen
With the clearest water and shores so fine
All wreathed around with bird and pine;
They looked like mirrors when the sun was low
And the pines far across shadows throw;
He dreamed these lakes were full of fish
And that you could catch them when you wished.
In the distance he could see the purple hills
Where the hunters find their joy and thrills;
For in those hills, deer and bear roam,
And ducks and partridge are right at home;
Where rivers flow like a silver thread
And help to form the Mississippi head.
He dreamed of wheat fields that had turned to gold
And oats that yielded a hundred fold:
And the ground like a carpet was covered all over
With little blossoms – they called it clover.



The splendid gardens in this land so fair
The garden of Eden could not compare
He dreamed of a fine road of gravel and clay
That went by the name of Scenic Highway
At every corner there was a blue star
To guide the traveler that came from afar.
Many people in autos were coming to share
The beautiful lakes and pure fresh air.
He awoke and found that the night had passed –
But his dream was true, for he lived in Cass.

Written by Harley D. Coffland, printed in the
Pine River Sentinel, Pine River, February 24,
1922.

Our Old Settlers

In June of 1932, Mrs. Ruth Stokesberry, then 101 years old, was designated “Minnesota’s Oldest Mother” by the state federation of women’s clubs. At that time she was in remarkably fine health, ate heartily, refused to spend her days in bed and continued to read letters and sew despite her failing eyesite. Born April 29, 1831, on an Indiana farm, Ruth Rhoades, who later married James Stokesberry, was one of a family of 11 children. Her father, Harlan Rhoades, was a Kentucky cabinet maker and wagon wright. One of his wagons, more durable even than the famous “one hoss shay,” was still being used by one of his grandchildren in 1934, more than a hundred years after it was built.

The family had moved to Vermillion county, Indiana, when Ruth was born. Harlan Rhoades continued to build wagons, worked also to clear his farm and feed an increasing number of eager appetites. Ruth married James Stokesberry and helped him break the ground for a new farm, resuming the struggle with the prairie that threatened always to take back the fields that had been laboriously burned over and broken into cornfields. To raise enough corn to feed family and livestock was the chief concern of the farmers.

After the Civil War, there was an influx of settlers in the Vermillion county district. Pioneers at heart, the Stokesberrys sold their farm, packed their belongings and their six children into one of Harlan Rhoades good covered wagons and moved into Illinois. They settled for a time iat Paris, Illinois, but then started westward again. By 1871, the family had increased to 10 children; two others had died in infancy. The covered wagon was heavily loaded when the journey toNebraska began, but the famly was never to reach Nebraska. At Red Oak, Iowa, one of the horses died. The enforced halt changed all their plans, and accepting the affair philosophically, the family began building their new life near Red Oak. Near the end of her life, Mrs. Stokesberry lived for several years at the home of her son, M. G. Stokesberry in Walker. She died in January 1934.

The Museum depends on your membership and donations to keep it going.
If you haven’t done so yet, please renew for 2012.

Membership

Single (\$10) _____ Family (\$15) _____

Benefactor (\$20-99) _____

Business (\$50) _____

Friends (\$100-\$249) _____ Sponsors (\$250-\$999) _____ Patrons (\$1000)

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Email: _____