

# CASS COUNTY CLIPPINGS

October 1, 2006

CASS COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

P.O. BOX 505  
201 MINNESOTA AVENUE W., WALKER, MN. 56484

## BENA WILL CELEBRATE ITS CENTENNIAL ON AUGUST 18, 2007

The Cass County records show that the Bena Townsite Company was organized October 3, 1906; articles of organization and a village plat were filed in the office of the Register of Deeds on October 9, 1906. The organizers were James Middleton, president and J. W. Bartlett, secretary-treasurer. Soon thereafter the townsite company grew when other residents such as Ernest Flemming and Tony Potvin joined. Ernest Flemming became president. He invested heavily in buildings and merchandise and in logging and general timber

operations. At the height of its activity, Bena is reported to have had a population of 1800, but no doubt all the lumberjacks in the large camps were counted. The village once had five saloons and several large hotels.

The first election in the new village of Bena was held in December of 1906. The candidates were J. E. Johnston, Tony Putnam, M. Jordan, Barney McGuire, V. Stewart, J. D. Middleton, William Morse, W. W. White, James Van Wert, W. J. Duval, and Gabe Lee.



Council members William Tucker, Steve Stangel, Jon Finn, and Stephanie Anwiler pose with the cake at the Community picnic on September 24. Missing from the photo are Michelle Charnley and Pat Rooney.

A thriving Indian community existed along Lake Winnibigoshish prior to the introduction of white settlement in the area. Although logging brought in many white families with Canadian and New England roots, the first white resident in the area appears to have been John Jackson, a farmer from Michigan, who settled in the Winni Dam area about 1883. He married Jane Fairbanks and had several children including William (1890), Benjamin (1893) and Catherine (1904). William married Josephine Lyons; Catherine Jackson married George Tibbetts.

About the time the Great Northern right-of-way was established between Deer River and Fosston, Ernie Flemming saw the potential of the area. His wife Julia and daughters Ida and Katherine located their allotments along the probable route of the railroad and the intersection with a road going south to Federal Dam. The whole country was timber. He built a little stopping place and moved to Bena on March 29, 1898. A traveling

*Story continued on page 3*

## Cass County Receives Fantastic Gifts

This past winter we received a complimentary volume of The Northern Pacific in Minnesota from author, John C. Luecke. He visited us several times for information and photographs of the railroad which passed through our county.

This has been a summer of surprises! Tom Williams looked over our research library and found a few books missing. He brought in Minnesota Logging Railroads; The Great Northern Railway History; and two volumes of Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars, 1861-1865.

Roger Underwood, Underwood Family Foundation from Ames, Iowa sent us a check for \$250. He had done some research at the museum years ago and thought we could use some help.

The Eikenberry family of Ten Mile Lake has given \$5000 to the Cass County Historical Society in honor of their family's purchase of their lake property in 1926. The family is very interested in history and historical preservation and wants to assist the Society in its efforts in these areas. The money is earmarked for permanent display case glass and other permanent display items that are needed. Family members include Jo Eikenberry, Sacramento, CA; Sue and Dan Eikenberry, Ten Mile Lake; Linda Waage, Roseville, CA; John, Sarah, Julia and Ellie Eikenberry, Center Point, IA; and Allison Eikenberry, St. Paul.

The work is nearly finished and was needed to bring our antique showcases up-to-date. All the glass has beveled edges and the cases sparkle like diamonds. We are so grateful to the Eikenberry family.

We are incredibly indebted to these people for their generosity. The Society thanks you for your special gifts. Without you, the Society would not have the funds for these special projects.

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

As of October 1st, Bev Sheldon had entered 10,793 obituaries into the Obit Excel file. Volunteers will be meeting again on a regular basis at the museum to read newspapers and abstract the pertinent information and put it on 3x5 index cards. More volunteers are needed as we have 50 years of newspapers to read to make our files current. Please call for information on dates and time. Volunteers are also needed to accession new items received in the last couple of years. This includes numbering each article and entering a description in the ledger, and helping to determine storage or placement in exhibits. Volunteers are also needed to file material into our archival collection. This involves completing a collection information form and determining which file to enter the information into.

### Cass County Historical Society Board of Directors

Eric Myhra  
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Audrey Chelberg  
Sandy Pauly  
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### Cass County Research Center

The research center is staffed by the Cass County Historical Society at the Cass County Museum in Waker. Someone is available to assist you in your research Tuesday-Friday from 10:00 - 5:00 from May 15-Sept 15. Research is also available by appointment through the winter. The research library, obit indexes, newspaper microfilm, and other archival materials are accessible for a \$10 research fee for non-members.

One of our immediate goals is to expand the microfilm collection of newspapers and census records as we have the only microfilm reader/printer available for public use in the county.

correspondent of the *Cass Lake Independent* made a town visit in April of 1899. At Bena he found two well-stocked stores conducted by Ernest Flemming and by Tuller & Terpening, two good hotels, Cook Bros' sled manufacturing plant and two logging camps conducted by Lee West and Cook Bros. The surrounding area was mostly divided into Indian allotments. It was also the shipping point to the Winnibigoshish dam, and large quantities of freight were being shipped to that point via Bena.

The development of Bena was challenged by a group of business men when the Richards Land and Improvement Company filed articles of incorporation in 1904 just five miles west of Bena. It was the first case of its kind to occupy the attention of the local land office as both factions presented their case for the establishment of one townsite or the other. This makes interesting reading for anyone interested in the development of the area. Eventually, Ernest Flemming's group prevailed despite a challenge from Archdeacon Appleby of the Duluth Episcopal diocese and a letter to President Roosevelt protesting against the establishment of townsites adjacent to the lands of the Indian schools.

Bena held its first planning meeting for the celebration of the centennial in August and held a community picnic on Sunday, September 24<sup>th</sup> where many people showed up and shared pictures and stories of Bena. There will be more meetings in the next months. The publication of a centennial book is planned as well. Cec McKeig and Renee Geving are gathering pictures and historical information for the book.

## The First County Fairs

The idea of a fair or an agricultural display may well have had its beginnings in the years between 1885 and 1898. Early records indicate that a 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration was held at Pillager Lake in 1885 with five ox teams and two teams of horses providing the transportation. A few years later a community Thanksgiving was held at the Summer's home north of Pillager and several families brought some of their produce to help out with the meal and to exchange with other families. These early social gatherings probably gave rise to plans for the first Cass County Fair. In 1948, Edward Dorsey wrote that any history of the early period of Cass County must depend on the memories and advice of the so-called old timers. They were naturally the young people of the early day – the upstarts – the ones who caused grey heads to get greyer and whose elders wondered, "Where are we drifting"? According to these old timers, the **first county fair** took place in 1898. An article in the *Cass Lake Times* on



September 14, 1899, states: "October 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> are the dates set for the first fair in Cass County, and the place is Sylvan Lake," leaving no firm conclusion as to whether it was 1898 or 1899.

The location is more definite. The fair took place on the south shore of Sylvan Lake near the cottages of Land and Allen and the farm of Walter Fischer. The Sylvan Livestock Company had a place to house and care for work stock, and this was headed by a young man from Wisconsin, W. B. Jones. The barns,

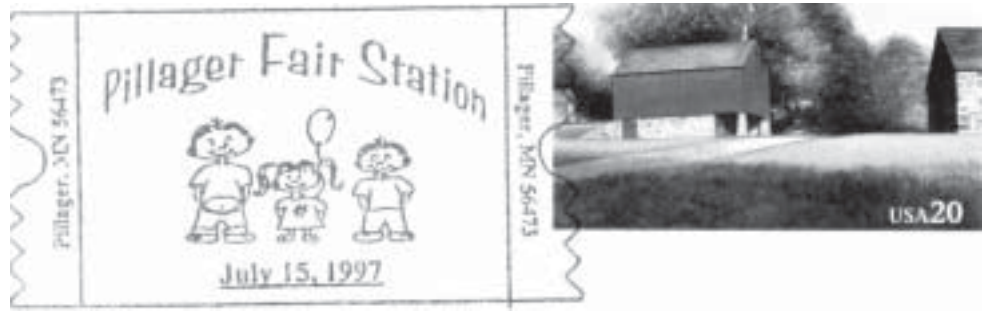
four of them on this farm, were about 60' x 200' placed in a hollow square which provided a yard or paddock for the horses to exercise in and gave shelter from storms. Nearby and farther west were other barns, a root cellar, buggy and wagon shed, and then on the point extending into the lake was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jones and their family. This home was the social center of the neighborhood and overflow crowds were cared for in the pavilion farther out on the point. This pavilion provided the needed space for the evening gatherings, dances, and

other social activities. This was the setting for the first fair and for the next several fairs held at Sylvan Lake. The officers of the fair appear to have been W. B. Jones, president; A. G. Barnard, secretary; and W. T. McKeown, treasurer. Records at Walker show that the County Commissioners appropriated “\$100, or so much thereof as necessary to the Cass County for settlement of the Premium List”.

Field crops were shown in the west shed or barn and the south shed housed the livestock. Sports and races were held either on the road leading to the farm or on the flat field south of the farmstead. George Ramsey and Ed Lasher were opponents in a wrestling match and horses belonging to Frank Hanscomb and Ed Lasher ran second and third in a race against none other than Martin Bragas’ mule piloted by Ernest Whipple.

Crowds were fed through the hospitality of the Jones family and the labor of the Jones ladies. Seth Phillips was a judge and others assisted in supervising the exhibits and placing the blue ribbons. A Grand Ball followed in the evening with midnight lunch and more dancing to follow.

The pattern of the first year was followed until about 1904 or 1905 when rivalries began to bring about a change. The fair was held at Sylvan and the exhibits were displayed in the Methodist Church, the depot, store, and in the nearby barns. Seth Phillips and Peter Yde became officers later on.



About 1907 the fair moved to Pillager. Records do not show the “why”. Perhaps it was due to space and facilities. During the earlier years C. D. Bacon had built and operated a merry-go-round and Cyrus Deavers and his boys had trained their race horses to compete with those of the Dorsey boys, the Ydes, and the Lashers.

When the fair came to Pillager under the guidance of Wm. Coe and E. P. Bacon, the habit of races and merry-go-rounds came along. Dan Moon built an up-to-date merry-go-round. Races were run parallel with the railroad tracks, and the exhibits were housed in the school, the old Methodist Church, the village hall or in small buildings on the present grounds. Livestock, if shown, were tied to posts or trees.

By 1910 the location had been secured and buildings went up. Crowds increased, exhibits improved, and tent shows became a new trend. S. E. Parks and Murray McNair were active in the period just before and following World War I. A Hawaiian orchestra and a pavilion provided more space. George McClelland headed up a building program. There was always a push for more buildings, improvement of the grounds, better attractions and larger crowds. A free barbeque was the number one event

for several years presided over by Ted Prescott and his family.

In the late thirties, additional improvements were made under the leadership of Mr. Saterlie and then Sewell Britton. From 1940-1945, displays emphasized patriotic themes and the Army put on exhibits. The Cass County Agricultural Society incorporated in 1945. James Friary became its president and Earl LaPorte its secretary. Governor Luther Youngdahl attended the 1948 Fair.

*The Pillager Fair 1898-1948* was written and submitted to the Cass County Historical Society by Edward J. Dorsey, and is a part of the museum’s archival collections. The photo of the 1913 Pillager Fair came from a manuscript by Lee Bennett entitled *Pillager - About Growing Up in a Small Town in Northern Minnesota*, donated to the Cass County Museum.

**The Cass County Historical Society meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 6:30 at the Museum. Two board members have moved out of the area thereby creating vacancies on the board. If you are interested in serving as a director, please contact us at 218-547-7251 and leave a message. A board member will contact you.**

<i>Sponsor</i>	<b>Membership</b>	<i>Patron</i>
<p>Acorn Hill Resort            Anderson Family Resorts            Warren &amp; Linda Anderson            Carl &amp; Judy Berg            Don &amp; Margaret Brown            The Eikenberry Family            First National Bank of Walker            Jeanette Fisher            Bob &amp; Nita Frink            Gramma Jo's            Betty Hutt            Phyllis Krueger            Frank &amp; Lois Orton            Dr. Otto Ringle            Spencer &amp; Miriam Turner            Tom &amp; Doris Williams            Underwood Family Foundation</p>	<p><b><i>Individual</i></b>            Amanda Amy            Vi Blackburn            Winnie Dau Schmidt            Margaret Dewey            Bessie Engebretson            Dick Hein            Beulah Hendricks            Karen Keener            Elsie Nelson            Meryle O'Connor            Patricia Oliver            Diane Pitzen            John Risteau            Arthur Shenk            Jeanette Silbaugh            Sherry Wagner</p>	<p>Audrey Chelberg            Tom &amp; Sarah Cox            George Dauphine            Leland &amp; Dorothy Delger            Tony &amp; Pat Doughty            John &amp; Thelma Grimley            Dave &amp; Honey Hamilton            D. W. Jones            Cecelia McKeig            Mary Beth Mohr            David Nieman            Kelly &amp; Jeanne Nelson            Norbert &amp; Rosie Ochs            Hugo &amp; Jana Pence            Dick &amp; Kathie Stoneking            Harry &amp; Martha Winter</p>
<p><b><i>Friend</i></b>            Virginia Abullarada            Carol Bennett            Clarence/Bonnie Byersdorfer            Tom &amp; Jennifer Coen            Jim and Shirley Dowson            Dick &amp; Donna Evenson            Jerry &amp; Renee Geving            Robert &amp; Shirley Jewell            Pat Herbison Jones            Steve &amp; Connie Kaylor            William J. Kline            Bob &amp; Shirley Mallory            Chris &amp; Dorothy Opheim            Oliver &amp; Virgie Opheim            Bob &amp; Sandy Pauly            Lloyd Peterson            Sylvia Peterson            Jim &amp; Rhoda Pope            Carol Sargent            Dana and Bev Sheldon            Bob &amp; Ann Winegar</p>	<p><b><i>Cities &amp; Townships</i></b>            Chapter Cy PEO, Walker            City of Chickamaw Beach            City of Federal Dam            City of Lake Shore            City of Walker            Outing Chamber of Commerce            Blind Lake Township            Boy Lake Township            Inguadona Township            Kego Township            Leech Lake Township            Lima Township            Loon Lake Township            Otter Tail Peninsula            Pine River Township            Ponto Lake Township            Powers Township            Salem Township            Shingobee Township            Torrey Township            Turtle Lake Township            Wilkinson Township</p>	<p><b><i>Family</i></b>            Henry &amp; Ardyce Achermann            Bob &amp; Dodie Burdick            Gordy &amp; Liz Dahl            Mark &amp; Carole Houghton            Don &amp; Karen Jensen            Steve &amp; Kay Johnson            Robert &amp; Betty Kangas            Karl &amp; Sherry Kiisa            C.R. &amp; Tina Pelzl            Richard &amp; Glenna Tappe            Bob &amp; Germaine Yochum</p>
<p><b><i>In Memoriam</i></b> for :            A.B. Oliver Family</p>		<p><b><i>Business</i></b>            American National Bank            First Federal Bank            Dr, Steve &amp; Sharon Bilben            Walker Animal Hospital            Ranch House Supper Club            Eric Myhra Ford            Hummingbird Press            Huddles South Shore Resort            Ivanhoe Resort            Kee Nee Moo Sha Resort            Leroy Strand Electric            Orton Oil Company</p>

## ADOPT-A-MICROFILM

The Cass County Research Center is a great place to research your local or family history, or simply learn more about our interesting past. The society wants to make it even better by having as many research materials as possible available to you. We're asking for your help. County newspapers are a wonderful way to find all kinds of historical tidbits. Not only do we learn from the front page stories, but the neighborhood reporters can add lots of color to your family stories. Newspaper microfilm is simple to use and great for storage. Though we have a reasonable microfilm collection, there's a lot we don't have that we really need. We are fortunate to have weekly newspapers so that we can purchase one or two rolls per year as the microfilm becomes available. We presently have the Backus Times (1903-1906), Cass County Cruiser (1892-1893), Cass County Pioneer (1894-1962), Cass County Independent (1921-1976), Cass Lake Times (1899-2003), Leech Lake Letter (1895), Pine Cone/Press Citizen (1987-2004), Pine River Journal (1951-2004), Remer Record (1923-1934), Remer Star (1955-1961), and the Walker Pilot Independent (1903-2004). We also own the Minnesota Cass County census for 1895 and 1905, and the Cass County federal census for 1900.

Other microfilms that we especially need will be the upcoming years for these newspapers. Other microfilms that would be desirable would be Cass County Probate and Wills, Naturalization, and the federal census for Cass County for 1910, 1920, and 1930. Another desirable collection would be the annuity rolls for the Leech Lake Reservation. Some films are available through the Minnesota Historical Society, but others such as federal census must come from the National Archives.

If this sounds like a desirable place for your charitable donations, we would be glad to help you sponsor a whole year of weekly papers on microfilm or other suggested microfilm for our collection. This makes a great memorial or gift to the Society. The current cost for a roll of newspaper microfilm is \$30, and a roll from the federal census is \$60. Please contact us for additional details.

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