

# CASS COUNTY CLIPPINGS

Jul 2024

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## 75th Anniversary Celebration of Cass County Historical Society Friday, August 9th

**3:00 p.m.** Presentation by Fia Larsen of her research on the POW camps of northern Minnesota. Very relevant to Cass County as we had three German prisoner-of-war camps placed in the area. These camps played a crucial role during the war, serving as both a housing facility and a source of labor for agricultural and forestry tasks. Through meticulous research utilizing newspapers, military reports, oral history transcripts and letters, Larsen will shed light on how these camps were organized and operated and their impact on Minnesota's agricultural landscape. Originally from Hackensack, Larsen has presented her research at prestigious venues including conferences at the University of Maryland and the Minnesota Capitol Rotunda. Attendees can expect to gain a deeper understanding of the contributions made by German POWs and their lasting legacy in the state.

**4:00 p.m.** Presentation by Chad Lewis on Lumberjack Creatures of the Northwoods. Hear interesting stories by this entertaining author. Sponsored by the Kitchigami Library Legacy Program and CCHS. His book came out in 2021. A current description reads: "Beware! The Northwoods of America are full of the most terrifying creatures that the lum-

berjacks could ever imagine. From the poisonous Hoop Snake to the monstrous Hodag, this book contains the folklore, tall-tales and fantastical yarns surrounding twenty of the most unbelievable animals that are said to inhabit the big woods."

**5:15** Brats will be served to the audience at the conclusion of Chad Lewis' presentation. Visitors are invited to stay and have a BRAT as long as they last. They are being donated by Laporte Grocery and Meats.

## How It All Began

The Cass County Historical Society is 75 years old this year. It all started with a few items displayed in the windows of the Walker Pilot by Clem Plattner.



Little by little, he acquired more items and citizens started bringing odds and ends of archival type items to him. This spurred a small group of Cass County citizens to discuss forming a county historical society. Eleven members of the Walker Ladies Civic Club and Isaac Walton League were supportive.

Cass County Historical Society  
Board of Directors

Jeff Peterson  
Robert Kangas  
Tim Werner  
Maiya Henson  
John Sumption  
Cecelia McKeig

Alexis Hadrava - Treasurer  
Tim Andersen - Director  
Renee Geving, Archivist

### Director's Report

Celebration of the 75th Anniversary event will take place on August 9, 2024

Visitor Count for June 2023 was 539. Visitors numbered 475 in June 2024

ADA restroom renovation approved by County Commissioners for \$28,870 to be begun by Hy-Tech Construction beginning October 14, 2024.

The museum will have a table at the Walker Community Center Event on August 16 & 17, 2024.

Linnaea Radley has been our summer Intern. She spent her time cataloging articles and photos and welcoming visitors. Her last day will be August 9, 2024. She will be returning to college this fall.

Free Days for this year have all been sold out. The museum appreciates the support of our businesses that have sponsored free admission for a day, which has enabled families and visitors to visit the museum and to become familiar with the collections.

John Sumption will meet with the County Commissioners on July 26 on behalf of the financial situation of the Cass County Historical Society.

An engineering assessment will be conducted in October to determine the pros and cons of insulating the office vs. the exhibit and office space.

(History of the Society, continued from pg 1)  
In April 1949, the society was organized with officers and directors R. F. Ross, Homer Frazer, Mrs. Don Wallace, Wynn Plattner, Dan Delury, Mrs. Lon Ivins and Mrs. Swindlehurst.

Reorganization occurred in 1956. Twenty members revised the Constitution and officers were elected: Jake Licke, president; Maude Orton, secretary; and Martin Reid, treasurer. Early projects were a memorial to Dan DeLury on Conservation Building grounds and a pageant presented for the Territorial Centennial in 1958.

In 1967, Gary Sheehan, president, and Gertrude Rolfe arranged to move the Huset schoolhouse from Boy River township to the museum grounds. Dedication ceremonies took place June 6, 1968. For several years, retired rural school teachers volunteered to be "Teacher of the Day."

In 1968, the Society rented rooms in the Conservation building, where they remained until 1981.

The society was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1976. Several fundraising projects, County revenue sharing funds, and donations enabled the society to construct a new building just east of the conservation building with the City of Walker donating the land. The Cass County museum was dedicated in June of 1982.

Many hands and minds made the museum a reality: Don Vollman, Willard Pehling, Cedric Schluter, Glenn Otteson, Babe Reid, Ardis Bilben, Mary Norton, Marion Orava, Herb and Jeanette Fisher, and Stan Johnson.

Volunteers manned the museum and Huset School. In 1985, Renee Geving was hired in a permanent part-time position, later became director for 30 years and is presently the historian. Juanita Hasty, Green Thumb employee, was with the Society from the early days to 1992. Lorraine Barrick and Dorothy Vollman also worked part-time for many years.

Lois Orton was our last honorary member and

was actively involved until her death in 2022. Cec McKeig began volunteering in 1989 and has been co-writing the newsletter, "Clippings" with Renee for 20 years.

Renee Geving and Cecelia McKeig have produced a dozen books on local history including working with a team to produce the major work on the "History of Cass County" in 1998. They also have been producing the column "Looking Back" for the Pine Cone-Citizen Press since 2006.

Tim Andersen became director in 2018 and introduced the project of Free Admission days every day in 2023 sponsored by county-wide businesses.

The Society continues to depend on your membership. It has proudly managed the Cass County Museum for 75 years collecting, preserving and disseminating the county's rich heritage.

## **YMCA Camp Olson**

Eric Orlander Olson was a successful businessman who made his fortune by developing a method to ship dressed poultry in refrigeration units to New York from Minnesota's Turkey Capital of the U.S. in Worthington. In 1943 he sold the business and went in search of a piece of property for his dream. He found and purchased desirable property on Little Boy Lake in 1945. An old log lodge came with the property but his wife Bella refused to stay there so he demolished it and built new buildings which the family used until he sold the farm to the NCA YMCA on October 12, 1953.

In the summer of 1954, 42 boys and eight leaders camped there. In the fall, Harold Forbes began preparation for a road to the lodge. Ralph Fuller and Lou Westling built the platforms for the first three cabins on the bluff. Eric Wickstrom built the first fieldstone fireplace and driveway retaining walls.

In 1955, sites were chosen for the main lodge and five cabins. The cabins had log exteriors and blue roofs. Five were completed that year as well as the

new lodge. Chester and Laretta McCann became the caretakers of a large poultry building with nearly 1000 chickens and a flock of sheep. The farming operations were discontinued in 1957. The Olson Farm YMCA Camp officially opened in June 1957 but the name was changed to Olson YMCA Camp that fall.

After many twists and turns including a legal battle with Cass County over taxation, the camp has survived. Camp Director Dave Rogers and Chairman Dick Perkins are credited with saving Camp Olson, as it is known today.

Camp Olson will celebrate its 70th anniversary August 30-Sept 2, 2024.

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Camp Olson YMCA Executive Director Russell Link was the guest speaker at the July 9 Walker Rotary meeting where he shared information about the camp. It is located near Longville, and the camp comprises 1,100 acres including six different lakes. It remains an independent chartered camp and hosts around 1,300 young people each summer. It is open May 1 to Nov. 1 with five full-time staff and 90 seasonal ones.

There are 60 buildings including a dining hall that holds 250 people. Ninety acres are protected in a forever conservation easement with the Minnesota Land Trust. There is also a new Arts Center.

Some of the camps are fishing, sailing, crafting, and a newly updated activity court that adds to the activity field. There is beginner horseback riding, advanced wrangler camp, hiking, bicycling, etc. Campers last year were from 11 different countries and 29 states. There are 46 counselors in training this year.

Russell Link has been director at the camp for 22 years and will be retiring January 1. (Information from an article on Walker Rotary and Camp Olson published in the Walker Pilot July 17, 2024)



## Zelah May of Cass Lake

The Zelah May, a legendary boat of the area, was built in 1900 and was in service on Cass and adjoining lakes for many years until, with the close of the big sawmills, it was purchased, run aground and converted into a houseboat.

According to George Maguire and Grant Utley of Cass Lake, the Zelah May was built at the west end of Crescent Beach on the south shore of Big Wolf Lake by Dan Freeman of St. Cloud in the spring of 1900. Freeman had logging interests up this way and the boat was designed and used to tow logs to the mills. The Zelah May was named for Freeman's young daughter.

McGuire had a sawmill at the south end of Wolf Lake. It was there the lumber for the big ship was surfaced and made ready for use. A boat builder named Batchelder from Stillwater came to Big Wolf Lake to supervise the boat's construction and men from St. Cloud, Stillwater, Duluth, and elsewhere worked on the job. The keel was laid in February 1900, and the boat was launched in the deep water off the McGuire sawmill in June of the same year. It was 110 feet long and had a beam of 37 feet. Power was supplied by twin engines. The contract called for a draft of not more than two feet. As a matter of fact, the Zelah May did not draw quite two feet of water and was able to navigate across the shallow bars of the lake. The oak for the framework came from near Nary and the pine lumber from Cloquet.

Mr. McGuire himself rode the craft into the water when she was originally launched and he held his son Cal McGuire in his arms. Cal was born at the sawmill site. In a few days the boat was hooked onto a boom of five million feet of logs which it towed successfully to the outlet of the lake and down into Cass Lake. It took all day and night to haul a boom of logs 10 miles. Between Lake Andrusia and Cass Lake, the boat grounded and teams with scrapers had to be employed to free it. McGuire recalled that a crew of caulkers came from Duluth to caulk the seams to make the craft finally watertight and seaworthy,

Pine timber went into the making of the Zelah May which was a side-wheeler. After Freeman used the Zelah May at the Norway Beach hoist for a year, Blakely and Farley used it when they took over his contract in 1901. They cut the balance of the timber that the Burlington Lumber Company hoisted out of Cass Lake. Then J. Neils took over the Zelah May and it wintered at Wolf Lake. John Briner (Old Sard) worked on this boat.

The Zelah May was bought by the J. Neil's Lumber Company and was their favorite tow boat. It was later sold to George Lydick who beached it at Birch Villa on Cass Lake and renamed it the Glyken after Green, Lydick and Kennedy, who used it as a lodge for the Lydicks and others.

Jess McDonald was engineer on the Zelah May. Frank Tibbetts was pilot, and Bill Tibbetts and the father of Slim Johnson fired the boat.



After forty years the Zelah May was dismantled and wrecked. While lying at rest at Sah-Kah-Tay Beach, with its prow resting on the sands of the beach and the stern in the water, workmen attempted to salvage any material that had withstood the ravages of time.

