

# CASS COUNTY CLIPPINGS

January 1, 2008



CASS COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

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

## **Cass County will celebrate the Minnesota Sesquicentennial in 2008**

Cass County Historical Society is the recipient of a Legacy Grant — one of 17 recipients of \$5,000 matching grants for a project tied to the 150 year celebration of Minnesota Statehood. The Leech Lake Agency Oral History Project will begin December 1, 2007, although some preliminary work has already been done.

Oral history interviews will be conducted with the members of the Ojibwe community at Onigum in Cass County, headquarters of the Leech Lake Agency of the Chippewa Tribe until 1922. Interview questions will focus on language, schooling, and traditional activities, and the relocation of many Onigum residents during World War II. Many who went to munitions plants in the 1940's have returned to their home community.

The project will collect at least thirty oral histories and save them to tape. Volunteers from the Cass County historical society will coordinate with the Onigum Local Indian Council and conduct the oral interviews. Two exploratory meetings took place in April 2007 to establish cooperation and coordination between the elders of the community and the society. At the second meeting, the group developed a list of potential candidates for the interviews. A community meeting took place at the Onigum Community Center on June 12, 2007 to refine the process. A third meeting was held November 29 at the Cass County Museum. The information will be transcribed and put into written form for distribution to the Onigum families and to the historical societies of the tribe, county, and state. These

booklets will be distributed in conjunction with the Sesquicentennial celebration of the date when Minnesota became the 32<sup>nd</sup> state admitted to the Union.

The Leech Lake Agency was opened after the Ojibwe ceded a large area of northern Minnesota in the Treaty of 1855. Ojibwe laborers immediately built a wagon road connecting Leech Lake with Crow Wing about 65 miles due south on the Mississippi River. It was one of the first roads in the region. Previously the area was accessible only by canoe or, during winters, through the use of snowshoes or dogsleds.

Congress appropriated funds for the new agency in 1856. Boutwell, the missionary in charge of the operation, bought land for the agency. He started the construction of several log buildings, including a mission house and blacksmith shop. The Ojibwe had mixed reactions to this settlement, and some sought to keep the outsiders away from the reservation lands.

Just 150 years ago, a council meeting was held at the agency in 1858 to air grievances and select a site for a new steam-powered sawmill. The Civil War brought a hiatus to the plans, but by 1865, the sawmill was up and running, and more land was being cleared. Additional buildings were erected as the Leech Lake Agency grew in size and importance.

After the Battle of Sugar Point in 1898, a new agency was opened within view of the first, just across the bay. The abandoned "Old Agency" saw continued use as a farming and residential area. Today, as in the 1850s, it lies within the boundaries of the Leech Lake Indian Reservation.

## Cass County -- Images of America Series

A new book will be out in the spring of 2008 that will give an overview of the area of Cass County. The area continues to attract tourists because of our many lakes, which provide a variety of recreational opportunities. In the early days of the resort industry, Cass County attracted not only farmers from the Dakotas and Iowa, but also became a haven for the mob from the Chicago area. After World War II, the resorts became more family-oriented and offered cabins and cooking to families who returned year after year.

The content of the book will appeal not only to the new tourist of the area who wishes to learn more about the county, but it also will appeal to those who have maintained generational cabins on our many lakes. It will also appeal to those who are interested in learning a bit more about the Indian presence within the county.

The book will cover the presence of the Leech Lake Indian Agency near Walker and include pictures of the boarding school, pictures of soldiers and Indians involved in the Battle of Sugar Point in 1898, and various other photos of the local Indian population.

The book will also focus on the importance of local logging and will include photos of early logging camps and loggers. It will also have pictures of the Chippewa National Forest and the Civilian Conservation Corps camps that were active in this area of the country.

Steamboats and railroads were the earliest means of transportation. One such launch, the Megowatt, was dubbed the "Tourist Queen of Leech Lake." We have photos of many of the most popular steamboats and launches that served the logging trade and later the fishermen.

In 1881, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers started a six-dam project. These dams controlled the Headwaters of the Mississippi, and these dams remain controversial up to the present day.

Minnesota was often publicized as a health resort. Journalists wrote glowing tales of our pure air. Many of our early settlers, infected with tuberculosis, moved into this "land of pine" at the urging of their physicians. While the medical community debated whether tuberculosis was "contagious" or "inherited", the disease reached catastrophic proportions and the Minnesota Sanatorium for Consumptives opened near Walker in 1907. 1947 saw the introduction of Streptomycin, PAS and INH, which had the ability to nearly extinguish this disease. Ah-Gwah-Ching ceased to be a TB sanatorium in 1962.

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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 Walker. Through the winter, research help is available by appointment. 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.

**The Cass County Historical  
Society meets on the third  
Tuesday of each month at 6:30  
at the Museum.**

**The next meetings are  
January 15th and  
February 19th**



This group of gentlemen posed on the courthouse steps after they were summoned to report for jury duty. The date on the photo is 1911, but that could not be confirmed. The men (in no particular order) include J. T. Gardner, Cass Lake; C. M. Taylor, excused; John Luiten, Backus; James Ellis, Jenkins; Pete Yde, Sylvan; Bob DeLury, Walker; Peter Kruckow, Pontoria; Ole Berg, Jenkins; John Lamb, Bena; J. G. Johnston, Bena; Harry Straight, Bena; Lee West, Bena; J. E. Croff, Walker; Ely Wright, Walker; Fred Moulster, Pine River; Robert Jarvis, Cass Lake; M. J. Setzer, Cass Lake; Chas. Graham, Cass Lake; Ed Garver, Walker; H. C. Anway, Walker; Marcus Finn, Pequot; Isaac Norman, Pine River; Hans Graw, Pine River; Richard Funk, Walker.

**A column written by Lee Bennett for the Pillager Herald (Nov 19, 1937) described the old ferry boat that used to operate across the Crow Wing at Pillager about 100 yards up the river above the bridge.**

*For many years the ferry was the only method of crossing in this area. The boat was some 20 to 25 feet long and about 10 to 12 foot wide and was attached to a heavy cable that spanned the river and was operated with a windlass. It took about five minutes to cross. A rowboat fastened to a small wire cable was used for occasional passengers who wished to cross from one side to the other. An old blind man, William Knowles operated it.*

*As a kid, we spent many a pleasant hour on the river riding back and forth on the ferry with our cane fish poles. The genial old proprietor was one of our best friends in those days, and oftentimes when we happened to be on the opposite side and there happened to be no teams waiting to cross, he would get us in his little row boat. Kelly Peterson (later county auditor) was my usual companion on those trips and he too was a great friend of Mr. Knowles. We often helped propel the old ferry and quite often gave Mr. Knowles the occasional fish we might catch. Being blind, Mr. Knowles had a very acute sense of hearing and could generally tell who was approaching even on the Morrison side of the river by the sound of the team, wagon or the driver's voice. Only once or twice to our memory did he even fall in the water, and it was uncanny the way he could find his way around. The horses and buggy and ferry days have given way to modern bridges and automobiles; another memory of the old pioneer days passes into memory. (continued on top of next page)*

(continued from page 3).

W. C. “Kelly” Peterson served as Cass County Auditor from 1933 – 1963.

William H. Knowles was born in August 1849 in Massachusetts. In 1880, he was working in Brainerd as a farm laborer. William H. Knowles applied for a homestead at the St. Cloud Land Office on October 21, 1890 for 120 acres of land near Pillager (T. 133N. – R.30W, Section 2). He appears on the 1900 census as the operator of a ferry near Pillager. A William Henry Knowles died on May 25, 1916 in Wilkin County.

Lee Bennett left school at the age of 14 to work on the Pine River newspaper after the death of both of his parents. He became sole editor/publisher of The Pillager Herald at age 20, the youngest in Minnesota, before he went into military service in World War I.

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### **Walker Archeological Dig Unearths More Finds**

(quoted from an article by Gail DeBoer, Pilot Independent)

Despite not having as much time as he’d hoped to work at the Walker Hill site this summer, Leech Lake Heritage Sites (LLHS) program director and tribal archaeologist Thor Olmanson says it was a productive and exciting season. In “digs” conducted in 2005 and 2006, LLHS’ team discovered what they and others believed were human-made stone artifacts far older than any previously discovered.

This summer, the LLHS crew was back, joined at times by Sue and Steve Mulholland, archaeologists with the Duluth Archaeology Center; David Mather, National Register Archaeologist with the State Historic Preservation Office; and Dr. Howard Hobbs with the Minnesota Geological Survey.

Also working on the dig were Leech Lake Tribal College grad Amanda Burnette and five other students who were part of a 10-week natural resources internship program funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF).

While sifting soil through a screen, Burnette spotted “the find” of the season; a tiny, unique tool now called the “Burnette Micro-Tool.”

The triangular artifact made of agate is no bigger than a person’s little fingernail. Olmanson says the tool has been bifacially worked all the way around and exhibits “basal thinning,” where a broad flake has been taken off each side of the base to allow the tool to be “hafted” or affixed onto a handle. This, he explained, is suggestive of Paleoindian (12,000 to 8,500 BP) fluting technologies. Similarly shaped but larger tools were common in the Woodland period (about 1,200 to 250 BP). A tool this small would have been used for detail work.

Burnette was honored for her find November 1, with the first-ever LLTC Presidential Award for Excellence. Attending the ceremony were Jody Chase and Mike Fredenberg from NSF, who were very interested to hear about the site. After seeing some artifacts and photos of soil profiles, they invited Olmanson and his team to Washington, DC, possibly this winter, to present a seminar to the NSF board.

In this field of science, definitive answers usually don’t come immediately, Olmanson cautioned. LLHS staff and other scientists will probably be studying the Walker Hill site for years, maybe decades, while debate continues about its significance.

Cass County Museum has applied to be the repository for these artifacts. Renee Geving has been working with the archeologists on the paperwork required for this to happen.

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**In Memoriam for :**

Dale Wilbur Geving  
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Renee Geving

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Winter Hours: By Appointment