The Mower County Fair
from *Mill on the Willow - A History of Mower County, Minnesota.*

The first fair in Mower County was held in Lansing on October 11 and 12, 1864. Every village in the county had the opportunity to offer a premium and the highest bidder would have the privilege of hosting the fair. Much to the disgruntlement of Austin citizens, Lansing offered the highest premium, so they hosted the first fair. Individuals were admitted for 25 cents. Officers of the Agricultural Society said that the first fair was a success, and began planning for the following autumn. In spite of all efforts to encourage participation, the second fair in 1865 was not a success and the Society was dissolved.

Over the next decade interest in the fair struggled. At times it continued satisfactorily, but then interest faded again. In 1882, citizens urged the Agricultural Society to join with the Farmers’ Alliance. At a meeting of the Farmers’ Alliance on July 5, 1882, the committee voted to aid the Agricultural Society in soliciting funds to purchase permanent grounds for the County Fair.

In June 1883, the Mower County Agricultural Society purchased the 26-acre Austin Driving Park site for $1,800. Plans were made to improve the fairgrounds by repairing the floral hall, dwelling house, stables, and judges’ stand. They also hoped to erect a new grandstand and 90 rods of board fence.

Finally, in 1884, Mower County’s first successful fair was held on the grounds of the former Austin Driving Park. Through the succeeding years the fair changed in organization, length, style, and format.

The building that currently stands on the Historical Society grounds is pictured below and is known as the “original fair building.” Before it was moved to its current location, it stood at the west end of the fair property.

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Above is an image of the “original fair building” in its original state before the wings of the structure were removed. The building served as the fair’s first exhibition building, then as a dining hall for the Christ Episcopal Church and the V.F.W. Auxiliary and the Seniors’ Building. In 1982, it was moved to the east end of fairgrounds and became part of the Mower County Historical Society.

Look inside for more images!
Virtual Fair Week 2020
By Randal J. Forster, MCHS Executive Director

When the Mower County Fair was finally cancelled earlier this summer, I knew that we had to do something to keep everyone engaged with the Historical Society. Since everything else in the world had moved to being on-line, I thought to myself...why not do a virtual fair, and bring our exhibits to our members?

One of the top things on the list was to figure out how to continue the tradition of our ever popular Tractor Show. In order to go virtual, we asked our past exhibitors to submit photos of their favorite antique tractors. Then I thought it would be fun to GO LIVE from a different exhibit building each day of the fair.

A special thanks to Barb Lewis, Jim Burroughs, Dean Ulland, and Sue Grove who graciously accepted my offer to speak and make our Virtual Fair Week a success. Their knowledge about the topics and buildings we explored was simply extraordinary!

In case you missed any of our videos, you can go to our website and watch them.

You can learn more about the following buildings at the fairgrounds just as if you had been at the fair:

* Administration Building - prehistoric Mower County
* Excelsior School - rural school life in Mower County
* Hormel Building - history of the Hormel Company
* Headquarters Building - life in Mower County during various wars
* Christ Episcopal Church - highlights of the original church
* Pioneer Building - artifacts from the “old courthouse” and county origins
* Train Cars and 1004 Steam Engine - a trip down memory lane on the rails
* Virtual Tractor Show - antique tractors on display

We hope to produce more videos in the future. Enjoy the shows AND most importantly, thanks for supporting YOUR Historical Society. We look forward to seeing you at the Mower County Fair in person next year!
Upcoming Events

- Please continue to monitor our Facebook page, website, and local media for more information.

October 12 6:00pm
History Happy Hour
Hormel Historic Home
“The Feedsack Story”
w/speaker Yvonne Cory

October 22 CANCELLED
Lunchbox History

November 3 Election Day

November 9 6:00pm
History Happy Hour
Hormel Historic Home
“Historic Treasures”
w/speaker Jaimie Timm

November 26 & 27 CLOSED
MCHS Office closed - Thanksgiving

December 11 2:00pm-5:00pm
December 12 11:00am-2:00pm
Christmas in the County
Bake Sale Pick-Up Times
Pioneer Building
Drive Thru-Bake Sale
(Pre-Order Deadline is Nov 20th)

December 14 6:00pm
History Happy Hour
Hormel Historic Home
“How the Grinch Stole Christmas”
w/speakers Randy Forster and Lisa Deyo

December 24 & 25 CLOSED
MCHS Office closed - Christmas

December 31 & Jan 1 CLOSED
MCHS Office closed - New Years

Cemeteries of Mower County

Did you know that Mower County has 53 cemeteries? How many have you visited? During the month of October, MCHS will be taking you on a different “virtual” cemetery tour every Friday at 10:00am on our facebook page LIVE @mowercohistory. You never know where we will be exploring.

Cemetery Township Listings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cemetery</th>
<th>Township</th>
<th>Listings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angell Pioneer</td>
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<td>Brown</td>
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<td>Pleasant Valley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zion Lutheran</td>
<td>Sargeant</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Listings noted corresponds to what is listed on the above mentioned website and not the number of actual graves in each cemetery. Some entries may be partial or incomplete.
A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT
Barbara K. Lewis ~ MCHS President

Its hard to believe that October is finally here. Which means only one thing, Christmas is just around the corner! Hopefully the weather will cooperate and allow us to decorate outside even bigger and brighter than before. Celebrations may look a little different this year due to Covid-19. We will be wearing masks and gathering in much smaller groups than in the past.

In order to keep everyone healthy & safe this holiday season, we have decided to cancel most of our traditional Christmas in the County activities. While we won’t be eating homemade chili, decorating rocks, or riding any horses this year, we can still remember all of the great events we have had in the past and look forward to future Christmas in the County events.

But, have no fear, there will be cookies! We knew that it just wouldn’t be Christmas without our annual bake sale. So yes, we will be having a Drive Thru-Bake Sale, featuring cookies, lefse, and other delicious goodies. Check out the enclosed flyer and send in your Special Order FORM right away!

Our Fall Harvest Drive Thru-Bake Sale was so successful, we thought we would try it again. A special thanks to everyone who purchased something to support the Historical Society, AND an extra special thank you to Stacy, Linda, Josie, Judy, Virginia, Colleen, Jim, Ardis, and Randy for baking pies, bars, cookies, and Lefse. Your efforts do not go unnoticed.

We will of course be having our annual raffle drawing. Once again, Virginia Bissen has made a beautiful quilt for the grand prize. Get your tickets from any MCHS Board Member or give the office a call. Lots of other fabulous prizes too.

We didn’t forget the kids either. Kids Activity Kits will be available with lots of great Christmas activities. Just let us know how many you need for curbside pick-up.

Thanks for all your support. ~ Barb
P.S. Merry Christmas too!

Drive Thru - Christmas Bake Sale
December 11th & 12th
Pre-Order Deadline is November 20, 2020

Christmas in the County
2020 Raffle Prizes

Quilt Feedsack Reproductions 80”x 95”
Winemaker’s Tour at Four Daughters
$100 Old Mill Gift Certificate
$100 Weis Landscaping Gift Certificate
$50 ArtWorks Center Gift Certificate
Dairy Basket-Mower Co. Dairy Association
$25 Kenny’s Oak Grill Gift Card (2)
Bubble’s Café - Pie of Choice (2)
MCHS T-Shirt of Choice
AND Much, Much, More!

Raffle Drawing
Saturday, December 12, 2020
@2:00pm LIVE on mowercohistory@facebook

Need not be present to win.
Must be 18 to purchase tickets/win

Raffle Tickets $1.00

Purchase tickets from MCHS Board Members
OR stop in the office
for supporting our 2020 Annual Donation Appeal


We have currently raised $11,985 and exceeded our goal of $10,000 - Congrats!

No donation is too small or too large.

All funds help to support the day to day operations of the Mower County Historical Society. Please contact the MCHS office to make a contribution. Thank you for your generosity!
Ira E. Padden - An Example of Pioneer Hardship and Resilience
by Sue Doocy, Research and Archives Manager

In Mower County, early births like Ira E. Padden’s in 1858 are difficult to prove in the State of Minnesota. Official record keeping in Minnesota began in 1870, but reporting remained sporadic during those early years as more counties continued to organize. Some records may have been lost to disasters or other events while others may have been recorded only in the family Bible. Although Ira E.'s birth may not be found in official records, his life is an example of pioneer hardship and resilience.

Ira Padden’s birth was not the only event in the family that wasn’t officially documented. The death of his father, Ira W. Padden, in 1865 does not appear in vital records either, although early county commissioner documents may hold the clue: they offered a $400 reward for the capture of Patrick McEntee for murder.

Ira W. Padden, Ira E.'s father, had returned from serving with Company C, Ninth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry in 1865, coming back to his family on their Windom Township farm that they had acquired on November 10, 1851. (The following year they had purchased another 120 acres in Section 6 from a veteran of the War of 1812).

According to family lore, Padden’s wife, Mary, had not been happy with his absence which had left her with total responsibility for the family and the farm. So, when he returned, she promptly decided to take a vacation, leaving the children and Ira W., to go back east to visit family.

At harvest time, the neighbors gathered to work each farmer’s fields in turn. Patrick McEntee complained that Padden worked too fast loading a table with hay, which McEntee was then to load into a machine. An argument ensued and McEntee challenged Padden to a fight. Padden refused twice. McEntee found a gun in the farmer’s house and again challenged Padden to fight. Padden refused once more. McEntee shot Padden and left. Years later, the younger Padden (Ira E.) recalled the tragic story of his father’s death and his killer who was never captured. It was difficult to track down a killer in the Minnesota wilderness.

Mary Padden returned home in the fall to learn of her husband’s death and found her children in the care of a neighbor. In 1867, she married Daniel Lester. They had one son, Stephen, born August 1869.

The Padden family history states that poverty struck the family and young Ira E. Padden was sold to an Iowa farmer for $300, where he was mistreated for three years. He eventually ran away to Crookston, Minnesota to live with an uncle.

A year later, Ira E. returned to Austin following his stepfather’s death, and supported his mother until her death in 1905.

Padden labored as a machinist in the Milwaukee Road roundhouse in 1880, supporting his mother, residing at 401 Bridge Street. Through 20 years with the railroad, he was promoted to foreman for the last six years.

Ira E. was the state boiler inspector for the First District and worked in real estate, before becoming General Superintendent of the Minnesota Farmer’s Brick and Tile Company.
Padden’s life was one of resilience as he prospered in Austin. He married Mira Streeter in 1883, and they had had three daughters. Tragedy struck with the death of their daughter, Ethel, born 1885 – died 1886.

Life went on as the family grew and prospered. Edith, born 1888, graduated from Austin High School and the University of Minnesota earning a teaching degree. She taught at Lake City, Minnesota. Elsie, born 1890, became a student at Hamline University. Both married and raised families of their own.

Padden lost his wife in 1917 and he continued on alone, working as an investment company manager through the years including the trying times of World War I and the Spanish Flu.

Active in the community, Padden served as alderman for 21 years. He was Sergeant at Arms at the state capitol in the legislature. He helped organize Company G, Second Regiment of the Minnesota National Guard and held ranks from Private to 1st Lieutenant, and Captain.

He was a member of several organizations including A.O.U.W. and M.W.A. in Austin.

Padden died in 1949 at the age of 91, in Hennepin County and is buried in Oakwood Cemetery beside his wife.

Padden’s life is one of pioneer determination and drive to succeed no matter the odds, taking care of his family and community to the best of his ability.
Collections Corner: New Signs at MCHS
By: Jaimie Timm, MCHS Curator

When the global pandemic brought everything to a halt last spring, it gave me the opportunity to work on projects that had been on my “back burner” for quite some time. New exhibits became less of a priority since it was apparent that we would not be welcoming any of our usual school tours and guests. Instead, we began to think about other ways to share the stories of Mower County’s history with visitors to our grounds – even though they couldn’t physically enter our buildings.

One of our brainstorming sessions resulted in new signage for the buildings. The staff at Mower County Historical Society have been talking about ways to make our buildings and the stories they hold more accessible to visitors. We know that with our small staff and somewhat limited hours of operation, we miss the opportunity to completely fulfill our mission to “discover, collect, preserve, and share” the history of Mower County with as many people as we’d like. Our new signs help bridge that gap by providing information about the buildings themselves and some of the objects inside for anyone willing to stop and read them.

For now, Excelsior School, the Rahilly Building, the Original Fair Building, Christ Episcopal Church, and Kehret Chapel all have brand new signs with lots of pictures.

We plan to create more signs in the coming years.

Please stop by and take a peek!

Check out the new signs at the Historical Society.
Watch for more signs to come in the future.
The Mower County Covid-19 History Project

Do you have a Covid-19 story you would like to share? What do you think people should know about the current global pandemic we are living through in 50 or 100 hundred years from now?

The Mower County Historical Society has teamed up with the Hormel Historic Home to document community members’ experiences living through a global pandemic. It’s no secret, that the entire world has been affected by this disease. It is important to capture history as it is happening. The main purpose of the Mower County Covid-19 History Project is to collect stories, photos, and artifacts from the entire community so we can preserve them for future generations.

Please visit our website to fill out a short survey.
Share your thoughts and experiences about Covid-19.
We are also collecting artifacts for our collection.

A memory of the dining hall...

One time when working in the dining room; the Ames brothers came into eat. Gert Nelson met them at the door and told them they had to sing for their supper. Of course they didn’t because they needed to save their voices for their performance that evening. This was the time we had many “name performers “ at the grand stand.

My sisters and I served many meals during the fair. Another remembrance I have is the screen door banging every time someone came in, and the heat that was always in abundance during this time.

~ Sharon Madison

Christ Episcopal Church workers include: from left to right Cristion, Gert Nelson, Bissie Goute, Bevvie Nelson, Lizzie Nemit, unknown, boy unknown, unknown, unknown, unknown, Marash, Ben Nemit.
NORTHERN COUNTRY CO-OP
MOWER COUNTY DAIRY ASSOCIATION
WITT FABRICATION
ABSOLUTE ENERGY
MOWER COUNTY FARMERS MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY
FREEBORN/MOWER CO-OP SERVICES
BOE BROTHERS TILING
KLOUSE CONCREATE CONSTRUCTION
DARRELL INGVALSON INSURANCE
MOWER COUNTY CORN & SOYBEAN PRODUCERS
PIONEER SEED
LEWIS FAMILY FARM
TUCKER TILING COMPANY
WAGNER CONSTRUCTION

THANKS TO ALL OUR AG SPONSORS!

AND a special thanks to everyone who supported our “Virtual” Tractor Show

www.mowercountyhistory.org in case you missed it

A special THANK YOU to the following Townships for supporting MCHS

~ Nevada Township
~ Udolphi Township
~ Lansing Township
~ Racine Township
~ Windom Township
~ Bennington Township
~ Pleasant Valley Township
~ Marshall Township
~ Adams Township
~ Dexter Township
~ Clayton Township
~ Red Rock Township
~ Grand Meadow Township
~ Waltham Township

~Township Officers Association

Your support is greatly appreciated!
Thanks to the following donors!

Sue & Vern Grove
Bill & Gayle Perkin
Barbara K. Lewis
Jim & Milly Burroughs
Glenn & Judy Medgaarden
In Memory of Judy Laskewitz
Sue & Vern Grove
In Memory of Roger Epley
Maureen Steenblock
In Memory of Kathleen Frisk
Gina & Daniel Clinger
Bill & Helen Holder
Cyrene & Jon Berthiaume
In Memory of Margaret Blue
Chris & Cathy Roser
In Memory of Lowell Franzen

The Schlichting Charitable Fund
In Memory of Henry & Emma Schlichting

The City of Austin

Mower County

---

Thank You to those who joined the MCHS or renewed their membership!

**Bronze Level**
Robert Mistretta & Bud Turner
Mower County Farm Bureau
Evelyn Schlichting
Steve & Dorothy Krob
Marlene Aurit
Nelson Dental

**Individual Level**
Shirley Guy
Terry Hall
Don Livingston
Lois Van Denover
Terry Donovan
Tim Gabrielson
Vernon Hoffman
Kathy Paine
Harold Jensen
Jeffery King
Trish Harren
Theresa Becker-Ersland
Julia Everson

**Family Level**
Don & Darlene Austin
Larry & Cindy Bellrichard
Dan & Sue Franklin

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Thanks for being a member of the Mower County Historical Society

***memberships listed are from 3rd Quarter only July 1, 2020 - September 30, 2020***

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Please contact the office if you are unsure about when to pay your membership dues.
Memberships are for 1 year and include your subscription to the Mower History Scribe!

Want to help us save postage and paper?
Sign up to TODAY to receive the newsletter digitally.
Just make sure we have your correct email address!
“The mission of the Mower County Historical Society is to discover, collect, preserve, and share the history of Mower County and relate it to the history of Minnesota.”

Follow us @mowercohistory

Contact Us
To learn more about tours, programs, and specials events at the Mower County Historical Society, please contact us at anytime.

Mower County Historical Society
1303 6th Ave. SW
Austin, MN 55912
(507) 437-6082
director@mowercountyhistory.org
OR visit our website mowercountyhistory.org

The Mower History SCRIBE is published quarterly

Look for information about the Christmas in the County BAKE SALE inside -