

OUTLINE MAP
OF
LE SUEUR CO.
MINNESOTA
• 1898 •

EXPLANATION

- Section Line
- Bound up Lot Line
- Wagon Road
- Railroad
- Creeks & Springs
- Houses
- Churches
- School Houses
- Adjacent Lands owned by same party connected by a line, thus
- Post Office
- Coal, Lead or Zinc Mine
- County Bridge

Les Nouvelles Historiques de Le Sueur

Elysian campus is taking shape

Along with the reconstruction work being done to the Elysian school building, other improvements are taking place on the Elysian LCHS grounds. The old corn crib which was located next to the log cabin has been removed from the property. Repairs are in the works for one of the Society's storage buildings; and an old homestead site located on the southwest corner of the LCHS campus is getting cleaned up. Also, brush and weeds on the Elysian campus were removed in preparation for the Society's Fourth of July event. A special thanks to LCHS Board Member Ron Greenwald for coordinating these works.



AUTUMN, 2023

The President's Corner...

A new season is upon us. As the days get shorter, the list of things we'd like to accomplish before winter hits seems to get longer. The LCHS board is hoping for good fall weather as the new roof on the Elysian museum nears completion.

Last month the board of directors met to create a budget for 2024. The budget is presented to the Le Sueur County Board of Commissioners along with a request for county funds to help the Society operate in the next year. This taxpayer money is vital to the operations of the Society.

However, tax dollar contributions make up only a fraction of the needs of the Society. Le Sueur County Administrator Joe Martin reportedly included a \$50,000 request in the county's 2024 budget. The LCHS board arrived at a figure of \$118,704 to cover anticipated costs for next year. LCHS is blessed to have great support from its members, and the board is determined to move forward within financial limitations.

As you all know, nothing is getting cheaper these days and lack of funding threatens the Society to be stuck in neutral — just as so much progress is being made to get back on our feet. It is becoming more and more clear the Society needs an executive director to manage the many facets of our organization. Unfortunately, we are in a bit of a “chicken-and-egg” situation: a good director candidate would help the Society be more efficient in securing funds; but the Society lacks the funds to attract good candidates.

Because the state of Minnesota values history and the arts, grant monies are available to organizations like ours to fund equipment and even staff. A shining example of this state support is the current restoration of the Elysian museum building.

LCHS Secretary Ruth Collins and Treasurer Bonnie Reak have carried the load in securing grants for the restoration project. The process has required numerous meetings with Minnesota State Historical Society officials and the contractor of the project. It is a larger and more complicated endeavor than I had ever imagined it would be.

While some organizations have professional grant writers at their disposal, Ruth and Bonnie have taken on this enormous endeavor on their own time with no financial compensation. Yes, grant money may be available to us, but it is unfair and unrealistic to expect these two women to carry our water.

So consider this as a plea to members of the Le Sueur County Historical Society: We need help writing grants. This is a call for anyone who has grant writing experience — or know someone who does — to give the Society a hand. We are hopeful there may even be a grant available to help pay for grant writing; but on the onset this help would need to be on a pro bono basis. The ultimate goal at this point is to continue the museum restoration and acquire funds to hire an executive director.

We can no longer kick this can down the road. The board's budget meeting showed that action needs to be taken now in order to fund a successful 2024. Please consider lending any help or expertise you may be able to give.

Yours in faith,
Bill Stangler

County Fair exhibits continue to be popular



Once again this year, exhibits by the Le Sueur County Historical Society generated a lot of interest from those attending the Le Sueur County Fair. Three hundred and twelve visitors registered at the log cabin exhibit and 237 registered at the School District #75 schoolhouse. Many more visitors chose not to register.

The Society would like to thank the volunteers who helped make the county fair exhibition possible. Your contributions are much appreciated.

LCHS Board of Directors

Bill Stangler, President
Dean Pettis, Vice President
Ruth Collins, Secretary
Bonnie Reak, Treasurer
Bryce Stenzel Rich Bennett
Mike Fredrick Paul Malchow
Ron Greenwald

Contact the Le Sueur County Historical Society at:

P.O. Box 123

Le Center, MN 56057;

via email at

info@lesueurcountyhistory.org
or by calling (507) 267-4091.

Glory days returning to Elysian school building

The former Elysian school is fairly typical of the facilities which replaced the one and two-room schoolhouses that dotted the rural countryside. In Le Sueur County, however, the red brick landmark – complete with bell tower – the first of its kind and drew regional attention. But the grand two-story brick school was not well received by the conservative public who had their own ideas of what a school should be.

A public vote to build the school was held in 1895. The local newspaper, *The Elysian Enterprise*, came out in support of the project. “The school house site is a bone of contention between some of our citizens,” *The Enterprise* wrote, “but we hope to see them fall into line and not as some propose to try to kill the whole project.”

“The ladies are entitled to vote upon the question as well as the men,” *The Enterprise* said, “and they should be interested in seeing that their children shall have all the modern comforts at school equal to any other town...”

Voters approved a \$3,000 bond to build the \$5,000 brick school house on land purchased by the district for \$600. E. Mahlke & Co. of Mankato was awarded the bid to build the school in June of 1895.

Amazingly, the school was scheduled to be ready for students in the fall of 1895. Problems acquiring building materials delayed progress, but classes commenced in the new facility in October.

In 1921 the Elysian school was wired for electricity. *The Mankato Free Press* filed this report on Dec. 23 of that year: “Large electric arcs will now permit class study at any period and at all hours, and the pupils fully appreciate the lighting system.”



A postcard depicting the Elysian school from the 1930s.



Students first assembled for classes in the Elysian school in 1895. The giant oak trees guarding the school building were mere saplings when this picture was taken.

The ladies had taken particular pains to make their surroundings bright and cheery, while the high school department contained a fireplace and ceiling festoon of a geometry design worked out by one of the scholars. At this time the convenience of the playgrounds and cement sidewalks leading to the building were noted by the visitors as fine improvements.”

The Elysian school board voted in July of 1937 to cut out the two years of high school and transport high school students to other towns. The Waterville school board voted to have Elysian students attend high school there and requested bids for a bus to transport students.

Classes continued to take place in the red brick school until 1965 when a new school was built in Elysian.

The Elysian Enterprise reported on a July 14, 1964 special meeting of the Waterville-Elysian school board. The purpose of the meeting was for “Negotiations ... for the transfer of the old brick school building and the frame structure used for used for kindergarten classes at Elysian. The transfer will be made from the Waterville-Elysian school district to the Le Sueur County Historical Society.”

“It is believed the project will have unlimited possibilities,” *the Enterprise* went on to say.

Proceedings of that same special meeting were filed by Clerk Al Fredell. “The Board of Education met with Le Sueur County Historical Society members H. von Lehe, Mrs. Block, James Hruska... By Invitation, Mr. Von Lehe conducted the meeting.”

Continued on next page...

Elysian school building continued

Wordings in the proceedings are a little unclear. Fredell says the Society decided to consult with their attorney. However, later in the proceedings, he wrote, "The plan met with the approval of the Historical Society — a quorum being present."



This photo of the Elysian school was dated 1980. Notice the difference in the bell tower and the addition of the Historical Society's genealogy center on the grounds.

The proceedings state the meeting lasted well over an hour — so a fair amount of discussion must have taken place; but no details were provided.

The new LCHS museum was opened to the public in 1967 and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1969.

Over the years, the museum building started showing its age and the Society decided to close the museum to the public in the name of safety.

Thanks to efforts by LCHS Board Members Ruth Collins and Bonnie Reak, major grants were obtained from the Minnesota Historical Society and the Schmidt Foundation to begin restoring the iconic red brick landmark. The entire restoration will take place in three phases and the Society hopes the first phase will be completed by Thanksgiving.



Work to begin restoring the Elysian school began this summer. The project will be done in three phases. The first phase, including a new roof, is scheduled to be completed this fall.

The museum's soffits and rain gutters are being rebuilt and restored to function properly. The bricks near the top of the building and chimney will be replaced. Finally, the entire roof will be replaced with new shingles. An extra layer of drainage and air circulation will ensure extended life of the new roof covering.

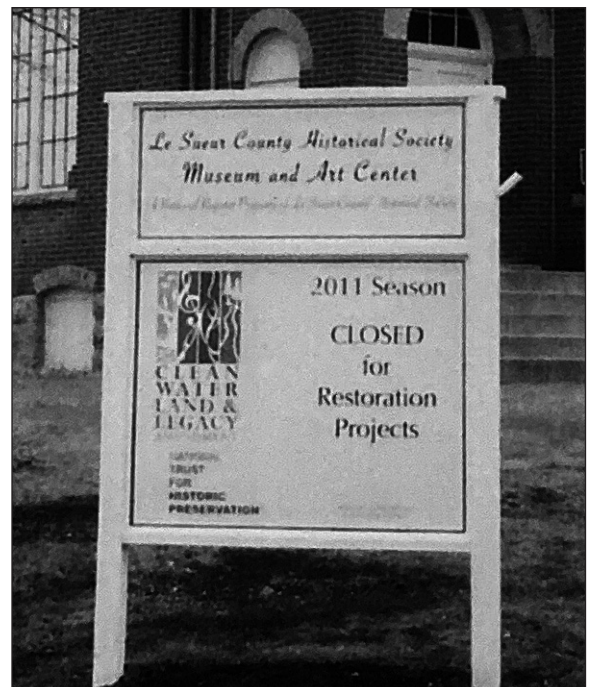
All work on the museum is designed to restore the building to its original condition — including materials and colors used in the school's construction in 1895.

Recovered files are a boon to the Society

Le Sueur County Historical Society's genealogy center is now closed to the public for the winter; but a large project is underway which will occupy the coming months. Four file cabinets containing Society records were recently discovered and moved to the Elysian campus. This discovery will be a great help in determining the origin of some LCHS artifacts. The LCHS board is working on dedicating resources to catalog artifacts in a computer database. This is a huge undertaking and any member who may be interested in helping with the project should contact a member of the board or email info@lesueurcountyhistory.org.

Share your memories and traditions

Do you have any Christmas stories or family holiday traditions you would like to share with fellow LCHS members? Send them to PO Box 123, Le Center MN 56057 and we'll print them in the next newsletter. You can also email stories to info@lesueurcountyhistory.org. Photos should be sent in JPEG format.



Many thanks to Greg, Bonnie and David Harriman for constructing and erecting the new sign on display near the entrance of the genealogy center. The other side of the sign has a little historical information as well. It looks great!

Independent group seeks to display signs

A loosely organized group containing a number of former Green Giant employees is taking steps to once again display two large signs advertising Green Giant peas and Niblets corn.

The signs, estimated at 25 feet in height, were erected on the grounds of the old Union School on North Second St. in Le Sueur. The school later served as a museum for the Historical Society.



When the Le Sueur property was sold in 2019, the building was demolished and the whereabouts of the two signs were unknown. The signs surfaced in the City of Le Sueur's maintenance building where they had been stored for safe keeping.

The signs break down into sections which are being evaluated to see what extent of restoration is needed to ready the signs for display in Le Sueur.

Watch for our new website: www.lesueurcountyhistory.org

Artifacts, author drew interest on July 4

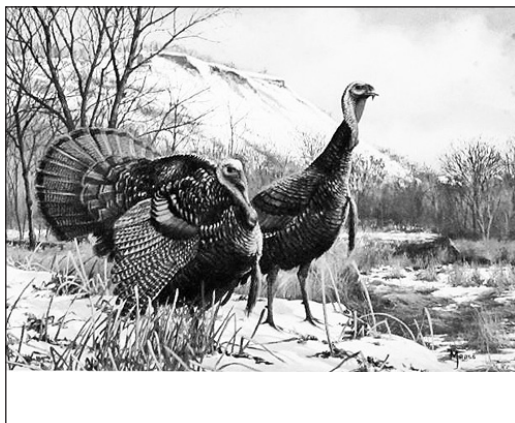
Beautiful weather blessed the Historical Society's Fourth of July open house at the Genealogy Center. For the first time in many years, one of the Society's storage sheds was opened for the public to enjoy the artifacts inside.

Author, historian and educator Dr. John Eggers was the Society's guest for event. Dr. Eggers has written a variety of books dealing with area history like "Livin' in the 50s Memories"; "Bullhead Days"; and "Tetonka Tales." He generously chatted with visitors and signed copies of his books.

Our thanks to Dr. Eggers, who traveled a considerable distance to be with us and make the event a memorable one for our many visitors.



Let the Society be your Santa!



If you have problems finding a meaningful Christmas gift for loved ones, the Le Sueur County Historical Society has a few suggestions. A gift membership to the Society is good for a whole year. Members can conduct research at the Genealogy Center without charge; and will receive Society newsletters, updates and invitations to special events. Members are also able to cast a vote at meetings of membership and help direct the future operations of the Society. For the history buff on your list, you can also purchase genealogy searches for those who want to learn more about their family histories. Natural history art lovers will enjoy canvas prints of artwork by Minnesota artists Adolf Dehn, David Maass and Roger Pruess. The prints depict various bird, fish and wildlife scenes and are ready to frame.

Ottawa bricks can still be found today

At one time many years ago, Ottawa village had a very extensive brick yard. The St. Paul Firebrick Company operated from 1892 to about 1907. It was a large two-story building, 80 x 120 feet with four kilns for firing bricks. The kilns still stand along the railroad track as one enters the village.

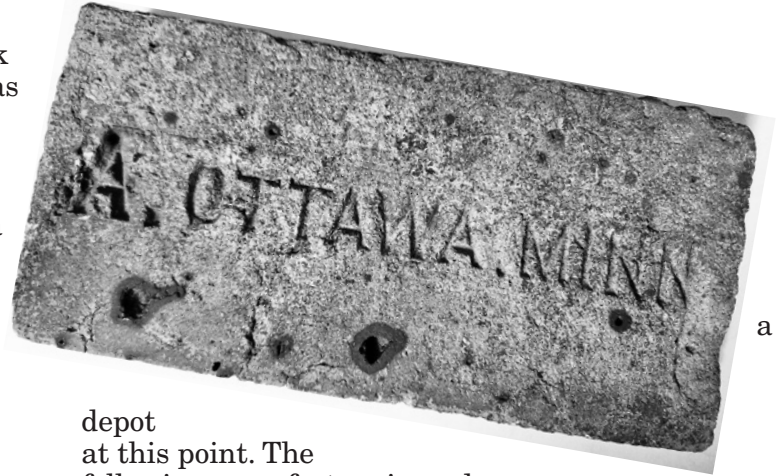
The clay used for bricks was dug by hand from a half-mile up Cherry Creek. A tram track carried the clay from the excavations down to the plant. Horse and donkeys pulled cars along the track. Once the cars began in motion, the pulling team would have to run ahead to stay out of the way. A driver on the car applied the brakes.

The factory turned out several thousand bricks per day.

Many monuments of industry were constructed with the superior-made building brick. According to local descendants, the factory faded for various possible reasons. Some say a competitive company sent men to be hired to break it. Freight rates and fuel for the kilns were very expensive. Perhaps the quality of the bricks may not have been high enough. A victim of hard times, the brick yard was abandoned, and with it the real business of the village was destroyed.

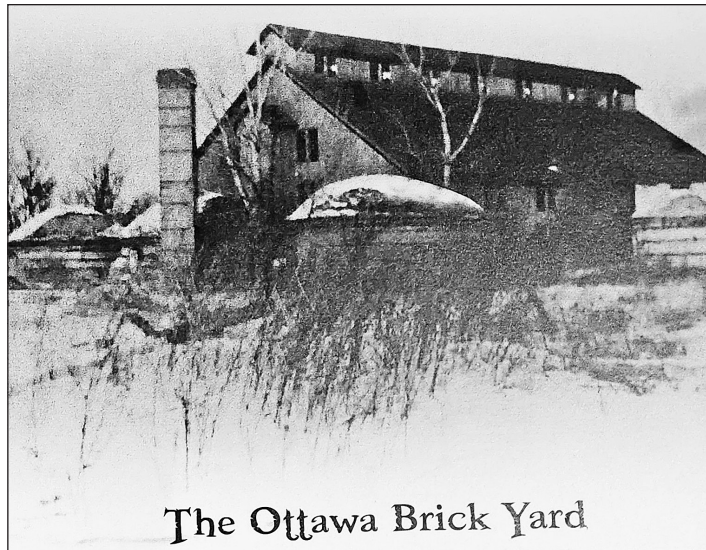
Many workmen had been employed for a number of years and the payroll was large.

In 1883 the business at Ottawa consisted of the following: One general store by Charles Needham, who was also postmaster; one hardware and tin shop; one wagon shop doing repair work, two smith's shops, a flouring-mill and grain elevator. The "Omaha" line of railway maintains



depot at this point. The following were factors in and near this village in the early eighties: David Bean who came in 1877 from Ohio; George Drew, a Vermonter, settled in section 34, in 1876; S. Gibbs, farmer, in section 22, came in 1872; Homer E. Gibbon, teacher, born in Virginia in 1847, after serving as a soldier in Civil War days, finally located in this township in 1873; L. N. Gray, blacksmith and wagon maker, came from Indiana in 1856, and later made the celebrated "Gary" wagon. Other

settlers included James Hayes, section foreman, who lived with his parents in Tyrone township until 1877 then moved to Ottawa; William R. Jones, born in Iowa county, Wisconsin, located here in 1859; Andrew Miller, in section 14, came from Germany in 1840 and to this township in 1869; T. M. Raney, of Tennessee, born in 1825, came to Minnesota in 1855, locating on a farm in section 26 and served from Minnesota in the Civil War.



The Ottawa Brick Yard

Find us on Facebook under LCHSHISTORY

Oh Canada!

LCHS received a welcome surprise last month courtesy of the Society's lone international member: Corinne MacLaurin of Gatineau, Quebec, Canada.

"Please accept my sincere thanks to both you and the Board of Directors for all your hard work," MacLaurin wrote. "You have once again accomplished so very much during a year, and it

is always such a pleasure for me to read the LCHS Newsletter telling me about all the projects completed and those underway."

Along with her letter, MacLaurin sent the Society a generous donation of \$1,200 to "further your work."

Thank you, Corinne for the kind words and support!

2024 will be here soon!

So many exciting things have happened for the Le Sueur County Historical Society this year.
With your help we can accomplish even more.

Help make 2024 the best year ever! Join the Le Sueur County Historical Society.

LCHS Membership Application

Member Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS

- Individual — \$30
- Family — \$40
- Supporting — \$100
- Business — \$250
- Contributor — \$500
- Benefactor — \$1,000

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP:

- Research at the Genealogy Center without charge
- Receive Society newsletters, updates and invitations
- Cast a vote at meetings of membership
- Dues and donations are tax deductible
- Le Sueur County Historical Society is a 501C3 Minnesota nonprofit organization with historic sites in Cleveland, Elysian, Le Center, Le Sueur and Ottawa

I can help with

- Building and grounds maintenance
- Recording inventory and artifacts
- Educational programming
- Genealogy Center assistance
- Communications

My signature on this application confirms my commitment to supporting the mission of the Le Sueur County Historical Society.

Signature _____

Date _____

Mail application with check payable to: Le Sueur County Historical Society

ATTN: Membership

P.O. Box 123

Le Center, MN 56057

For Society Records: Received _____ Reviewed _____ Approved _____



Le Sueur County
**HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

P.O. Box 123
Le Center, MN 56057

**PRESORT
STANDARD
Permit #55
New Prague, MN
56071**

Le Sueur County Historical Society is seeking Board of Director candidates

Bylaws of the Le Sueur County Historical Society dictate term limits for its Board of Directors and executive committee. The Executive Committee is comprised of the Society's president, vice president, secretary and treasurer.

In 2024, the current secretary Ruth Collins and current treasurer Bonnie Reak will no longer be eligible for office. There are also four seats on the board to be filled in 2024.

Election of the two-year board terms will take place at the Society's annual meeting in April. To be on the board you must be over the age of 18 and a LCHS member in good standing.

To maintain the positive direction the Society is experiencing, the board of directors is imploring members to consider serving on the 2024 board. Board members meet during evenings on a monthly basis at various sites in the county.

Anyone interested in being on the LCHS board can email info@lesueurcountyhistory.org or contact any board member. Interested parties are also welcome to attend board meetings. Future meetings will be held Nov. 14 and Dec. 12 at the LCHS Genealogy Center in Elysian; and January 16 at the Tourism Center in Elysian.

The mission of the Le Sueur County Historical Society is to collect and preserve the story of Le Sueur County — telling its history through historic sites, a research center, collections, exhibits and educational programming.