

Legends of Freeborn County
What Would the Community do if the FCHM Ceased to Exist?
Eighteenth in a monthly series of Freeborn County Articles - September 2001□
by Bev Jackson

"If the Freeborn County Historical Museum ceased to exist, what would be the impact on your community or county?"

When I first read that statement in a Minnesota Humanities Commission questionnaire, I looked up from my desk and out the office windows. I paused to reflect. My view is of exhibits of family heirlooms that have been donated to the museum with the belief that these items would be protected, preserved, and interpreted for future generations.

These pieces lovingly donated, carefully accessioned, and respectfully displayed, are priceless to the donor. What would happen to them if FCHM ceased to exist? My next thought went much deeper. If the museum and pioneer village were not here, what would happen to our history? If there was no one to record that history, what would happen to us?

That sounds pretty heavy, but let me explain.

I believe that whatever we do with our lives today is based on a combination of present occurrences and past influences. Whether we have the courage to tackle a new problem or shrink from it, depends on our background experiences, our own personal history.

All through school, I thought that history was boring. It was names that I couldn't remember, dates that eluded me, places that I'd never heard of, and events that didn't affect me. When I started college (at the ripe old age of 37), American History was one of my required classes. I knew that I'd get through it, but that's all it would be - survival.

What a shock it was for me to find that history occurred because of the people that made it happen. That in 1776 a few gutsy men had the courage to say to Great Britain "We don't want to be part of your world empire. We don't need your help. We don't need your dominance."

Where did they get the courage? How did they dare to dream they were right? How did they think they had a chance? How, under insurmountable odds, did they win? What was in their history that gave them that kind of courage?

All of a sudden, history became the people who made it happen. The dates and names were only part of the whole. The humanness and the courage became the important part. History became people, and that is exciting.

Whether it occurred more than 200 years ago half a continent away, or Friday night at the homecoming game at Hammer Field, the event is part of our history; and someone will someday wonder how it happened. They'll look on it with pride or at least humor. They'll remember it with nostalgia and they'll be glad that it was part of their own personal foundation.

If the Freeborn County Historical Museum ceased to exist what would be the impact on your community or county?

Who can say for sure?

I do know that there would be hundreds, maybe thousands, of people who have donated items to the collection that would be extremely upset. and we'd have a run on the museum mindful of the 1929 bank closures.

I do know that the papers from schools, businesses, churches, organizations, townships, and families, that are today preserved in acid-free folders and boxes in the museum achieves, would probably eventually deteriorate in someone's basement.

The fashions that are wrapped in acid-free tissue, including Native American leather pieces, Victorian wedding dresses, and WWII army uniforms would someday be found by moths or even squirrels in someone's attic.

The farm implements that turned Minnesota's virgin prairies into some of the most productive farm land in the world would rot in a grove.

The cast iron toys that were played with and loved by today's senior citizens would eventually rust in a landfill.

It sounds as if I'm painting a worst case scenario, but I believe that question has only negative answers.

The items themselves tell a story, your story. They are a part of your foundation.

"If the Freeborn County Historical (Yourstorial) Museum ceased to exist what would be the impact on your community or county or you?"