

## **Legends of Freeborn County Can we learn the 'real' history?**

by Bev Jackson

Thirty-sixth in a monthly series of Freeborn County Articles - March 2003□  
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Recently, the Tribune printed a column by Andy Rooney titled "Will 'real' history please stand up." In it he describes a scene in which Lincoln is shot by a bow and arrow from the stage of Ford's Theater by a man having an affair with the president's wife. The idea seems almost sacrilegious.

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He goes on to describe how with today's technology a convincing movie could be produced by an imaginative writer and director. I can just picture the public, always hungry for a touch of sensationalism, having a ball with this information. The TV talk shows, newspaper columnists, college debate teams, and every restaurant in town would be abuzz with the pros and cons.

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Even if the story were to be proven entirely false, the doubts and questions would forever be in the public mind.

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I couldn't help but think, how vulnerable we are to the opinions of "experts". And, how a really clever person can make convincing arguments both for and against a subject.

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Although the following item isn't quite on the same level as the death of a president, we do have a fun bit of controversy surrounding the naming of our county seat. A marvelous poem has been written describing a horse race sponsored by teams from Albert Lea and Itasca (one of Freeborn County's ghost towns - I'm not sure whether a ghost town means empty buildings with creaking doors or if it is simply the original town site).

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Apparently, this was a very exciting race. Hundreds of dollars were bet on the outcome. People came from far and wide to watch and cheer for their favorite horse/town. (Maybe I should say town/horse.)

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This story has been written as a part of Albert Lea's history for many, many years. A variety of promotional materials have proclaimed Albert Lea to be the county seat decided by a horse race.

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However, one of Albert Lea's leading historians is absolutely convinced that the idea is a fabrication. He claims that it was written as part of the entertainment for a meeting of the Pioneer Society. He has spent hours searching for information that will prove/or disprove the story. At this point, given the technological know-how, we could make a pretty convincing movie for either case.

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A marvelous book has been written describing a motel that is excavated hundreds of years after its civilization was buried. As the archeologists are working on this incredible find, they use their expert knowledge to identify the items in a motel room and the adjoining bathroom. The religious sanctuary that they describe is a wonderful, tongue-in-cheek interpretation of life in the 20th century.

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Getting back to the opening statement, "Will 'real' history please stand up," I've spent 15 years at the museum learning the country's history; and after all this time I feel like the phrase "The hurrier I go, the behinder I get." or in other words "The more I know, the more I know I don't know."

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Modern technology can do wonderful things. We are able to store and retrieve within seconds more information now than in any other time in history. We can manipulate and maneuver images and ideas and make these creations available to millions of people instantly. Everything that we are doing now will affect our future.

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We can't change history, but I wish we could figure out what it is.