

History & Legends of Freeborn County FCHM Library Offers "Real" History

by Bev Jackson □

Sixth in a monthly series of Freeborn County Legends - September, 2000

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"Welcome to the FCHM. Have you ever been here before? No? Well, let me explain our facility to you. You've just entered the main door of the museum building, you are right here. (Point to a spot on the diagram.) The exhibits on this floor cover the earliest known history of the county including mammoth bones, the native American period, and on through settlement by a variety of ethnic groups. To my left is the library..."

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"The library?," you say?

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"Oh, yes, the library. While our exhibits portray early life in Freeborn County, the library defines the people who made it happen. It's as if the museum displays are merely the introduction, and the real history is explained in the business records, genealogies, newspaper microfilm, obituaries, school records, catalogs, and all of the other archival materials in the library."

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I do have to admit, usually our introductory remarks to visitors do not go into this detail; however, if you've never taken the time to visit this part of the museum, please do. There you will find incredible amounts of history stored in acid-free folders and boxes, much more information than could ever be defined in three dimensional exhibits.

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The other day, I stopped to ask our librarian, Linda Evenson, a question; and found her in rubber gloves (the kind you wear to clean the oven or other equally delightful places) sorting through a box of records that had recently been brought in. Unfortunately, mold, mildew, and mice had visited that box before she got the chance to go through it. She was carefully examining each sheet of paper, trying to determine which materials could be saved.

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Most items donated to the library are not in this condition. This deterioration not only affects the new materials, but it will eventually affect the items presently stored there.

Consequently, careful consideration is given to anything brought into the archives.

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These preserved items add up to a real treasure of information, so I asked Linda to give me a list of questions that she has researched recently. This is what she came up with.

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"I would like the history of the Bessessen home."

"...the history of the London English Lutheran Church."

"...the date of Boyd and Jack's fire."

"...origin of the City of Albert Lea's name."

"...operating instructions for an American Gas Company stove."

"...history of the bar fixtures for the Palace Bar."

"...when/where of the Albert Lea Tractor Company."

"...Livdalen family history in connection with the log cabin."

"...history of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Geneva Township."

"...Is there an 1877 newspaper available."

"...history of Faville Park."

"...information of S.C. Jenson, watch repair business."

"...address for Irish genealogy."

"...Why are there dogs on the Freeborn County courthouse."

"...number of people living in Conger in 1900."

"...information on the Woolworth sit-in of the 1930's."

"...Was there a furniture business by the name of Hauben?"

"...information on Albert Lea baseball from 1944 to 1948."

"...opening and closing dates for school #124."

"...information on the preservation and storage of books."

She also told me that this is only a portion of the telephone, mail and visitor inquiries she has handled recently. Meanwhile, she is patiently working on updating the indexing of all of

the materials, a seemingly never-ending job.

Do plan a trip to the museum library. You may come researching one subject, and find yourself sidetracked and off on to another area. It's a great way to spend a day, or a week, or a month, or a...