

*Serving Scott County:*

- Belle Plaine
- Blakeley
- Credit River
- Elko
- Lydia
- Jordan
- Marystown
- New Market
- New Prague
- Prior Lake
- Savage
- Shakopee
- St. Benedict
- St. Patrick
- Belle Plaine Township
- Blakeley Township
- Cedar Lake Township
- Credit River Township
- Helena Township
- Jackson Township
- Louisville Township
- Sand Creek Township
- Spring Lake Township
- St. Lawrence Township

## New Fall Programming Begins This September

As fall approaches, schedule time for activities at the museum. Five new events are scheduled through November. Check the calendar on page six for dates and times.

The noon Lunchbox Lectures at the Stans Museum begins with historic quilts with local quilter and teacher Sandi Andersen in September. In October, retired teacher and author Tom Melchior discusses his new book of life's lessons learned both as a student and a teacher. Genealogist Betty Dols will share the early 20th-century history of Shakopee in November.

Sip coffee and taste wonderful desserts while listening to a new speaker each month at Dessert & Coffee in the evening. Tom Brennan will present the history of the Fur Trade in September. Tom recently served as an exhibit consultant at the Northwest Company Fur Post in Pine City. Just in time for Hal-



Duke Addicks

loween, professional storyteller Duke Addicks shares ghost stories of the Minnesota River Valley appropriate for older children and adults.

A reminder: Regular museum admission applies for all Lunchbox Lectures. Members are free. Non-members are \$2. Admission for Dessert & Coffee includes treats and beverages and is \$3.50 for non-members, \$1.50 for members. Admission supports programming at the non-profit museum.

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## The Ghost of Belle Plaine at the Old Stone Bridge

In the early 1900s, a strange phenomenon appeared in the southern limits of Belle Plaine. A "ball of fire" seemed to appear near the St. Peter and Paul cemetery and float a few feet above the ground traveling in a northwest direction and settling in a plum tree grove near the Whitlock Bridge. It was observed by many of the town folk, some even shooting at it with shotguns. The following article appeared in the December 3, 1908 edition of the *Belle Plaine Herald*.

The Ghost Performance at the Old Stone Bridge nightly from 5 to 8 o'clock.

The above attraction has been drawing the curious since the past week. It isn't a real ghost, such as we imagine a "real" ghost to be, but merely a light that has hung about the fields near the old stone bridge at the south edge of town, and performed queer stunts for the onlookers.

Apparently, many of us were not familiar with the ignis fatuus, and curiously, this seems to be the first time that it appeared in this vicinity, at least to such a noticeable extent. The appearance is jokingly referred to as the "ghost at the haunted bridge," and

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## Recent Gifts to the SCHS Collections: Thank You Generous Donors

- **Lydia Area Historical Society:** Book, *Lydia Area News: The History of Lydia as Reported in Local Newspapers, 1870-1954*.
- **Irene Powers:** Book, *Family History: Peter Stelten Family in America*; two Rock Spring bottles; two wedding aprons.
- **Betty Dols:** Two, small beer glasses labeled "Home of Dan Patch, Savage, Minnesota"; one pair of brown woman's gloves.
- **Helen Kubes:** Postcard, Boiling Springs.
- **Joe Huber:** Two postcards, stove company and courthouse.
- **Dorothy Briemhorst:** Skirt worn by three generations of women; two baby belly bands.
- **Esther Clarke:** Amanda Mesenbrink retirement album from Northwestern Bell in Shakopee; two photographs of Rahr Malting.
- **Cathy Isles:** Funeral card of Archbishop John Roach.
- **South Dakota State Agricultural Heritage Museum:** Letter to patient from Jordan Sulphur Springs.



## "Will-O'-The-Wisp" Appears Nightly at Belle Plaine Cemetery

Continued from page 1.

some have considered it the scheme of someone to play a joke upon the townspeople.

Ignis fatuus, sometimes called "will-o'-the-wisp," is from the Latin meaning "foolish fire." It is described as "a luminous appearance frequently seen in marshy places, churchyards, and stagnant pools, which has puzzled philosophers from the time of Aristotle." It generally appears a little after sunset, as a pale, bluish colored flame, varying in size and shape; sometimes it shines steadily till morning, at other times disappears, and reappears within about half-hourly intervals. It floats in air at about two feet from the ground, is sometimes fixed, and sometimes travels with great rapidity.

In general, it recedes on being approached, and vice versa, though several successful attempts have been made to light a piece of paper by it. Many efforts have been made to discover its cause; but so varied are its appearances, and so void of any common principle that these attempts have totally failed.

Of the various theories advanced, we need mention only two. The first is that the ignis fatuus is due to phosphoresced hydrogen gas, which possesses the power of spontaneous ignition on coming in contact with dry atmospheric air. Gas would be generated by the decomposition of animal matter present in a marshy soil. The motion of ignis fatuus is accounted for by the flame being communicated along the line of the gas.

The second theory is that it is due to the combination of a light carbureted hydrogen gas, arising from the decomposition of vegetable matter; but though this supposition satisfactorily accounts for many appearances connected with the ignis fatuus, the gas itself is not spontaneously combustible, and an additional supposition is required to account for its ignition. The probable conclusion is that a number of phenomenon's similar to the eye, but arising from different causes, are aggregated under the term ignis fatuus. The ignis fatuus has never been produced artificially. Electricity and phosphorescence can produce the luminous appearance, but they are unable further to imitate it. -*Belle Plaine Herald*

## Two New History Books Published

Recently, two local history books have been published. The first is *Lydia Area News: The History of Lydia as Reported in Local Newspapers, 1870-1954*. Together, Don Beuch and Pam Killian spent hours combing local newspapers for news on the Spring Lake Township area. Both Beuch and Killian are members of the Lydia Area Historical Society, which in addition to publishing the book also recently erected a monument commemorating Lydia's history. Books are available at the Stan's Museum gift shop or directly from the Lydia Area Historical Society. For more information, call Don Beuch at 952-492-6173.

The history of Shakopee Public Utilities from 1900 to today is chronicled in the book, *A Look Through Time: Shakopee Public Utilities*. In 1900, Shakopee residents decided to operate their own electric and water utilities. The mayor and city council oversaw the system until 1951 when the utilities commission was created. Professional writer and historian Bill Beck wrote the book, which includes many photographs from the Scott County Historical Society and Minnesota Historical Society collections.

## Lydia: Center of Scott County

Settled by Irish, English, and German settlers, Lydia was once a thriving community. The town's name is attributed to Lydia Pewthere, who operated a small store on her property. Like other communities, the church and the school were the centers of social life. Two general stores, a hardware store, saw mill, and creamery were just a few of the businesses that operated there. The town, located in Spring Lake Township, continued to thrive until after World War II when better transportation made it easier for residents to travel to larger, surrounding towns such as Jordan.



Platbook of Scott County. Northwest Publishing Co. 1898

## Volunteer Spotlight: The Men With the Tools at the Stans Museum

It's always nice to hear visitors give compliments on the appearance of the Stans museum and house. For the most part, staff does not have the time and more importantly the talent to keep everything looking good and running smoothly. Thanks goes to a team of Shakopee guys that deserve all the credit.

**Bob Sorensen** has been volunteering at the museum since responding to a newspaper ad looking for a handy person and exhibit builder five years ago. A retired retail display designer, he has never needed much direction. Somehow he turns sketchy ideas into hands-on activities, models, shelving, walls, and more. When not working at the museum, Bob spends his time volunteering at his church and woodcarving.

**Steve Blake** is our newest volunteer. With a complete shop at home, he thought it would be fun to create one-of-a-kind exhibits (Plus, his wife was running out of projects to keep him busy.) Look for Steve's wonderful work on the newest museum exhibit. Not yet retired, Steve somehow makes time to volunteer, go

fishing, and follow car racing. "We have cable," his wife says, "so Steve can watch it if he can't be there in person."

While working full time and maintaining an 1895 house that needs constant attention, **Jay Whiting** answers the call to hang the storm windows and screens on the 1908 Stans home. A volunteer board member, Jay also helps out at special events and on the occasional odd job. A history buff, Jay's real passion is perhaps his jam and jelly for which he has won hundreds of county and state fair ribbons.

Last but not least, **Don McNeil** has literally fixed-up an entire room at the Stans house. From patching cracks to repainting walls, Don did it all with amazing results. He can also be seen in the garden park working with the spring clean up crew in preparation for the summer growing season. The McNeils' winter decorating is a wonderland of lights and spirit at the holiday season. A drive by their house is a Christmas tradition for many Scott County families.

## From the Historical Society Library with Genealogist Betty Dols

The last *Connections* newsletter included information about the passenger list extractions in the book series, *Germans to America*. However, one cannot not forget the "Baca" books of Czech passenger lists as well as the *Famine Immigrants* of Irish extractions, which are also in our library.

Another essential tool in researching any American family is the census schedules, both federal and state. The first federal population census was taken in 1790 and has been taken every 10 years since then. Most states took a census every ten years as well, half way between the federal census years as well as some eastern cities. Besides counting the number of people, the census takers asked different specific questions in each census that are valuable clues in researching a family. Some of the information available from the census includes occupation, age, year of immigration, country of origin, and number of children.

The first federal census in Minnesota was the 1850 territorial census, but there were few white settlers living here at that time. The next federal census was the 1857 special census to ascertain if there was suf-

ficient population for statehood. Because its purpose was so important, it was very thorough and is one of the best census schedules available. Minnesota became a state in 1858 and took a state census in 1865, 1875, 1885, 1895, and 1905. If one's immigrant ancestors arrived in Scott County in the 1850s or 1860s, one can see who was in the household for a fifty or sixty year period of time. That period is even longer if one's ancestors ever lived in the eastern states.

In the Scott County Historical Society library, we have all of the federal schedules for Scott County that have been released thus far and all of the State schedules. Completed indexes to the 1857, 1860, 1885, 1900, and 1920 Scott County Census make searching for a family member relatively quick and easy.

Betty Dols has been a volunteer at the Scott County Historical Society since the museum's opening in 1995. A member of several genealogical societies, she graciously shares her knowledge with library visitors. She also indexes the local newspapers when not keeping the Stans garden park looking beautiful.



Shakopee 1895, Sanborn-Perris Map Co. Ltd.

## Around the Block History

The latest exhibit being developed by the Scott County Historical Society strives to give visitors a sense of how the museum's neighborhood has changed over the past 100 years. While some significant changes are recent—the demolition of an entire block of homes for a new county jail—other changes have occurred gradually over time. Photographs from 1900 to the present will share and preserve the story of the homes and buildings that once stood in the area. Visitors will be able to envision what it was like when a blacksmith shop and a hotel were among local landmarks.

In order to complete the project, **we need your help locating photographs of the area, its houses, or businesses.** A photograph of anything along Fuller Street between First and Third Avenues would be helpful. Some of these buildings include the Theis, Scherkenbach, Rosen, and Unze/Geis homes, the Heger blacksmith shop, Berens store, St. Paul House, and Eastman drug. Please call the museum at 445-0378, with any information. All photographs will be returned.

## Historic Stone Arch Bridges Grace Scott County Landscape

Eight miles south of Belle Plaine along County Road 51 in Blakeley Township, a stone arch bridge spans a dry streambed. Built of limestone, the bridge's key-stone bears the inscription "1878." The bridge is unique for its high quality masonry work and the fact that it is stone and not wood as was typical of Scott County bridges of the time.



The bridge was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1988 as the oldest, known, surviving stone arch highway bridge in the state. At that time, the bridge was attributed to the "Good Roads Movement" when farmers, motorists, engineers, and others concerned with the quality and safety of highways and bridges advocated the building similar stone bridges. However, today it is believed that the bridge was built by the railroad as it prepared the grade for tracks. As the railroad moved through section 30 in Blakeley Township, it would have crossed the streambed where the bridge is located.



A second bridge of similar design can be found two miles south of Belle Plaine. Difficult to find, it is located in the middle of a farm field. Little or no information is known about this structure but is believed to also be a railroad bridge along the same line.

Today, the status of the historic bridge is uncertain. It is one of several bridges in Scott County classified as "deficient and in need of replacement within five years." However, the bridge has already received a two year reprieve and county engineers are working with the State Office for Historic Preservation to determine the best course of action.



### Annual Meeting Planned

The Scott County Historical Society Annual meeting will be Monday, October 20, 2003 at 7:30 p.m. at the Stans Museum at 235 Fuller Street South in Shakopee.

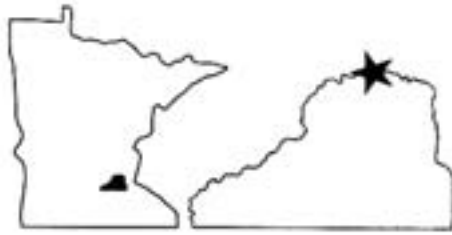
Following the meeting all members are invited to the Stans House for coffee and cookies made from period recipes. This is also an opportunity to see the historic 1908 house and meet other members. The hour long video produced for the county's sesquicentennial will also be available for viewing. For more information, call the museum at 445-0378.

### Sharing Stories of the Depression

Shakopee High School tenth grade students are learning the value of sharing stories to pass on knowledge and experience. Sixty students will be conducting oral histories regarding the Great Depression in conjunction with a U.S. History class. The project lasts three months from December to February.

Shakopee Public Schools volunteer coordinator Paulette Rislund is looking for individuals willing to talk to or be a pen pal with a student about what life was like during the depression. For more information, contact her at 496-5028.

**SCOTT COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
searching, saving and sharing the history of Scott County



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Hours:  
Tues., Wed., Fri. 9:00–4:00  
Thurs. 9:00–8:00  
Sat. 10:00–3:00  
Sun., Mon. closed

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## Lunch and Dessert Make History Fun in the Fall at the Museum

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|----------|---|---------|---|
| Sept. 10 | Lunchbox Lecture: Historic Quilts<br>Join Sandi Andersen for a discussion of historic quilting and a look at samples from her vintage quilt collection. Noon.   | Oct. 20 | SCHS Annual Meeting<br>Meeting for members followed by coffee and cookies at the Stans House. 7:30 p.m.   |
| Sept. 18 | Dessert & Coffee: Fur Trade<br>Tom Brennan, fur trade historian and member of La Compagnie re-enactment society, will share the history of the fur trade in Minnesota. 6:30 p.m. Reservations encouraged. | Oct. 30 | Dessert & Coffee: Ghost Stories<br>On the eve of Halloween, professional storyteller Duke Addicks will share ghost stories about the explorers and pioneers of the Minnesota River Valley. 6:30 p.m. Reservations encouraged. |
| Sept. 25 | Crazy Quilting<br>Remember to join the SCHS quilters at their monthly meeting at 6:30 p.m. at the museum. No experience necessary. Open to everyone. Free.  | Oct. 20 | Dozinky Day<br>Join SCHS at our booth during this traditional German and Czech celebration in New Prague.   |
| Oct. 8   | Lunchbox Lecture: Tom Melchior<br>Tom Melchior will discuss his book, <i>From Both Sides of the Desk</i> . A local author and retired teacher, Tom also wrote <i>They Called Me Teacher</i> . Noon.       | Nov. 12 | Lunchbox Lecture: Shakopee<br>Professional genealogist and lifetime Shakopee resident, Betty Dols will share the history of Shakopee at the turn-of-the-20th century. Noon.   |