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Farm, Food & Fun Fair: Reconnecting with Agricultural Roots in Dakota County 1858-2009

July 23, 2009, Hastings, MN – NEW this year on August 22 at the LeDuc Historic Estate, 1629 Vermillion Street, Hastings is "Farm, Food & Fun Fair: Reconnecting with Agricultural Roots in Dakota County 1858-2009." Visitors will learn about William LeDuc's contributions to agriculture. Not only was he Commissioner of Agriculture under President Hayes, but he also conducted many innovative experiments in growing a variety of crops in the northern parts of the United States. The idea of a fair goes way back to 1858 when the Dakota County Fair was first held in Nininger, October 7-9. Participation was not lacking as industry, quilts, fancy work, drawings, oxen and horses were all on display. Governor Sibley was the featured speaker.

William LeDuc's riverboat, the "North Star," and the steamboat, "Bangor," transported fairgoers between Nininger and Hastings. Financially, the fair did very well, having a balance of \$8.95 at the conclusion of the fair.

At the LeDuc Historic Estate Fair there will be demonstrations of traditional woodworking, harvesting, and food preservation; and guests may try their hand at old-fashioned farm tasks.

Fresh produce, plants & baked goods will be available for purchase from various vendors. Farm animals will be present and a highlight will be the home-made pickle contest.

Why have a pickle making contest? It is reminiscent of the times when the LeDucs lived at the Estate. In the 1850s one could not go to the market and purchase fresh produce. Almost everyone had a garden and preserved what they could for winter. One form of preservation was pickling. As Greg Brown, a folk singer from Iowa sings, "Taste a little of the summer; my Grandmother put it all in jars." This year people of all ages will have an opportunity to put some of their own summer in jars by pickling cucumbers, peppers, onions, green beans, beets, crab apples, apple rings, watermelon rinds and other edibles.

Check <http://www.dakotahistory.org/LeDuc/home.asp> for the Pickle Contest rules. All entries must be delivered to the LeDuc Historic Estate by August 20, 2009. If you do not have internet access, please call the LeDuc Historic Estate @651-437-7055 and a hard copy of the rules can be mailed to you.

Throughout the day of the Fair there will be these exciting presentations:

- David Geister and Pat Bauer (Authors of "B is for Battle Cry: A Civil War Alphabet") will play William and Mary LeDuc. As General LeDuc, David will relate to the group his findings on the agriculture of the day. Pat will demonstrate the making of butter and bread.

- Chrystal Weinhold will talk about the difference between vegetables we grow today and those grown in the 1850s.

- Jerry Weber will be presenting the history of the Hastings Coop Creamery.

- Kevin Chamberlain will be on hand to visit with people about his family's farming roots in Nininger. Kevin is the 4th generation to farm this land.

- Richard Darsow will be on hand to share his experiences growing up on his grandfather's farm without the modern conveniences we take for granted today.

- Roberta Norris Norvoll has transcribed and tested several of Minnie LeDuc's recipes. She will share samples with fair goers and will talk about the cookbook of Minnie's recipes that she has prepared.

The free event, sponsored by Friends of LeDuc of Historic Hastings and Dakota County Historical Society, on the grounds of the LeDuc Historic Estate, will be open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on August 22. Tours will be given at regular hours (10 & 11:30 a.m.; 1, 2:30 & 4 p.m.) and admission prices will be the same as on scheduled tour days - \$6, Adults; \$5, Seniors & Military Personnel; \$3, Students up to age 18; **admission is always free for members of Dakota County Historical Society and children under 5 years of age.** Please check <http://www.dakotahistory.org/LeDuc/home.asp> or call 651-437-7055 for more information.