In honor of its 60th anniversary in 1999, the DCHS presents

The Good, the Bad, and the Tuna: A Sampling of Artifacts Collected by the Dakota County Historical Society Since 1939
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Dakota County Historical Society, 1999
The Good, the Bad, and the Tuna: A Sampling of Artifacts Collected by the Dakota County Historical Society Since 1939

In April 1939, a handful of individuals interested in Dakota County history and archaeology met to form an organization. Seven months later, they decided to call themselves the Dakota County Historical and Archaeological Society. In 1999, the Dakota County Historical Society celebrated its 60 anniversary by opening this exhibition. The exhibition showcases different parts of the museum's collections. Many of the items have been in storage for years, some for decades. All of the items reflect parts of Dakota County history and/or the interests of those who donated them to the museum.

First, a little history about the Dakota County Historical Society.
Organizing the Historical Society

The first meeting of the “historically minded” Dakota County Historical and Archaeological Society, was held in the South St. Paul public library in April 1939. The original purpose of the Society was to “establish a link with the past by preserving the relics, written records, and other material of those historic days of long ago for future generations.”

The Society met semi-regularly until 1941, then did not meet again until 1947 because of the disruptions caused by World War II. In 1949, the society formally changed its name to Dakota County Historical Society. When DCHS incorporated in 1951, it had 125 members.

Opening the Museum

It wasn’t until 1955 that DCHS opened its first museum. The Society first looked to open a museum in Hastings, the county seat, but couldn’t secure a location. Attempts to place a museum in the Faribault House in Mendota also failed. When South St. Paul decided to build a new municipal building, the society asked the city if the it could open a museum in its basement. The city agreed.

After the society had secured a spot in the South St. Paul municipal building, it looked for a temporary home for its new museum. Space was found in Room 308 in the South St. Paul High School. While DCHS did own some artifacts, many of the original exhibits were built around artifacts borrowed from the Minnesota Historical Society. One of the advantages of being located in a high school was that student members of Scribes, a junior historian group, often served as museum attendants.

The growth of the student population led to the closing of the museum in the school only a year after it had opened. On April
16, 1957, DCHS officially opened its history museum in one room of the South St. Paul municipal building basement. But the one room was quickly filled with new donations and exhibits. By 1961, the museum had over 5,000 items. Repeated requests for additional space resulted in an expansion to another room, then another, then across the hall until finally, the museum filled the entire basement of the South St. Paul city building.

Fred E. Lawshe

The museum was mainly the brainchild of one of the original DCHS members, Fred E. Lawshe. He was the first president of the society and he lobbied long and hard to secure space for a museum. He was the director and curator of the museum until his death in 1970. What began as a hobby led to a full-time passion, especially after he retired in 1958 from his 40 year job as the South St. Paul High School industrial arts teacher. Fred Lawshe logged thousands of hours creating exhibits, giving tours to student groups, and organizing collections.

A New Building

In 1976, the Dakota County government was looking for a bicentennial project, and the Dakota County Historical Society board members had just the project - a new museum building. The museum was bursting at the seams in the basement of the city building. County commissioners finally agreed to make a permanent history museum building their legacy, but a debate did ensue about the building's architectural design and its location. One was finally agreed upon, and on December 30, 1976, one day before the bicentennial year ended, county commissioners and DCHS board members broke the ground for the museum. The day was cold and windy and the official ceremony took all of 15 minutes to complete.
Although Fred E. Lawshe never got to witness his dream - a museum building - the museum was dedicated to him. The storage area still holds numerous original paintings and prints which Fred had created for his exhibits. And his distinctive object labels still provide extra information on quite a few “mystery objects.” Scattered throughout the exhibit are photographs of early exhibits and the construction of the museum building.

Today’s museum

The Dakota County Historical Society continues to build upon the efforts of Fred E. Lawshe and others who have worked for the Society over the years. There are now over 25,000 objects in the museum’s collections, about 11,000 of them are photographs. Its publishing program, first begun in 1961 with a newsletter called “Over the Years,” now puts out over 100 pages of original historical research a year. Its research library has one of the best collections of local history in the state.

Dakota County Historical Society’s Collection overview

Until the last thirty years, museums were often seen and used as places to show off curiosities or relics from the past. Like many other museums from the mid twentieth century, DCHS also collected anything that was unique or exotic in addition to items from Dakota County. Many of these items were souvenirs that people picked up on their overseas travels or found while on an amateur archaeological dig. While not historically valuable to Dakota County, they do reflect the values and interests of early collectors and the museum’s founders.

Today, DCHS’s mission is to collect, preserve, and interpret the history of Dakota County. In addition to collecting artifacts, the museum also collects stories about these artifacts - how were they used, who used them, why, and where were they used. By collecting these stories, these objects become unique to Dakota County and its history.
Agricultural and Tools and Equipment

The museum has 440 artifacts which pertain to Dakota County’s agricultural history. Most of Dakota County was farm land until the 1960s and most of southern Dakota County remains farm land. The wooden hayfork was used to lift loose hay from a hayrack into a hay loft. Today, hay is baled by machinery and moved by belts into the hay lofts.

Farmers used a flail to thresh wheat before the invention of farm machinery in the 1870s and 1880s. The accompanying illustration shows how this was done. The flail on display is hand-made from a tree branch.

Clothing

The clothing collection is the second largest collection in the museum, numbering about 2750 pieces. (The largest collection is paper materials.) Shoes, outdoor wear, clothing accessories (e.g. belts, gloves, and collars), and underwear are also included in the clothing collection.

Hoops first became popular in 1857. This style of wire hoop, worn by women in the late 1800s, had a cutout in the back to accommodate a bustle. Bustles became fashionable in the 1870s and saw the height of their popularity in the 1880s. The ideal female figure during the 1880s was an accentuated posterior and tiny waist. The waist on the hoop above measures about 17 inches. As the bustles became bigger, the hoops became narrower.
It became popular to wear **fur sets** such as these in the 1930s. The heads, tails, and paws were left on the animals as adornments.

**Communication Tools and Equipment**

The label attached to this **telephone** claims that this was the first dial hanging handset used in Dakota County. It was installed in the South St. Paul Fire Department. Over the last 150 years, technology has played an important in the development of mass communication and entertainment. This change in technology can be seen in the different typewriters, telephones, telegraphs, televisions, and even the computer in the museum’s collections.

**Curiosities and Souvenirs**

The **plant scrapbook** is an excellent example of something created to be a souvenir. The book is filled with dried plants taken from famous people’s graves or gardens. There are also a number of plants labeled as being from western U.S. tourist destinations. It appears that the individual who made the scrapbook collected plants during her trips to the east and west. The plant scrapbook is a botanical memory album of her trip.

**Plant scrapbook, c. 1880**
This **Blue Fin Tuna** came from Fred Westerholm's estate. It is not known where Fred Westerholm caught this Blue Fin Tuna. But since tunas are warm salt water fish, it definitely is a curiosity in Minnesota.

Soldiers often pick up souvenirs from the various foreign locales where they are stationed. During World War II, Ervin Krech from Inver Grove Township joined the U.S. Army Air Corps and spent his tour of duty in the China-Burma-India Theatre. This **opium pipe** was among the souvenirs he brought back from his time spent in central Burma and India.

Joe Zuzek, a printer from Hastings who worked at the *Hastings Gazette* for 43 years, donated a number of items to DCHS from places around the world. His souvenir donations run from a strand of elephant hair to a 2,600 year old sarcophagus from Egypt to this unique **Hindu headdress**. While we know that there are over 700 shells on this headdress, we don't know where exactly it came from or how it was used.

**Ethnographic Objects**

Ethnographic objects are items that have a unique meaning and use to a particular culture. Many of the ethnographic objects in the museum’s collections were picked up as souvenirs. However, there are also quite a few objects that were brought by immigrants from their home country or made by cultural groups in Dakota County. The museum has about 1,000 ethnographic objects.
Both the hardened maple sugar inside this birchbark cone and cone itself were made by an Ojibwe tribal member. Maple sugaring was a traditional spring time activity for the Ojibwes and some Ojibwes continue to collect maple sap and turn it into sugar.

Little is known about this Swedish copper pot except that it was used to serve hot water. It is likely that it was brought by an emigrant family and they or their descendants eventually settled in Dakota County.

The Gesundheitsdpfeifer, big pipe, was a parting gift given to members of the Imperial German Army when they retired during the years after the Franco-Prussian War and before World War I, or 1871 - 1914. The bowl of each pipe listed the name of the soldier, his date of service, regiment, and branch of service. The middle section of the pipe carried a testimonial. The pipe was also adorned with military motifs and a picture of the German Emperor. This particular pipe was given to a soldier named Jakob Thodom in 1910.

**Home Furnishings and Accessories**

Household items are an important part of any historical museum for the home is a central part of everyone’s, and particularly women’s, lives. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, most women’s lives centered around the home; to learn about women, we must study the home. Most of the museum’s roughly 1800 household objects are common, every day objects. These household objects include kitchen appliances,
cleaning materials, furniture, knick knacks, food service items, and food storage materials. A large percentage of the household materials date from 1880 to 1920.

The **corn husk basket** pictured on the left was made by Emma Stapf sometime in the early 20th century. Emma and her husband George owned a farm in Castle Rock township. She probably gathered the corn husks from one of their own corn fields. Corn husk baskets themselves were a particularly midwestern form of folk art. Corn husks were also used to make bread plates or fruit drying trays.

The J.S. Ford & Johnson Company of Chicago first patented the **cradle-carriage** or swinging cradle in 1884. It quickly became a good seller, retailing for about $5.00 in the late 19th century. The company also sold a model of the cradle with a brace support and canopy. It is unknown how this particular piece made it into the DCHS collection, but it is in very good condition.

The perforated tin **footwarmer**, or foot stove, was placed in sleighs and carriages during the cold winter months. Coals would be placed in the tin dish and the dish inserted into the footwarmer. The footwarmer on display came from the Alfred Day estate. The Alfred Day family moved to Castle Rock in 1860.

Cattle furniture became all the rage in the late 19th century. Chairs and tables were constructed out of cattle horns. This **pin cushion**, stuffed with sawdust and shaped over a cow hoof, probably came from that era.
Before electricity, a woman heated multiple sad irons on her wood stove to iron her clothes. When the iron she was using cooled, she placed it back on the stove, grabbed a heated iron, and continued to iron the clothes. Early sad irons were made completely of cast iron, including the handles. Detachable wooden handles like the one on this mini sad iron made irons easier to use for the handle itself was never heated and it was relatively light weight compared to the all-iron irons.

The **mini sad iron** that is on display is only 3 1/2 inches long and 2 1/2 inches high and may have been used to iron children's clothes. This type of sad iron was also used as a sales sample by door-to-door iron salesman in the 1890s.

The **Will Rogers clock** is not as old as the other household items on display, but it is as historic. The clock reflects the growth a mass popular culture in America in the 1920s and 1930s. While Will Rogers began his career on Broadway, it was through the radio that most Americans learned to love him. He became a radio star in the 1920s and 1930s, the period when the radio was one of the most popular forms of mass entertainment. People were drawn to his gentle humor, particularly during the Great Depression of the 1930s when people needed to escape the daily reality massive unemployment, drought, and crop failures. Americans mourned his untimely death in a plane crash in 1935.

The label on the **rolling pin** said it was handmade by Grandpa Dewey. Forty years ago when that label was made, they knew who Grandpa Dewey was and probably when he made it. Unfortunately, that information has been lost over time.
Patty Irons were used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They could be bought from the Sears catalogue, a popular method of purchase, or from a general store. Women and girls used the patty irons to make tarts.

Maps and Blueprints

In the past five years, the museum has accepted hundreds of blueprints and maps into its collections. Most of the blueprints related to the stockyards and meat packing plants in South St. Paul. In all, there are about 500 maps and blueprints.

On both sides of the exhibit case are the original 1978 drawings for the Old Town shops that are still in the museum building. Some of the contents in the shops have changed and some of the buildings did not turn out as originally planned. One of the museum’s current goals is to bring more Dakota County local history into the different shops.

Medical and Scientific Tools and Equipment

The museum has over 950 items used in the fields of science and technology and medicine. DCHS has a particularly good collection of early 20th century dentistry and optometry tools.

In 1943, Joseph C. Smith of South St. Paul patented his new invention, the sinusagger. He believed that head heat, caused by sinuses, caused hair loss and graying. The sinussager massaged the scalp, thus eliminating sinus trouble and the cause of hair loss. There are a number of different models of Smith’s Sinusagger in the museum’s collection. The simple
one shown here is an early model. Later models were in vinyl, velvet lined cases and included different types of electrodes, the name given to the glass bulbs placed inside the handle. While it is unknown how well Smith invention caught on across the nation, it was a local hit.

Dr. Orriman S. Ely practiced medicine in South St. Paul from 1916 until his death at the age of 79 in 1958. His family donated his medical bag to the museum in 1977. The bag contains 48 vials, all neatly labeled and many with their contents still intact. The drugs that could be identified in Dr. Ely’s bag include quinine for malaria; ammonia to prevent fainting; bismuth to relieve diarrhea and help an upset stomach; acid acetyl salicylic, an aspirin; quassia for ridding parasitic worms; emetine, an emetic; lobeline, a respiratory stimulant; veronal and choral hydrate, sedatives; phenocetid and camphor, anti-infective agents; phenactine and amidopyrine, pain relievers, and rheumatone, an anti-inflammatory drug.

**Military Items**

The military collection is relatively small compared to the other collections - about 400 pieces - but there are pieces from every American war except the Revolutionary War. World War II is best represented followed by World War I and the Civil War. There are even uniforms used by women who were involved in World War I and II. Some of the military items were objects that soldiers took from enemy soldiers as souvenirs.

The Civil War was the most devastating American War in proportion to its population. The war ran from April 1861 - April 1865. It initially began as a fight to bring the seceded states --
South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Texas -- back into the Union, but in 1863 it took on a larger purpose - the destruction of slavery. The Confederate flag shown in the exhibit was used by the Confederacy between March and April 1865, the last days of the war. It is likely that a Union soldier from Dakota County brought this Confederate flag back home with him as a reminder of his role in the war.

The museum also has a Civil War Union rifle in its possession. The percussion rifle is a 58-caliber single-shot muzzleloader made in Watertown, New York. About 12,800 of these rifles were made between 1863 and 1865.

The British field phone was used to exchange orders and information between field officers and higher ranking officers. This particular field phone is called a Fuller phone and was used throughout World War II which, for the British, was from 1939-1945.

This photo is of new recruits at Camp Ripley, Minnesota, 1939. There are a number of Dakota County men in the photo. Many of these men went on to fight in World War II and at least one of the individuals in the photo was killed in action.
Personal Gear and Accessories and Toiletry Articles
Small personal items like pocket watches, earrings, and eyeglasses and toiletry articles like razors and hair curlers make up a considerable portion of the museum’s, 2460 items to be exact. The eyeglasses on display date from the 1860s. The label found in the eyeglass case explains that they came from Carrie Johnson’s mother. Carrie Johnson was born in about 1859.

Political Materials

The Charles Lindbergh campaign poster is one of 400 objects relating to local, state, or federal politics. Charles Lindbergh, Sr. was the father of the famous Charles Lindbergh who was the first to fly across the Atlantic ocean. Lindbergh, Sr. was a Minnesota Representative in Congress from 1907-1917. This poster is from his unsuccessful 1918 bid for Minnesota governor. Other political materials include political buttons, campaign literature, and some governors’ papers.

Research Library Materials

The museum has over 11,000 photographs in its collections. These photos include tintypes from the 1850s, daguerreotypes from the 1860s, glass plates, and sepia prints from the late 1800s. There are also photos from throughout the 1900s.

Hannah Olson, 1930s

Hastings High School Class of 1904 graduation photo
In addition to photographs, the Research Library has hundreds of local newspapers. Most of these newspapers are in microfilm format. It also has a rare copy of the *The Daily Citizen*, the last newspaper printed in Vicksburg, Mississippi before the city surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant during the Civil War. The city was under siege from the beginning of June 1863 to July 4, 1863. When paper ran out, the daily newspaper was printed on the reserve side of wallpaper. Although this copy begins on July 2, it ends on July 4, the day that the Union forces took over the city. A copy of the last paragraph in the newspaper is hanging to the left of the actual newspaper.

Besides photographs and newspapers, the Research Library also has volumes of state and local history, family genealogies, Dakota County Federal and State census records, naturalization records, plat maps, and cemetery transcripts, manuscripts, and oral history tapes. There are also resources files for every town and township in the county.

**Stockyards Objects and Documents**

Many of the items in the museum relate to the most important local industry in the history of South St. Paul - the stockyards. The stockyards first opened in 1887 and their rapid growth in the early twentieth century led to a transformation in the cultural, social, and physical environment of South St. Paul. There are over 850 stockyard and meat packing plants related items in the museum.

The *cattle horns* in the center of the case are documented as being from the first steer ever dressed when the first packing plant opened in the South St. Paul.
The oddly shaped **rubber boot** displayed in the center of the exhibit came from a bull - Randy the Bull to be precise. Between April 28, 1964 and March 28, 1965, Randy walked from International Falls to the Gulf of Mexico to promote the sale of U.S. beef. He wore specially made rubber boots and attracted national attention over the course of his 2,000 mile journey. He even had his portrait painted and it’s hanging on the exhibit wall. Randy’s owner, Carl Swanson, walked with Randy and financed the trip with the sale of key rings and postcards. The beef promotion trip was later recorded in a book and Randy made numerous appearances at fairs and parades.

Despite his celebrity status, Randy was sold to the Rifkin Packing Plant in South St. Paul in 1969 and slaughtered. He had fulfilled his role as a bull.

**Textiles**

The museum only has a small collection of textiles - about 100 pieces - but it does have some excellent samples of quilts and coverlets. This early 1930s **nursery rhymes coverlet** was created by 10-12-year-olds as a class project in Morgan, Minnesota. Their teacher, Gladys Schumacher, grew up in South St. Paul. She returned to South St. Paul after teaching in Morgan and is still an active citizen in the community.
Toys

Toys are very popular museum objects and they are also highly prized for their collectible value. The museum’s toy collection dates back about 120 years. Its most recently made toy is a video game machine from the early 1980s.

The **wax doll** shown on display is one of the oldest toys in the museum’s collections, dating from the 1850s. It has a paper mache head covered with wax and its arms are made out of glove fingers. Some time ago, somebody made a very good drawing of the doll. If you look closely at the drawing, you’ll notice that the feet turn backward just as the doll’s feet turn backward.

Wax doll, 1850s

Walter Kauper was the lucky boy who owned the **horse and wagon** on display. This style of toy was popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It appears that Walter was given this toy in 1908. The horse is covered with real horse hair and the harness is real leather.

Horse and wagon, 1908

In 1950, Claire B. Seekin’s father bought her the stuffed **toy cow** that is sitting in the doll carriage. The stuffed animal is a Hook ‘Em Cow toy. The Hook ‘Em Cows were a stockyards civic organization complete with a mascot, band, marching club, and horse riding club. Hundreds of people were members of this organization. Claire’s cow represents both a toy and an item related to the stockyards.

Hook ‘Em Cow toy, 1950
The reed **doll carriage** was given to Marion Day of Farmington in 1903 when she was just 3 years old. Her name is scratched on the bottom of the carriage.

**The Rest of the Collection**

The items in the exhibit are only a small fraction of what is in the museum's collection. In fact, only about 5% of the collection is on display throughout the entire building. The rest of the items are in storage. There is a constant attempt to rotate materials in and out of storage so that the public may see different artifacts. It is also harmful to have objects on display for too long because light and some of the display materials will damage artifacts after a period of time. The museum also has a number of artifacts used in its travelling education program.

In addition to the collections highlighted above, the museum also has items that pertain to natural history artifacts (200 items), archaeology (500), transportation (460, though no large vehicles), woodworking (330), sports (73), advertising (300), armaments (565), leather working (220), and textile working (515), and merchandising (724).
Museum Trivia

- Early workers in the museum once claimed that the barber chair in the barbershop was from 1788. Actually, they misread the patent date - it was patented Feb. 17, '88 (1888).

- The wood in the blacksmith shop was taken from a train depot in Castle Rock.

- In 1992, the bomb squad was called to the museum to retrieve an active Civil War cannonball. Apparently, the powder in old cannonballs breaks down into nitroglycerine, a material that is highly explosive.

- Dakota the cat lived inside at the museum from 1992-1998. During his tenure, he eliminated all rodent and bat populations.

- The reason the Great Hall is because the Society originally planned to build a two story house in there. However, the two story house was never built.

- The wall mural was painted by John Acosta and Carlos Menchaca in 1982 and the floor map was painted by John Acosta, Carlos Menchaca, and Jose Lopez in 1989 for the 50th anniversary of the Society.

- One of the oldest items is the museum’s collection is an Egyptian sarcophagus for a baby girl. It was found near Sakar, Egypt in 1929 and dates to 600 B.C.

-- The first membership in 1939 cost $0.50.

-- There is 6,750 square feet for exhibit space, and 3,000 square feet for collections storage.

-- There are 17 manual typewriters in storage and most date between 1920 and 1950.