



Anoka County
Historical Society



HISTORY 21

Volume 48 No.1 January-February 2018

We love history yes we do, we love history how 'bout you?

AnokaCountyHistory.org

History 21 (in honor of the 21 cities in Anoka County) is published by the Anoka County Historical Society six times yearly as a member benefit. The ACHS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Contributions are tax-deductible within the allowable limits of the law.

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Front Cover: Superior Cleaners, located at 544 Summit St, Columbia Heights. January 1967.

Object ID#: 162.1.01



From the President

The holidays have passed and 2018 has begun. Time to start our diets, play with our presents and put all the holiday décor away.

Before we leave them behind completely, it is worth looking closer at a holiday tradition that elicits mixed reactions – and it is NOT fruitcake.

It is the “holiday letter.” Many folks love to get them and many love to hate them.

I have several friends who send me letters . . . some are delightful and some are downright obnoxious. In some I read well-crafted accounts of the adventures of my friends. In some I get to see photos of children I have never met but find myself looking forward to following their progress as each year – and letter – passes.

In others, I read of every possible ache and pain or anticipate (with dread) listings of impossibly perfect vacations and embellished accomplishments of every kid in the family.

All letters, whatever their tone, tell the stories of the year that has passed. Those stories are important – they are touchpoints of how people live. However pleasant or putrid, they are worth saving.

ACHS keeps an archive of holiday letters from families around Anoka County. If you’ve send a holiday letter, considering adding us to your list for next year’s edition (and perhaps print out one more of the one you just sent). We want to add your family stories to the collection.

May your 2018 be blessed and may your accomplishments be worthy of next year’s letter.

Orville Lindquist, ACHS President



From the Director

Wise people say the first year on the job, you watch; the second you plant seeds; the third you implement change. I'm happy to announce the Board of Directors will embark on a journey of strategic planning for ACHS in February. This retreat will provide an opportunity for tradition and dreams to meet and meld to create an encouraging plan for the next five and 10 years.

I'm excited to take the lessons learned from experiments in programming, fundraising, and exhibits last year and apply the best parts of each moving forward. Our staff has analyzed our collective strengths and challenges, adapting tasks to better fit personalities and natural skills. We have identified voids and will take this opportunity to creatively fill them so that ACHS continues to serve as a leader in the world of local history.

Thank you for being a part of this journey. We will certainly keep you informed during this process!

Rebecca Ebnet-Mavencamp, Executive Director



PRIVATE JAMES GROAT

James W. Groat was the great-grandson of John Groat, who immigrated to the United States from Germany in the 1700s, eventually settling in upstate New York. The Groat family remained in that general area, with each generation moving a little further away. James was born in 1824, and four years later his parents moved the family to Oneida Lake in Oswego County. Married and with children of his own by the age of 30, James took his family west, first heading for North Prairie, Wisconsin. He didn't find the land suitable, so the family pressed on to St. Paul in the mid 1850s, where his wife Rebecca waited with their children while Groat headed north. He reached Anoka in October, and found "the place suited me better than any section of the country I had struck in the west." Rebecca and the children arrived there on October 17, 1854, and with a few temporary exceptions, Anoka became home.

Groat became immediately involved in Anoka society. A carpenter by trade, he began building the first hotel (seen above) in Anoka, owned by Silas Farnham. Shortly thereafter, Groat and a few other men formed a company to run a ferry between Anoka and Champlin across the Mississippi, since the service didn't exist prior to that time. Groat even built the ferry boat itself for this venture.

Groat tried farming in a few different places around Anoka before finally building a house in Slaughter and Creighton's Addition in 1857. The family lived happily together for several years, but the 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln increased tensions between the North and the South. Groat didn't seem surprised by the outbreak of hostilities in April, 1861, signing up as one of the first volunteers from Anoka. As a Union soldier, Groat began three years of journeying which took him far from home. He was one of many; out of the 320 adult men in Anoka County who were eligible to serve in the Army, 97 percent, or 309 individuals, did so.

The journey began on foot, with the volunteers marching to Fort Snelling and

joining Company C of the First Minnesota. This Regiment mustered for duty on April 28, 1861 and has the distinction of being the first troops raised by Minnesota for Civil War service. Not only that, they were one of the first regiments anywhere in the Union to enter national service, appearing in Washington D.C. by July 4th, 1861.

Initially given orders to relieve another regiment at Fort Ripley near Little Falls, the men walked as far as Sauk Rapids before a messenger arrived to order them back to Fort Snelling: they were being sent to Washington and the front. That journey was accomplished in large part by boat and train, aside from a brief march through the city of Baltimore, Maryland, which was not friendly to the Union. While a previous regiment had met with violence, the First Minnesota received respectful treatment; Groat reports that “The only hostile demonstration that we encountered was that of a lady leaning over the balcony above us on one of the streets with a miniature rebel flag projecting from her bosom.”

While serving with the First Minnesota, Groat accumulated many interesting stories. The fact that he was not allowed to assist fellow Union soldiers at the Battle of Balls Bluff made Groat angry (he refers to the battle as a “slaughter” and considered General Stone to be a “rank traitor”), though he continued to hold a picket line along the north bank of the Potomac River throughout the winter of 1861-1862. Another group of Union soldiers, the 82nd New York, suffered many casualties from Confederate soldiers across the river due to their “buck and ball” muskets. These weapons could not shoot across the river, so the Confederates could stand openly on the bank and pick off the Union soldiers. The regiment’s commander, General Gorman, sent in several of the First Minnesota (who all carried newer, Springfield rifles) at night.

“The rebels next morning at break of day lined the bank of the river, looking for heads of the boys in the rifle pits and at a given signal the Minnesota boys pulled triggers, down went some eight or ten of the enemy,” recalled Groat. “Some tall running followed and in a few moments not a rebel could be seen on the opposite bank of the river.”

Groat said the following day the Confederates came under a flag of truce and “begged of us to cease picket firing, for they considered it a barbarous practice....” This struck Groat as rather hypocritical, but the two sides reached an agreement to end the sniping for the rest of the winter.

The following spring, in March of 1862, the First Minnesota seized the town of Berryville from Confederate cavalry. They found that the “proprietor of a disloyal sheet decamped, leaving his paper half printed with glorious Confederate victories. The printers of our regiment worked all night setting up type and printing the other half with glorious Union victories, and it was issued to the Brigade in the morning.”

On April 12, Groat woke up under his





“little dog tent... with my feet sticking out in the mud and frozen fast.” He freed his feet, at which point he discovered his shoes also frozen to his socks! Fortunately, he warmed his feet and didn’t suffer any permanent damage. He also met his brother, George Groat, on May 25 “while both looking for a chance to bathe in clear water, as most of the water along the [Chickahominy] river was too slimy and dirty

for even a moccasin snake.” Unfortunately, this marked the last time James and his brother would meet: George was killed at the Battle of Malvern Hill not long thereafter.

Groat stayed with the First Minnesota through the Battle of Antietam in September, 1862. In October, he transferred to Company A of the U.S. Engineers due to a disagreement with his captain. Although he missed his friends in the First, he wrote that “I have never regretted the change for I felt more at home in that army of the service.” During this part of the year, Groat also mentions a man coming down from Minnesota to bring ballots to all of the Minnesota men who were in service so they could vote in the election that year.

“After receiving my vote Mr. Genks handed me a nice package from my wife, which I prized much,” wrote Groat.

Company A (seen above) moved frequently, constructing infrastructure needed to keep the Union Army mobile, despite weather conditions such as those of January, 1863. Groat said they marched through “one of the worst rain storms... that I ever saw, it seemed to come down in sheets and no cessation for forty eight hours. The whole country became one vast sea of mud and water...” He describes “wagons settled down in the mire up to the axles” and “mules in the mire so deep that nothing but ears could be seen. The poor creatures were cut out of the team and left to die.”

Of the three field visits made by President Lincoln, Groat recalls the happiest as occurring on April 8, 1863, when “the whole arm[y] of the Potomac fell in line for the grand review.”

“The line was over four miles long, two, and some of the way, four ranks deep,” Groat described. “That vast line of blue, with bright bayonets fixed, was grand to behold, and as President Lincoln passed down our front a lusty cheer when up from a hundred thousand loyal throats.”

Not long after this review, Groat found himself once again back on the front lines near Fredericksburg for the Battle of Chancellorsville; his battalion had put up a bridge, but soon the Army of the Potomac was pulling out of the area to the northern shore of the river. Groat, waiting on the south shore to cut the ropes of the bridge, had a close

encounter with a Confederate soldier.

“...a tall confederate soldier came within a few feet of me and brought his musket down to 'order arms,'" recalled Groat. “After looking at each other a moment, the order came, 'cut the ropes', I was not many moments severing every cord, and the current soon carried the bridge and myself to the other shore [many of these were floating bridges]. I breathed easier then. Why the rebel did not shoot me, or take me prisoner, is more than I can tell.”

Groat’s battalion stayed on the move and were involved in many battles over the following months. In late November of 1863, they were ordered “to march to Ely’s Ford and throw a pontoon bridge.”

“We reached Ely’s Ford at dawn the next day...,” said Groat. “We took no rations with us, supposing our supply train would follow us, but no supplies came. The enemy [was] hovering around and our quartermaster dare not venture to bring us food. There we lie three days and four nights without anything to eat.”

By December 1, they marched back to their previous camp at Germania Ford to get food, but Groat said “I never fully realized before the terrible gnawing of hunger.”

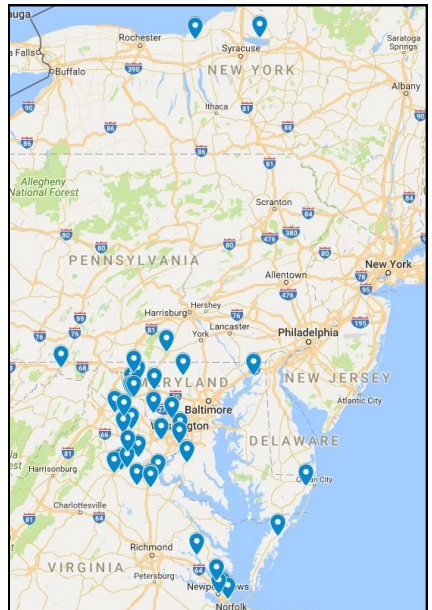
As 1864 opened, the tide of the war had started to shift and Groat’s service approached its end. One of the last jobs he recounts was “fix[ing] up things generally” around General Ulysses S. Grant’s new headquarters near Brandy Station in Virginia.

“Among the improvements I made on that tented field was a rough board shanty sixteen by twenty feet, and a table, I think, ten by thirteen feet,” recalled Groat. “This table was built in the shanty for the purpose of receiving a map of the same size to be shaded by an Italian Artist. This map embraced all the territory south of the Potomac and Ohio rivers to the coast line, and was designed to aid Grant in his great and last campaign.”

Groat had a quiet last two months in the service. He mustered out with an honorable discharge and a good recommendation from his commander on April 28, 1864, though he turned down an offer of a commission should he stay. On hearing “Revilee” sounding on that last morning, he says, “It was sweet music to me as I knew it to be my last one in the service.”

“The eighteen months that I served with the U.S. Engineers were full of adventure and danger which just suited me,” said Groat. “I was slightly wounded three times, and suffered sickness nigh unto death many times, was in seventeen pitched battles and many skirmishes, but have never regretted my service to my country.”

Groat recounted spending at least one night at 81 different locations over the course of his service, in addition to each individual battlefield. We are fortunate to have Groat’s memoir, written in 1889 based on diaries he kept for 30 years. Groat passed away in 1895, just a few weeks shy of his 71st birthday. He was survived by his wife, three of his sons, and grandchildren.



Desert Storm Collector's Cards

Although the Gulf War did not have the same impact on home front life as WWII in terms of rationing or sacrifices asked of the general population, it was nevertheless a conflict much in the public eye and mind.

Stacy Wendel, Coon Rapids, was all too aware of the reason for her Marine Corps father's absence. When several trading card companies began to put out sets of cards relating directly to the Gulf War in 1990, Stacy started collecting them. Of her cards that made it to ACHS, three different sets are represented. In total during that period, 10 different manufacturers each produced a set of Desert Storm trading cards.



The largest part of Stacy's collection was the set of Desert Storm Cards by Pro Set. 250 cards in total, they came in their own box decorated with the flags of the countries involved in the conflict. The cards themselves have tan camouflage backgrounds, with images and brief titles on the front, and short descriptions on the back providing more information about the subject of that card (for example, "Military Police"). The subjects ranged from Geography, Leaders, Intelligence Files, Governments, and Military Assets. This was the largest single set of Desert Storm cards produced by any manufacturer.


Also represented in Stacy's collection are a few cards produced by Spectra Star in 1991. Although intended to eventually be a full set of 300 cards, only the first 60 or so were ever produced. These cards were divided into five categories: Troops, Armor, Weapons, Aircraft, and Ships. The cards (see example below) have black and white backs with short descriptions of the subject; the fronts are primarily taken up with images, and have red, white, and blue borders.

The Desert Storm trading cards were popular in 1990 and 1991; manufacturers and retailers alike had trouble keeping them stocked. Unlike the baseball cards which were the main product of many of these card companies, the Gulf War had a broader audience and therefore (temporarily) broader sales. Stacy was one of many who wanted the information that the cards provided.



For anyone who is interested in these cards and other similar sets, this website seemed to be a good source of both information and sets of the cards themselves:

www.desertstormcards.com



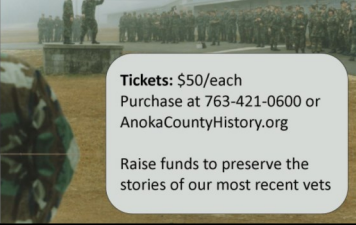
Tickets on Sale Now!

Finding Their VOICE

January 27 at 10 a.m.
Federal Cartridge Clubhouse, Anoka
Brunch, silent auction, & speakers

Tickets: \$50/each
 Purchase at 763-421-0600 or
 AnokaCountyHistory.org

Raise funds to preserve the
 stories of our most recent vets



A SPECIAL PROJECT KICK-OFF

Please join us on January 27th at 10 a.m. at the Federal Cartridge clubhouse building in Anoka to kick-off a preservation project of our most recent veterans.

The fundraising brunch will feature Major General Jon Trost, who served 41 years with the National Guard before retiring. He will speak of his experiences in the military, as well as the importance of preserving this newest group of veterans in the historic record.

Trost received several awards during his career including the Army Distinguished Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal with three oak leaf clusters, Army Commendation Medal with one oak leaf cluster and Army Achievement Medal with one oak leaf cluster.

Funds raised at this event will support the History Center as they embark on this project to collect oral histories from local veterans who have served during the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Bosnia. From the oral histories, the Anoka County Historical Society will build an exhibit in the museum as well as an online exhibit to showcase the stories collected. The Historical Society hopes to also collect artifacts, memorabilia, and photographs from families with service people during this time. These donations will also have a place in the exhibit hall and be digitally preserved as part of an online gallery.

Federal Cartridge has donated camping and hunting equipment for the silent auction, as well as use of the clubhouse. A brunch menu is planned for guests to enjoy as well as social time and a parade of uniforms through American history. The Anoka

Legion Post will present the colors and special recognition Awards will be given.

Tickets are limited, so advanced reservations are required. Visit the History Center in person, by phone, or on the web to purchase yours for \$50 today. Sponsorships are still available for businesses and individuals to support the History Center beginning at \$250.





FRED PRICE CONVICTED (AGAIN) IN MURDER OF MARY FRIDLEY PRICE!

A hush fell over the jury gathered in the room as the Judge's gavel fell with a heavy thud onto the bench. *This court is now called to order!* In this particular court at the History Center, on this particular night of December 14, an unsuspecting jury hunched over plates of chicken and green beans while witnesses ran lines in their heads.

"It was a delight and a privilege to be able to entertain people while bringing an historical court case to life while supporting the mission of the Historical Society," said cast member Andi Sherek.

The murder case was that of Mary Fridley Price, who died from a head wound during a fall. The historical event occurred in 1914, on an evening after Mary had enjoyed the theater with her husband, Fred Price. After the accident, he would claim she dashed after her dog, Chum, and plummeted down a ravine near the Town and Country Club along the Mississippi River. His best friend, Charles Etchison would back up his story for a year, before coming forward as the only witness to a very different tale.

As Judge Fish (Tony Palumbo) called witnesses to the stand, the Bailiff (Buzz Netkow) swore them in. The Prosecution (Terri Melcher) and Defense (John Huberty) proceeded to craft the story of the fateful night from each of the narratives. The doctor (Sherek) testified that Fred (Nick Severson) insisted on riding in the ambulance to the hospital after the fall, but also pointed out Fred found comfort from his grief that night with his mistress, Carrie (Christina Loechler).

The Private Investigator (Sherek) hired by Mary's father, David Price (Fridley Mayor Scott Lund) and Park Board Commissioner (Wally Wysopal) admitted the cliff in question was steep and quite dangerous. They added that the distance covered by



Mary's body couldn't have occurred without a good deal of propulsion. Help, it seems, that could have come from Fred.

Fred's second wife, Grace Swartz (Robyn Thanghe) said she often feared for her life and filed for divorce as a result. The defense, however, noted that no formal charges had ever been filed.

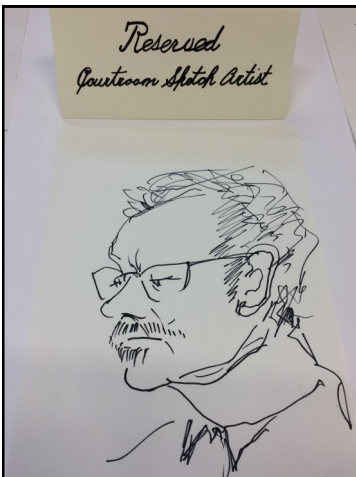
Much of the case hinged on the eye-witness testimony of Fred's best friend, Charles Etchison (Steve Florman). Charles claimed he witnessed Fred planning the murder, as well as hearing the "thud" of a rock hitting the side of Mary's skull.

The defense used this change of story to paint Charles as a liar. Was this not grounded in a deal to reduce his own role as an accomplice and broker a deal with law enforcement?

The flamboyantly dressed Carrie testified to Fred's many gifts and kindness. She showed little shame in her role as mistress, expressing her love for the man who had, during the ensuing year, since become her husband. However, when the prosecuting attorney (Melcher) asked how she lived with the knowledge of Fred's two prior marriages, Carrie's adoration turned to surprise and distaste at the news. Her shock grew when it became known that his first divorce was never actually finalized.

Fred tried to reinforce the idea that the whole incident was an accident. He didn't need her father's money, nor the lifestyle they lived, just her gentle self, he insisted. The antics of her ghost (Sara Given) however, showed the jury HER version of the story. The jury especially enjoyed how she kept her dog, Chum, from attacking him.

Historically, Fred Price received a first degree murder conviction and spent the remainder of his life in prison. His friend, Charles, had the murder charges dropped and was never tried for his part of the crime.



Top: Fridley Mayor Scott Lund and City Manager Wally Wysopal pose prior to the show. Middle: A scornful ghost of Mary Fridley Price (Sara Given) listens to the testimony of mistress Carrie Olson (Christina Loechler). Bottom: Court sketch artist Catherine Vesley recorded the event throughout the night, selling her work to attendees for a donation.



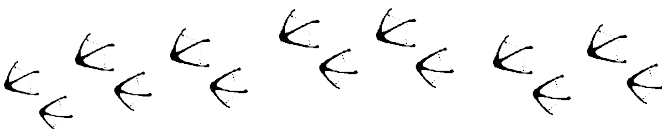
Volunteers—our gift throughout the year!

This Holiday season, as people made the mad dash into stores to do last minute shopping, obsessively checked the tracking status on online orders, or sat smug in the knowledge that all their gift purchases were done, we at ACHS celebrated a different gift: YOU. Yes, it’s corny, and I can feel you rolling your eyes at me, but that doesn’t diminish its truth.

Our volunteers don’t save their gifts for one day a year, they give so much of themselves throughout the year.

We rely on our volunteers for help greeting visitors, answering phones, organizing collection items, doing research and writing for the local papers, and also for mundane things like doing dishes, trolling months on end in the newspaper looking for a hidden gem, or mailings (see more on this on the next page). The bottom line is: our volunteers help us share the amazing history of our County, and bring smiles to our faces. You are the best!

Sara Given
Volunteer Coordinator
Sara@AnokaCountyHistory.org



SUPER HERO VOLUNTEER DAY!

At the end of November I sent out the Volunteer Bat Signal for help folding, stuffing and mailing our Annual Appeal letter. From an economic standpoint this letter is essential for balancing our budget, but also for letting people know about our project plans for the new year and how they can help.

We took over the Philolectian room and set up different stations around the room in our own ode to Henry Ford's production line—but with paper instead of car parts. We chatted, laughed, listened to music all while hands busily folded letters, stuffed envelopes, sealed envelopes or placed labels.

It was a collective effort and made me so grateful for the amazing human beings we have as volunteers. The morning crew tested the system and got a steady rhythm going. People joined and left throughout the day. Almost like it was choreographed, as the morning crew started flagging, and needed to head home

another batch of volunteers started walking in the door on their way home from work to take us over the finish line.

I can't say how much we appreciated all of your hard work that day, and how grateful we are to call you our friends and volunteers. THANK YOU to Linda, Marlys, Jill, Yvonne, Glenda, Joe, Dennie, Sandy, Shelly, Steve, Liz, Deb, Gloria, Lisa, Jessie, Grant, Al, and Betty.



Keep up with the Fun at ACHS!

Don't wait another two months to discover what the ACHS is up to. Find us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. We share photographs and artifacts from the collections, updates about upcoming programs, and a behind the scenes look at antics around the History Center.



Anoka County
Historical Society



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 Eileen Flint

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Northeast Bank
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**M
O
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Y**

Visit the History Center! Open 5 days a week, FREE:

Tuesday 10 a.m.—8 p.m.
 Wednesday-Friday 10 a.m.—5 p.m.
 Saturday 10 a.m.—4 p.m.

ACHS Board Meetings

Second Thursday of each month. 6 p.m. at the Anoka History Center
 Open to membership and the public.

Living Legacy: Memories that Stick to your Ribs

January 20, 2 p.m. at Northtown Library

Dusting off the old family cookbook and recipe cards has never been more fun! Join us to discover more about how you can use family recipes to honor traditions, tell stories, and still reflect on your modern situation. Come add to the living legacy that is both your past and your future.

January Fundraising Brunch: Finding Their Voice

January 27, 10 a.m. at the Federal Cartridge Clubhouse, Anoka

Tickets \$50. See page 11 for more details

A County Full of Growing Things

March 17, 2 p.m. at Rum River Library

Anoka County may not look like it now, but before the 1950s, this area had a strong agricultural economy. Join us as we explore these ideas, the Columbia Heights Garden Club, and the efforts of Marie DeGraff in this program.

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