

EXPLANATION

- Section Line
- Survey or Lot Line
- Wagon Road
- Railroad
- Creeks & Springs
- Rivers
- Churches
- School Houses
- Adjacent lands owned by same party connected by a line, thus
- Post Office
- Coal, Lead or Zinc Mine
- County Bridge

OUTLINE MAP
OF
LE SUEUR CO.
MINNESOTA
• 1898 •

Scale: 2 Miles to an inch.

Les Nouvelles Historiques de Le Sueur

LCHS annual meeting set for April 28



A date has been set for the annual meeting of the Le Sueur County Historical Society. The gathering will take place at 6 p.m. on April 28 in the 4-H building on the Le Sueur County fairgrounds in Le Center.

The annual meeting is an opportunity for fellow members to connect and learn of the many projects the Society has been involved with over the past year. Work is underway to catalog LCCHS artifacts on computer. Improvements have been made to LCCHS buildings and Dr. Ruth Collins will provide an update on the renovation of the red brick school in Elysian, Minn. Members will also receive a finance report for 2025.

Continued inside



The current LCCHS board of directors is made up of: front row (left to right) Board Secretary Dr. Ruth Collins, Director Ron Greenwald, President Bryce Stenzel and Vice President Nick Pollack; back row (left to right): Directors Mike Fredricks, Dean Pettis and Paul Malchow; Treasurer Colleen Carlson; and Director Bonnie Reak.

Newsletter of the Le Sueur County Historical Society

SPRING, 2026

The President's Corner...

Spring has sprung; or it is about to. As I write these lines, south central Minnesota is bracing itself for perhaps what might be the biggest snowstorm of the year. Area grocery stores are packed with people pushing around bulging shopping carts laden with food and water, in preparation for what will likely be a one- or two-day severe winter weather event.

While I am all for planning ahead, the reaction on the part of some of these well-intentioned people seems a bit of an over-reaction. Anyone who has grown up in Minnesota, or even spent a few years here, knows that it often snows in March — sometimes heavy. There are even legends surrounding St. Patrick's Day blizzards and snowstorms for the Minnesota Girls' and Boys' Basketball tournaments. We Minnesotans also know that because it is March, the snow won't stay around for very long. Some of the very people who are going on and on about the huge snowstorm that is supposed to be coming have also emphatically stated they aren't going to shovel their driveways when it gets here. Let mother nature take care of it! My point is, we (myself included) often overreact to things that, when analyzed, really aren't as bad as they seemed at first.

The same is true when discussing issues concerning our Le Sueur County Historical Society. The LCHS board recently participated in a work session to discuss what to do with the deteriorating Cleveland Church. Like many buildings of that age, it is suffering from not being regularly used. As many of you know, a vacant structure can age quickly. I want to assure you the LCHS Executive Board, with members I am proud to work with, is motivated to do the work of the Society and making it better.

The Society has already made enormous strides since 2019, when the Board was reorganized. LCHS is like a phoenix rising from the ashes of neglect and decay. We must not lose sight of that fact. Work has already started on the restoration of the Elysian Museum, with more to follow this summer.

I have written a letter to Cleveland's Mayor and Cleveland City Council, asking for the status of the Cleveland Church to be placed on their agenda. The hope is that members of LCHS can discuss with them the needs of the building, and what can be done collaboratively to bring the historic structure back to glory. I would like to form a "Community Partnership" with Cleveland. In this way, we will not simply wait for the spring sun to shine on the problem, in hopes that it will go away with time (it won't). Instead, we will put on our coats and boots and go "dig ourselves out" of the problem by resolving it.

Another initiative undertaken by the Le Sueur County Historical Society in recent months has been the scheduling of educational programs at various locations within the county in order to expand the Society's outreach.

On Presidents' Day, (Feb. 16), I offered a presentation on the life of Robert Todd Lincoln and his family after the assassination of his father, in April, 1865. Robert was the eldest son of Mary and the President; and was the only son to survive into adulthood. Robert was a self-made man in his own right - an attorney, ambassador, secretary of war, and president of the Pullman Railroad Company of Chicago. He died in July, 1926. The program was entitled, "After Lincoln: A Family's Journey Beyond the Presidency, 1865-1926." It was held at the Elysian Tourism Center, located off of Minn. Hwy. 60. We had a very nice turn-out for the event. An American flag donated by Board Member, Bonnie Reak, and an annual membership to the Society were given as door prizes. Cake and coffee were also served.

On March 10, author and speaker Jeff Sauve did a presentation on "The Works of Ora J. Parker." As a young boy, Parker moved with his family to Le Sueur County in 1862 — just in time to witness the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862. Ora went on to practice law in the county, after passing the bar exam in 1881. He wrote highly imaginative and humorous articles for the St. Paul Pioneer Press between 1902-1903, under the title of "The LeSueur Lyre." Parker gained particular fame for his piece, "Mummy Is Found in Hollow Tree," which was widely printed, and even copied, to suit other locations. In fact, Ora Parker inspired an entire new style of writing, known as "coffin stories." As Mr. Sauve pointed out, Ora Parker's writings did generate some controversy; because not everyone knew that they were completely fiction. Altogether he wrote 450 of these short articles; each being approximately 200 words. Ora Parker died in 1931, and is buried at Mound Cemetery in Le Sueur. Appropriately, there is an image of a lyre on his grave marker! This presentation was held at the Ney Center, near Henderson.

Please make plans now to attend the Le Sueur County Historical Society's Annual Meeting, on Tuesday, April 28, at the 4-H Hall of the Le Sueur County Fairgrounds, in Le Center. The Election of Board Officers for 2026, as well as an Annual Report on the current state of the Society will be presented at the meeting. This is YOUR opportunity to gain insights as to how the Society is doing, as well as your opportunity to have your voice heard as a member of LCHS. I look forward to seeing all of you there.

Bryce Stenzel

Le Sueur County Historical Society President

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Four seats on the Society's Board of Directors need to be filled and elections will take place at the annual meeting. Members in good standing are eligible to vote. Once the board has been elected, board members will select officers for

The mission of the Le Sueur County Historical Society is to collect and preserve the story of Le Sueur County - telling its history through historic sites, a research center, collections, exhibits and educational programming.



On March 10 author and historian Jeffrey Sauve presented a program on Le Sueur attorney Ora J. Parker at the Ney Center outside of Henderson Minn. Parker, who lived from 1856 to 1934, gained notoriety as a newspaper humorist who wrote under the nom de plume of "The Le Sueur Lyre." Sauve shared a number "Le Sueur Lyre" tales from 1903 to 1922.



2026 marks the centennial of the death of President Lincoln's eldest, and only son who lived to adulthood, Robert Todd Lincoln. To commemorate that event, LCCHS President Bryce Stenzel presented "After Lincoln: A Family's Journey Beyond the Presidency, 1865-1926" on Feb. 16 at the Elysian Tourism Center. Over 20 people attended. Cake was served and a prize drawing was held.

Ottawa Stone Church open weekends beginning in May

Beginning May 16, the Ottawa Stone Church will be open to the public on Saturdays and Sundays from 1-4 p.m.

Now that the Ottawa Stone Church in Ottawa Minn. has

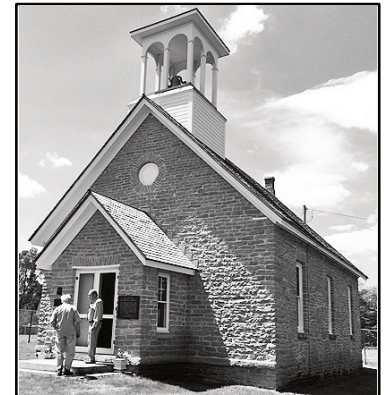
returned to its historic glory, the landmark is being made available for social gatherings such as weddings, reunions or similar events.

Rental of the church and grounds for an entire day (8 a.m. - 10:30 p.m.) is \$300. A damage, cleaning and key deposit of \$250 is required for all rentals. Late cancellation fees may apply.

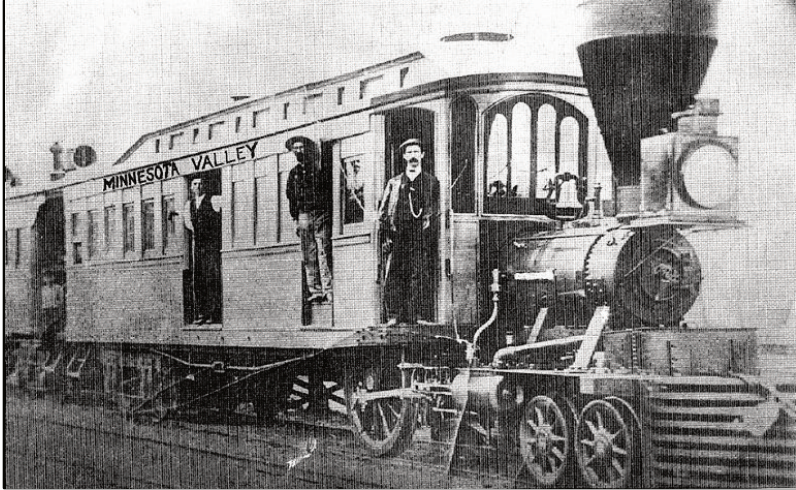
Rules and guidelines for renting the church are included on the application.

A rental application must be made to the Le Sueur County Historical Society for review. An application is available on the Society's website <http://lesueurcountyhistory.org/>. For more information, contact the Society via email at info@lesueurcountyhistory.org or call (507) 267-4091.

Make an enchanting day even more memorable with a unique touch of yesteryear!



Railroads brought growth to Le Sueur County



The Shakopee, a combination locomotive and coach built in 1865, served the Minnesota Valley Railroad. Organized in 1864, Minnesota Valley was the oldest predecessor line of the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis & Omaha Railway.

Between the last half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, railroads were king. Railroads were the premier mode of land transportation in both the United States and Europe. Railroads were the life blood of many towns scattered across rural North America. A railroad going through a small town and a railroad station located within that town could often ensure prosperity and growth for that community. If a railroad was constructed around a small town or through a small town, but with no station point, the town was more often than not condemned to wither and die.

During the Civil War (between 1862 and 1865), railroad construction came to nearly a standstill. After the Civil War, railroad construction started up again at a rapid pace until the "Financial Panic of 1893." By 1897, the economy had improved and railroad construction continued.

The major obstacles to building a railroad were lack of money and finding a direct route with no more than a 2 percent grade along with rivers and wetlands.

By 1902, five great steam powered railroad lines intersected or touched Le Sueur County. The Chicago, Minneapolis, St. Paul, & Omaha skirted the entire western boundary with its line from St. Paul to Omaha. The Winona and St. Peter (a division of Chicago & North Western) built a bridge across the Minnesota River and completed a line from Winona to St. Peter. The Minneapolis & St. Louis skirted the eastern row of townships dividing Lansburgh, Montgomery, Kilkenny and Waterville townships with its Minneapolis and Albert Lea route. The Chicago Great Western Ry cut through Waterville and Elysian townships when it built a line westward from Faribault, reaching Madison Lake in 1884 and Mankato in 1887. The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul traversed the county diagonally with its line from Mankato to Farmington in 1902.

The first steam railroad to enter Le Sueur County was the Minnesota Valley Railway Company. The Minnesota Valley Railway Company completed a branch line from Belle Plaine to Le Sueur on Dec. 3, 1867. The first train arrived in Le Sueur on Dec. 11, 1867.

The first station in Le Sueur was built between Oak and Maple Streets in 1867. On July 1, 1868, the Le Sueur Courier reported

LCHS thanks our adverti

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The best in
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**TODD'S
AUTO
PARTS**

415 4th
Montgomery,
507-36

on further track laying operations on the south end of town. The Minnesota Valley Railway Company extended its line to Ottawa and then to East St. Peter. "By August, after constructing the Ottawa bridges and trestles, with 1,000 men at work, they reached a point on the east side of the river opposite St. Peter (East St. Peter)."

On Oct 6, 1868, the first Minnesota Valley train arrived in Mankato. By 1869, there was daily freight train service between Le Sueur and Mankato. The MV's first engine was called "The Mankato," and had four drive wheels, five feet in diameter. The Mankato was carried up the Minnesota river by barge and delivered to the railroad at a point near Shakopee.

In 1869 the Minnesota Valley Railway had station points at South Bend, Mankato, Kasota, East St. Peter, Ottawa, Le Sueur, and East Henderson. The station in Kasota was jointly owned by Omaha Road and CNW. The first station in St. Peter was built in 1867 on East Broadway Ave. in East St. Peter. The east St. Peter station later served as a freight station when a new station was built in St. Peter in 1905. In 1869, the name of the Minnesota Valley Railroad Company was changed to the St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad.

In August of 1869, The St Peter Tribune said, "The first train of cars, consisting of a locomotive and seventeen freight cars arrived on the "Valley" road yesterday. Such an event is an epoch in the history

of the majority of town, but the citizens of St. Peter concluded it best to celebrate the event by substantial use of the additional conveniences at hand. Eight hundred bushels of new wheat for the Minneapolis mills were sent from the warehouse of William Schimmel & Company. The people here will chronicle the arrival of their stores of grain which will soon be ready for shipment. The road will appreciate such a celebration."

The name of the Minnesota Valley Railroad was changed to St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad on June 7, 1870. The St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad contracted with the Sioux City & St. Paul Railroad to build tracks from St. James, Minn. to Elmore, Iowa. The St. Paul & Sioux City and Sioux City & St. Paul Railroads were sold to the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis & Omaha Railroad on May 9, 1881 and became known as the "Omaha Road". Stock ownership of the C. St. P. M. & O. was acquired by Chicago & North Western Railway in 1904. Since 1957 the line has been known as "The Chicago and Northwestern Rail and Transport Company. In 1977 two or three trains a day ran past the depot at 109 West Oak St. in Le Sueur. The C & N. W. later merged with the Union Pacific Railroad. The line running across southern Minnesota is now operated by the Dakota, Minnesota, and Eastern Railroad.


The second steam railroad, the Winona & St. Peter Railroad, entered Le Sueur County on May 5, 1871. The Winona & St. Peter Railroad merged with the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad in 1867 but

Continued on next page



The Le Sueur Center Depot, taken sometime before 1930.

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CHECKING ■ SAVINGS
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Railroads continued

continued to operate under its' original name until 1900. The old Winona and St. Peter line crossed the Minnesota River and extended west. Kasota was the only station within Le Sueur County on this railroad. Their tracks ran from the north end of Mankato, just east of and parallel to, the Minnesota Valley Railroad tracks; crossed the Minnesota Valley tracks and the Minnesota River at Kasota, then continued up a steep incline, cutting through the Minnesota River Bluff on the west side of the river, just north of the St. Peter Hospital, turned north through St. Peter before turning west and heading through Traverse, Oshawa, Nicollet, Courtland, New Ulm and on to Sleepy Eye.

The first bridge across the Minnesota River was completed May 5, 1871. It was a long timber bridge that used timber truss spans. The first bridge was replaced by an iron center-pivot-style swing bridge in 1879 to allow for riverboat traffic. The 1879 iron bridge continued to be used as a secondary route into the 1950's. When the old line was abandoned, the railroad tracks through St. Peter and the bridge over the Minnesota River at St. Peter were removed. Three remaining piers (one of which was the center pivot) from the old 1879 iron bridge can still be seen today from U.S. Highway 169 when driving north from Mankato to St. Peter.

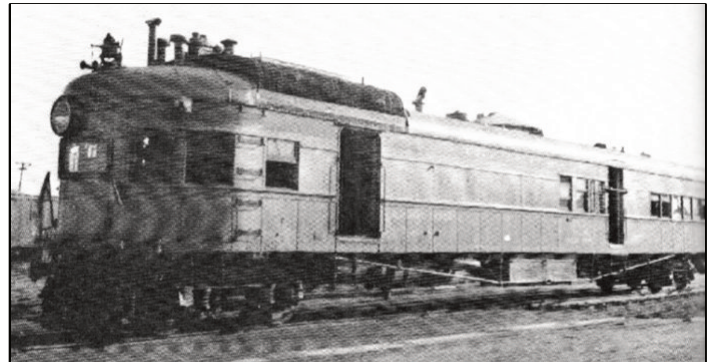
A third steam railroad reached Le Sueur County in 1877, the Minneapolis & St. Louis Line. This road was constructed to connect Ft. Dodge, Iowa to Minneapolis. It gave an outlet to the south as far as St. Louis, taking in the rich coal fields of Iowa and the lumber districts of the far north. The Minneapolis & St. Louis Line traversed out of the Minnesota River Valley through the established yet small communities of Hopkins, Chaska, Merriam Junction, Jordan, New Prague, Waterville, Waseca, Hartland and Manchester, and led to the creation of the new villages of Montgomery, Kilkenny, Palmer, Otisco, and New Richland. At New Prague, the M. & St. L. entered the east side of Le Sueur County and extended the entire length of the county, from north to south, passing through the townships of Lansburgh, Montgomery, Kilkenny, and Waterville, with station points at Hopkins, Chaska, Merriam Junction, Jordan, New Prague, Montgomery, Doyle, Kilkenny, Waterville, and several sidings.

The fourth steam railroad to enter Le Sueur County was the Chicago Great Western Railroad. This railroad built a line westward from Faribault, reaching Madison Lake in 1884 and Mankato in 1887. The C. G. W. RR cut across the southeast corner of Le Sueur County with station points at

Faribault, Morristown, Waterville, Elysian, Madison Lake, and Mankato. The Great Western station in Elysian was built between 1st and 3rd Streets in 1887. The station closed in 1967.

In order to accommodate the government requirement for passenger service, the Chicago Great Western began running the Dan Patch, a fast gasoline-fired motor coach and baggage car, between Madison Lake and Mankato in 1910.

The Chicago Great Western tracks between Mankato and Faribault were abandoned in 1995 and became part of the Red Jacket and Sakatah Singing Hills hiking and bicycling trail.



Some of the early gas-electrics were constructed with bullet noses. This is the 5903 locomotive photographed in 1941. (W.S. Kuba Collection).

A fifth steam railroad, the Chicago Milwaukee & St. Paul, ran diagonally through Le Sueur County in 1902. The C. M. & St. P. built a 60-mile branch line from Farmington to Mankato, and on Dec. 15, 1902, completed the southwest extension from St. Paul to Mankato. The line was also extended from Montgomery to Le Sueur Center in 1902. In 1903, the road was extended from Le Sueur Center to Cleveland and on to Mankato. The C. M. & St. P. tracks passed through Lansburgh, Montgomery, Lexington, Sharon, Cleveland, and Kasota Townships, with station points at Kasota, Pettis, Cleveland, Le Sueur Center, Montgomery, Lonsdale, Farmington, Rosemont, and St. Paul. By 1906, C. M. & St. P. continued south from Mankato to Wells with station points at Mankato, Rapidan (Station), Good Thunder, Mapleton, and Wells. On Nov. 22, 1926, the C.M. & St. P. became the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Pacific Railroad and was later known as the Milwaukee Railroad Company.

The advent of hard surfaced roads and large trucks brought about a gradual decrease in the railroad business. Passenger service was discontinued in about 1945. The Le Center Depot closed in 1977. The trains stopped running in 1978. The tracks were removed, and the railroad sold their right-of-way in 1981.

HELP US DO MORE

JOIN THE LE SUEUR COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

All members have a voice in LCHS goals and operations, an opportunity to help preserve Le Sueur County history, and free access to the Society's Genealogy Center.

LCHS Membership Application

Member Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS

- Individual — \$30
- Family — \$40
- Supporting — \$100
- Business — \$250
- Contributor — \$500
- Benefactor — \$1,000

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP:

- Research at the Genealogy Center without charge
- Receive Society newsletters, updates and invitations
- Cast a vote at meetings of membership
- Dues and donations are tax deductible
- Le Sueur County Historical Society is a 501C3 Minnesota nonprofit organization with historic sites in Cleveland, Elysian, Le Center, Le Sueur and Ottawa

I can help with

- Building and grounds maintenance
- Recording inventory and artifacts
- Educational programming
- Genealogy Center assistance
- Communications

My signature on this application confirms my commitment to supporting the mission of Le Sueur County Historical Society.

Signature

Date

Mail application with check payable to: Le Sueur County Historical Society

ATTN: Membership

P.O. Box 123

Le Center, MN 56057

For Society Records: Received _____ Reviewed _____ Approved _____



**Le Sueur County
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

**P.O. Box 123
Le Center, MN 56057**

**PRESORT
STANDARD
Permit #55
New Prague, MN
56071**

Genealogy Center opens for the season April 25 – Volunteers needed!

The Le Sueur County Historical Society is excited to announce the Genealogy Center will be open for a new season beginning April 25.

The Society's Research Center at 301 NE 2nd St. in Elysian is open Fridays and Saturdays from 1-5 p.m. through Sept. 19. The phone number is (507) 267-4091.

The building's electrical system was improved to eliminate the network of extension cords, accommodate computers and printers, and make plug-in access safer and more convenient.

The Genealogy Center has proven to be a valuable resource in researching family histories. The list of historic resources at the Center includes church histories, cemetery records and maps, birth records, marriage certificates and indexed obituary clippings from newspapers. At the Center you can find old plat books, maps, and town history books and files. Some family histories which have already been compiled can be found at the Center as well.

A user fee of \$10 is charged, but the fee is waived for LCHS members. If you wish to have Center staff assist with research, there is a fee of \$10 per hour. Document scans and copies are 25 cents each. The Center is equipped with a Microfilm scanpro printer/reader. Patrons can view archived newspapers from throughout the county and print selected items.

While most Center patrons are walk-ins, appointments can be made via email at info@lesueurcountyhistory.org or by calling (507) 267-4091.

Volunteers are always needed to help out at the Center with research, filing, organizing and cleaning. Anyone interested in being involved with the Genealogy Center — or any LCHS projects — should contact LCHS via email at info@lesueurcountyhistory.org or call (507) 267-4091.