

## History of Le Sueur County Old Settlers Association

### In the beginning

The Old Settlers Association was organized on September 20, 1876 with a membership of 27 members. Reverend E. Sanders served as its first president, J. J. Green was secretary.

In a news article published December 12, 1878 by the *Le Sueur Sentinel*, J. J. Green explains its mission: *The association aims to collect all possible information of the early settlement and frontier experience of this county and the Minnesota Valley.* Green goes on to write that the two meetings held by the association *"have given this locality an enviable prominence through the leading press of the State."*

This prominence in the press was likely due to high profile guest speakers the group hosted for their first two meetings: Judge Charles Flandrau and General James Baker.



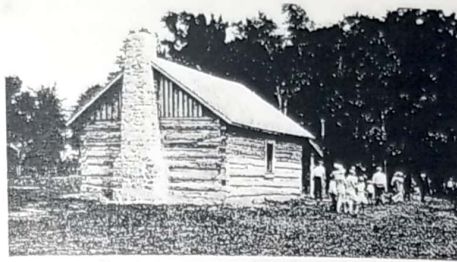
Charles E. Flandrau



James H. Baker

Flandrau was an attorney, territorial and state judge, a Sioux Indian agent, and led the citizen army in the 1862 uprising at New Ulm. Baker served as Secretary of State, was a Civil War veteran, Minnesota surveyor general, and owned and edited the *Mankato Free Press*. Both men were lifelong historians.

By 1882, there were 67 Old Settlers members. The group held an annual meeting and banquet, bringing together early settlers from all corners of the county.



Old Settlers Log Cabin on opening day in 1928.

### The story of the Log Cabin

It was 1876 when Le Sueur Center (changed to Le Center in 1931 by vote of the people) became the county seat. A few years later, the Old Settlers located there moving from Le Sueur. In February of 1926, the membership decided to create an official headquarters for their activities. A year later, the group endeavored to construct a building on the county fairgrounds. To preserve the memory of county forefathers, they chose to erect a log cabin. It would be their meeting place to congregate, share artifacts and stories. Foresight told them it would someday be a center for learning pioneer history.

The log cabin project was a county-wide effort. A log was brought in from each township in the county. The cabin was built in the cooperative spirit of the pioneers with everyone pitching in and enjoying the work.

The "log raising" began on May 1, 1928 for a cabin measuring 22 by 26 feet. The work was in the hands of experts – original settlers who as younger men had put up log houses throughout the countryside. Every detail of a true log cabin was adhered to in the design including rough sawn lumber, wood shingle roof, Kasota stone fireplace, and a covered front entrance.

The committee in charge involved John Burke, George Dressel, William Jameson, John Kluntz, Mike McCourtney, Martin Ponwith, August Vath, William Ziegenhagen, and Fred Zimmerman assisted by son Ted and the help of his county highway crew.

### The Old Settlers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Many descendants of pioneers listed on the original membership roll continue to live and work in Le Sueur County, four generations since the 1850s settlement. In the beginning, members of the Old Settlers were required to have lived in the county 50 consecutive years. Other ways in were being a Civil War veteran, the widow of one or a descendant of a Le Sueur County pioneer. The work of the Old Settlers Association lives on through Le Sueur County Historical Society whose members work in collaboration with the County Fair Association to preserve the log cabin exhibit for future generations.



In 1971, the county fair board constructed a building around the little cabin to protect it from the elements.

The log cabin is open to the public every year during the county fair - the third weekend in August, and other times by appointment. It is a special place that fulfills the original mission of memorializing early settlers who knew they were part of something big. Something that was to happen only once in history – carving a county out of the Big Woods.

The *Le Sueur Center Leader* published a special section on green paper stock to commemorate the log cabin's grand opening in 1928. The front page carried a headline with meaning for all time:

*"Let us keep green the memory of those pioneer men and women who developed a wilderness into a garden spot, and who are not with us anymore."*