



Society is gifted an original Dehn lithograph

Le Sueur County Historical Society's substantial collection of Adolph Dehn's art recently got bigger.

In November, LCHS was contacted by April Orcutt concerning a signed lithograph by Adolf Dehn called "Minnesota Farm." The donation of "Minnesota Farm" is from Richelle "Ricki" Williams of Nice, France and April Orcutt of San Anselmo, Calif.

Adolf Dehn was a high-school student of Lillian Murseth Orcutt. Born in Minneapolis on March 2, 1887, Lillian graduated from the University of Minnesota around 1907 and taught English, Latin and German (and possibly algebra) in a high school in Waterville, Minn. She and Adolf Dehn stayed in contact throughout his life.

April's aunt, Ruth Margaret Orcutt Williams, received the "Minnesota Farm" lithograph after Lillian passed away. (Ruth was her only daughter.)

Continued inside

Newsletter of the Le Sueur County Historical Society

WINTER, 2025/2026

The President's Corner...

Seasons Greetings! It is shocking to think that 2025 is almost history, and it will soon give way to 2026.

During the Society's 60th anniversary year, the Executive Board of the Le Sueur County Historical Society, as well as other dedicated volunteers, have been busy with the ongoing restoration of the historic Elysian school building. During the course of the MEA weekend (Oct. 16-19), a significant number of artifacts and furnishings were moved out of the building and into safe storage. As the Society readies for the second phase of the building restoration, it is important to keep these valuable assets out of harm's way.

The next phase involves replacing the school's windows. Some of the building's interior walls are currently blocking some of those windows.

Military and other uniforms were carefully removed from display cases to be cleaned. A large display case located in the building's front hall once held a large bison skull. The skull and the case were carefully removed, paving the way for re-creation of the original floor plan of the historic school. Moving the display case also set the stage for removal of two large safes which blocked access to the exterior walls.

While there is still much work left to do, we are off to a great start. Thanks to all who have contributed to the renovation effort by volunteering their time and expertise.

LCHS seeks candidates for governing board

An election of four seats on the LCHS board of directors will take place at the Society's annual meeting April 28. To be on the board you must be over the age of 18 and a LCHS member in good standing.

Our Society thrives on active member participation and a seat on the board is a great place to start. Please consider throwing your hat into the ring.

A meeting of the Society's Nominating Committee will take place in late March. All LCHS members are welcome to attend. At this meeting, the Nominating Committee shall submit the names of potential candidates for the available vacant seats

Last February, I offered an educational program entitled, "Stone Cold Tomb: Abraham Lincoln's Final Resting Place." The program highlighted the original construction of and several subsequent renovations of Lincoln's Springfield, Ill. tomb, which took place between 1869-1931. Kasota stone from Le Sueur County was used to decorate the tomb's interior — just one of its many uses as a premier building material.

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, as well as to pick up the story where I left off, I will be offering another program on Presidents' Day 2026 (Feb. 16). "After Lincoln: A Family's Journey Beyond the Presidency, 1865-1926" will begin at 7 p.m., at the

Elysian Tourism Center. It is free and open to the public. Last year's program was well-received, despite bone-chilling temperatures — a testament to the hardiness of us Minnesotans!

Best wishes to all for a happy, healthy holiday season, and a prosperous new year ahead. Don't forget to renew your membership in the Le Sueur County Historical Society. We need all of you to ensure our continued success.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Bryce Stenzel
Le Sueur County Historical Society President



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 the board. Nominations of potential candidates will also be accepted from the floor.

The Nominating Committee will then set the ballot for election of board members. No names will be added to the ballot during the annual meeting.

Anyone interested in being on the LCHS board can email info@lesueurcountyhistory.org; contact any board member or attend the Nominating Committee meeting.

Time and location of the Nominating Committee meeting will be posted on the Society's website, <http://lesueurcountyhistory.org/> and posted on Facebook (LCHSHISTORY).

LCHS partners with WEM for Dehn Day celebration

Famed Minnesota-born artist Adolph Dehn turned 130 years old on Nov. 22. His home town of Waterville marked the occasion with a special program for Waterville-Elysian-Morristown students on Nov. 21 and the Le Sueur County Historical Society was there to help.



LCHS Board Member Dr. Ruth Collins shared the Society's recent acquisition of Adolph Dehn's "Minnesota Farm."

school district in the past – most recently a mural depicting Dehn's art on the school building in Waterville.

Students in grades K through 4 and high school art students took part in the event. Along with works by Dehn, the Society displayed art by Le Sueur County artists David Maass and Roger Preuss

LCHS Board Member Dr. Ruth Collins led each group of students in a lively presentation along with Society collaborator Jeff Jarvis.

Students were able to view replications of the three artists' works provided by LCHS. Three lucky students were able to take their choice of the replications home. The day also allowed the Society to show off Dehn's lithograph print, "Minnesota Farm," which was recently donated to LCHS.

3 Stanton-Nutt has been working with students, exploring the three artists work. High school students have been

WEM art instructor Kelly Stanton-Nutt contacted LCHS to help with event. Stanton-Nutt recognizes Dehn's historical context in the county and LCHS has worked with the WEM



studying Maass' waterfowl paintings, Dehn's landscape watercolors along with his cartoon drawings. All elementary classes have worked on projects influenced by the art of Preuss, Dehn and Maass. The results of their efforts were displayed in the hallways of the school in Waterville.

WEM hopes to make similar art education collaborations an annual event over the month of November.



Students were able to view replications of works of art by Dehn, Maass and Preuss.



WEM students had been studying Le Sueur County artists all month. Student renditions of Maass' waterfowl art hangs in the school hallway.

Dehn lithograph continued

Ruth's daughter, Richelle Williams, inherited it from her mother in 2009.

Richelle sent it to April in 2022 when she downsized and moved to France. Richelle and April are Lillian's only granddaughters.

"We are delighted to have the lithograph return to the Waterville and Minneapolis area where both Adolf Dehn and our grandmother, Lillian Orcutt (nee Murseth) were born," said Orcutt

It is believed there are 100 lithographic prints of "Minnesota Farm." The print LCHS received is numbered 35 of 100 copies.

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Kate Bolke was the law in Le Sueur County in 1933

The Le Sueur County Sheriff's department was – and is – a man's world. But for a brief time in 1933 and 1934, the department was under the leadership of a woman: Kate Bolke.

Kate was married to Hugo Bolke who served as Le Sueur County's sheriff for 14 years. When Hugo passed away unexpectedly on March 16, 1933, the County Board convened for a special meeting. Statute placed County Coroner Dr. J.J. Kolars as the interim sheriff and a number of candidates applied for the vacant position.

According to a March 29, 1933 report in the Le Sueur News-Herald, the County Board appointed Kate to fill out the remainder of Hugo's term. The other members of the sheriff's department, George DeGonda of Le Center, Joseph Brown of Le Sueur, and Arthur Bolke of Cleveland were retained for service. Kate would act as jailer.

It wasn't long before Kate was involved in a high-profile crime. The May 3, 1933 edition of the News-Herald reported:

"C.W. Weis, of this city, and treasurer of the city for eight years was arrested in Minneapolis last Thursday afternoon and brought to Le Center by County Sheriff Kate Bolke on a charge of grand larceny. He was held until Friday morning when released on \$10,000 bonds to appear at the September term of District Court. The bonds were signed by Doug Tousley of Le Sueur and Jerry Keohen of Montgomery. The charge is brought on a warrant signed by Alderman Ray Christian and a result of the recent check-up made by McLaughlin Noreen & Co. of the treasurer's records covering city funds. The report shows that \$11,099.71 appears to be short in the amount of money on hand as against the amount reported on hand by the city clerk. We understand that Mr. Weis admitted that he was short in the city account at the time the bank closed last January. The Council has been advised of this alleged shortage, but had done nothing but make a formal demand upon the bondsmen for the amount."



In addition to being the only woman sheriff in the state of Minnesota at that time, Kate held the distinction of being the first woman sheriff of the state to have taken a prisoner to the state penitentiary in Stillwater.

Kate continued her service to the county into 1934 at an annual salary of \$1,400. Hugo's term as sheriff was set to expire in 1934 and Kate was the first to file for election. Her filing caught the attention of The Minneapolis Tribune which printed a feature on her in its Jan. 11, 1934 edition.

"If, offhand, any opponent asserts that women's place is in the home, Mrs. Bolke has a ready answer," the Tribune's Milt Davis wrote. "Home in her case is handy to the jail. In fact just a few steps across the threshold from kitchen to cells."

"Mrs. Bolke didn't hesitate recently when she got word that three masked men were holding up a store," Davis went on to write. "Without bothering to call in any deputies, she gathered up one of the guns that are handy around the house and set off to attend to that job all by herself. When she got there, the holdup men had vanished. But their departure – when they doubtless got word of her approach from a lookout – was so precipitate that they failed to gather any loot."

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"Maybe I take too many long chances," Kate was quoted as saying. "But somehow I never felt afraid. I never felt fear when my husband was sheriff, and I haven't felt any since I took office."

"There are a lot of things a woman can do," Kate went on to say in the story. "And in some cases, like those involving women, or girls, or children she may be better qualified than a man."

Kate placed an advertisement in the News-Herald on June 6, 1934 seeking support for re-election. "I have, since taking the office of Sheriff, given this county the best possible service and if re-elected promise the same courteous, honest effort," the advertisement reads. "Will appreciate Your Support at the Primary Election, June 18, 1934."

Kate finished third in the primary among 12 candidates. She lost the 1934 election to Anton Novotny 1,227 votes to 1,550.

At 52 years of age when she held office, Kate continued to be active in church and family after her term as sheriff. Born Katherine Hart on May 10, 1879, she was the daughter of Fred and Elizabeth Hart who farmed near Cleveland. She married Hugo in 1899 and together they raised five children: Mrs. Francis (Dorothy) Traxler, Mrs. Theofil (Lucille) Krenik, Fred, Arthur and Reinhard Bolke.

Kate passed away at the age of 83 on April 9, 1963.

- This story was made possible with extensive research by Sally Olson.

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Ottawa Stone Church bells were wedding bells on Sept. 27 when Kennedy Straub and Bill Randall were married in the historic chapel.

"The Society made a big investment in repairing the church and we are so pleased to see it being used by the public," said LCHS Board Member

Paul Malchow. "We would love to see more couples make use of this unique and historic venue."

The church is one of seven native limestone buildings left in the village and is listed with all seven others on the National Registry of Historic Places and are also on the list of Minnesota's Ten Most Endangered Properties. LCHS makes the church 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 plus a damage, cleaning and key deposit. Late cancellation fees may apply.

The renter is responsible for any and all damage to the facility occurring during the term of the rental by the renter or by guests. The renter is responsible for cleaning the facility and grounds after the event. Smoking is prohibited in all Le Sueur County Historical Society facilities. No open fires, including candles, are allowed in the Ottawa Church or on the property.

A rental 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.

Seeking old LCHS newsletters

The Society is asking members' help in locating LCHS newsletters printed before 2019. We would like to have an archive of past newsletters to better reflect Society activities over the years. If anyone has any old newsletters they would like to donate, send them to P.O. Box 123, Le Center, MN 56057.

New address? Let us know!

If your mailing address has changed, or you are no longer receiving the LCHS newsletter, send your current address to P.O. Box 123, Le Center, MN 56057. We need your help to keep our records current.

Too much too soon: LCHS requested to scale back grant application

The Le Sueur County Historical Society's hopes for grant money for the restoration of the Elysian school building were recently tempered by the Minnesota State Historical Society.

This fall, LCHS applied to MSHS for a grant in the amount of \$558,571.50 to fund the next phase of the Elysian school's restoration and rehabilitation. While the LCHS board of directors were unsure the State would approve a grant of that size, it decided to take a chance. If the grant application was turned down, LCHS still would have time to re-apply with a smaller request.

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Unfortunately, the LCHS board's hunch was right.

Fortunately, because costs and figures had already been assembled for the initial grant application, LCHS did not have to re-invent the wheel to submit a second application. LCHS Board Member Dr. Ruth Collins, who handles the bulk of the Society's grant work, recommended the Phase 2 portion of the restoration be divided into three segments.

The building's east and south sides make up the first segment. This includes masonry work, replacing all of the windows located on the east and south side, replacing the steps to the building and installing new entry doors. The remaining west

and north walls will be the focus of the second segment and LCHS plans to submit a grant proposal to the State in 2026. The final segment of Phase 2, and the subject of a 2027 grant application, deals with the building's basement windows.

SG, Inc. of Mankato Minn. has assisted the Society with the bidding process and will also handle the implementation of the grant once it has been awarded.

Phase 1 of the restoration centered around the roof and bell tower of the building. The next phase addresses the school's windows, entrances and masonry.

"We are obviously disappointed that the work on the building we had hoped to complete in a year will now take at least three years," said Collins.

Of course, if other funding sources were to make themselves available, the restoration could be put back on schedule. The Carl and Verna Schmidt Foundation has committed \$33,333 in 2025 to support the restoration project along with the same amount to the Society in 2026 and 2027.

LCHS received other interesting news concerning the Phase 2 project. Because the steps of the school on the southwest corner need to be removed and excavation will take place, an archeological dig is required to see if artifacts are buried in that area.

The LCHS board is exploring the possibility of Minnesota State University in Mankato coordinating the dig.



Ruth Collins, Bryce Stenzel and Bonnie Reak were among the volunteers who continued emptying the Elysian school in preparation for the next restoration phase.

Start the new year right ...

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 2026!

Do you have a friend who loves history? Give them a membership to 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
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My signature on this application confirms my commitment to supporting the mission of Le Sueur County Historical Society.

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

Look for more details in the Society's Spring newsletter.

Four seats on the Society's Board of Directors need to be filled and elections will take place at the annual meeting. Any member interested in a board position should contact the Board as soon as possible to get their name on the ballot.

Stenzel to present Lincoln program on Presidents Day

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, LCHS President Bryce Stenzel will present "After Lincoln: A Family's Journey Beyond the Presidency,

1865-1926". The event will take place on Presidents' Day 2026 (Feb. 16) and will begin at 7 p.m. at the Elysian Tourism Center. It is free and open to the public.

"Le Sueur Lyre" program slated for March 10 at Ney Center

Author and historian Jef Sauve will present a program on Le Sueur attorney Ora J. Parker at the Ney Center outside of Henderson on March 10 at 7 p.m.

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." Parker's work drew the attention outside of Le Sueur County and his writings were published in the New York Telegram and in Chicago.

"(Parker's) vivid imagination and skillful writing set him apart," Sauve said, "yet, unfortunately he remains largely forgotten in the annals of Minnesota's humorists."

Sauve has located number "Le Sueur Lyre" tales from 1903 to 1922 and will share some of them at the Ney Center event. Come and enjoy a relatively unknown slice of our local history.