

# CASS COUNTY CLIPPINGS

April, 2015

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## **My Arrival November 25, 1924**

Very early Tuesday morning Mr. and Mrs. Leon Ashton of Laporte started for the Walker hospital by car. They had a happy idea that if Mrs. Ashton would go to the hospital that day, the stork might in due time visit her. It finally developed that the stork was on his way and caught up with the Ashton car near Benedict. It was a better cold morning and the stork's strong beak could not hold the little bundle any longer and so from necessity he had to break all precedents and drop the bundle right in the car. Mr. and Mrs. Ashton became terribly worried about that package the stork left with them for the weather just seemed to turn forty degrees colder in a jiffy so Mr. Ashton stepped on the gas terribly hard and they arrived at the hospital at breakneck speed and none too soon, as the mite of humanity left by the stork was gasping for breath and almost chilled to death. Prompt action by the efficient nurses at the hospital saved the little son and preserved the health of the mother. Leon Ashton, Jr.

## **Pioneer Corner**

In December 1899, John Downes came to Cass Lake, and in January of 1900, Mrs. Ellen Downes and her infant son Jeffrey followed. The family made their home at Cass Lake from then on. Mrs. Downes was a licensed midwife when she was eighteen years of age, and she delivered a score or more of babies without an attendant physician. In Cass Lake, she worked with Dr. Hanley, Dr. Smeely, Dr. Whitstone who built the Tedford house, Dr. William Smith, Dr. Fraker, Dr. G. A. Christenson, Dr. House, Dr. T. F. Rodwell, and Dr. Dumas. She helped deliver over 300 babies in Cass Lake.

Ellen Downes was born in Wilmar, Minnesota to Joseph J. Downes of London, England and Ida McDermot from Ireland. Mr. Downes came directly from London to his brother's place at Wilmar and became a saloon keeper there. Ellen was raised in Graceville. She was married to John Downes, a bartender, who was born in County Clare, Ireland and emigrated from there in 1887. He was the son of Thomas Downes and Catherine Quinn. They were married in Graceville in 1899. Likely, they were distant cousins with the same last name.

When they moved to Cass Lake, they stayed in Gorenflo's hotel until they got a house near the roundhouse to stay in. Mr. Downes became a watchman for the Great Northern Railway. Mrs. Downes was a housekeeper and practical nurse. She often had as many as fifteen patients at her house in a year, and others that she took care of away from home.

She was also an accomplished artist. She painted china in company with Mrs. I. D. Converse and her cups and plates became collectors' items of those early days.

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### **Historical Society Receives MN Historical and Cultural Heritage Grant**

The Cass County Historical Society Board of Directors and museum staff were elated to hear that the local museum has received a MN Historical and Cultural Heritage Grant in the amount of \$6500 through the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) to conduct a museum lighting evaluation project. The present museum lighting dates to the early 80s and is inadequate to highlight the large selection of local historical artifacts housed there. The grant is financed in part with funds provided by the State of Minnesota from the Arts and Cultural Heritage fund through the MHS.

On March 19, a nationally recognized lighting expert came to Walker to review the present lighting, museum exhibits, and work areas to recommend new lighting which will improve the viewing experience for museum members and the public. The new lighting is expected to also be more energy efficient.

A second grant application will be requested and reviewed by the Cass County Historical Society Board and submitted by museum staff to implement the lighting improvements recommended by the expert during one of the upcoming 2015 grant application cycles.

### **Membership Renewal – 2015**

Cass County Historical Society members are invited to enjoy the museum's continuing enhancement by renewing their memberships for 2015 by sending membership dues to the Cass County Historical Society and Museum, PO Box 505, Walker MN 56484. Cass County residents who do not enjoy membership benefits (free admission, newsletter, etc.) at present may consider supporting this valuable regional historical resource by becoming members.

Various annualized membership levels recognize the support and care afforded the CCHS and the museum. Thanks to all for your support!

### **Bridgeman**

Bridgeman made the news in 1917 when Claus T. Walblom, a well known and prosperous farmer living near Bridgeman, found a chunk of pure copper on his farm. He had been plowing on top of a hill on his farm and his eldest son was picking off the stones. He picked up one which was extremely heavy for its size and on examination found that it was composed of copper. It weighed 13 pounds.

Alex Kinneberg, who had worked a number of years in a copper mine and as a prospector, examined the piece and pronounced it to be a piece of pure native copper. He said that it was not likely that there was any more of it in large amounts in this part of the country but that this piece had evidently drifted in there at some earlier period.

Bridgeman was a small settlement in May Township. It was settled by a group from Kentucky linked to Daniel Boone. Bridgeman was named after an old-timer, Bridgeman, who lived east and south of the store, post office and school.

Charles Williams started the Bridgeman store. Charles was also the school teacher and taught the first term in the new North Kentucky School. He was appointed postmaster on December 7, 1899.

Charles Williams was born in Kentucky in March 1876. He came to Cass County with his parents, eight brothers and four sisters in 1892. He united with the Free Methodist church in 1897 and remained a consistent member of the church until his death in 1903. He taught in the public schools of Cass County, and then conducted a store in Bridgeman. He died following an operation.

Oscia Williams took over as postmaster on December 22, 1903. Harry A. Bridgeman became postmaster on May 12, 1906 until Louis Williams, a brother to Charles, took over on July 29, 1907. The post office was discontinued on January 31, 1911 and the mail went to Motley

The Bridgeman School was located in Section 27 in 1908. Students from that school year were Berti Bixby, Nelly, Edward, Henry, Estlee, Alfred and Lydia Pietz; Silas and Arthur Samson; Alfred and Anna Sjowall; George Williams; Harris, Esther and Clara Anderson; Flora, Mary, Olive and Johnie Barnett; Esther and Edna Olson; Henry Rodby; Arthur and Dolly Dahl.

The North Kentucky School was located in Section 15. The old North Kentucky School on this site was sold in 1901. A petition was presented to the school board in 1911 to make arrangements to have the following children “conveyed” to and from school: Earl and Ethel Croker; Raymond, Minnie, Nora, Clara and Herbert Mannin; Harry, Nora, Nina Pietz; and Harold Williams.



North Kentucky School

In 1901, the editor of the Motley Register visited a “garden spot” in Cass County. He was referring to a ridge of good soil from Wheelock north through Bridgeman. At Bridgeman, he ate a roasted prairie chicken dinner with the Charlie Williams family and looked over their store. He noted the good fences and nice frame buildings. Andrew Rosvold had been there about two years and was already cropping 30 acres. R. W. Sipes had an apple orchard.

The St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bridgeman was organized in 1926 with charter members: A. J. Pietz, A. Pietz, Emil Pietz, Gust Pietz, Paul Flaner, Jacob Wendth, Herman Pietz, Marous Knuth, H. Strube, C. Voels, H. Fiseplohr, F. Jans, P. H. Marohn, Edward Pietz, N. P. Anderson, Milo Jans, Hertel Anderson and August Ronhovde. They incorporated on March 21, 1929. Church services were held in the Bridgeman schoolhouse until their church was finished. The church was built four miles north of Motley and dedicated in 1930.

Adolph Pietz was born near Oshkosh, Wis. The family eventually settled near Estherville, Iowa. Laura Rix was born in Germany and became a teacher. At age 16, she was sent to America to live with a sister in Lakefield, Minnesota, until the rest of the family could come. The Rix family met members of the Pietz family. Laura remembered a man named Gus when word came to her that a Pietz man wanted to marry her. She agreed, assuming she was to marry Gus. When they met at Lakefield on March 16, 1889, it was not Gus but Adolph waiting for her!

After their marriage, Adolph and Laura farmed near Estherville until 1900, when they, their two children, along with other families, moved to May Township. They moved all the family’s belongings in an ox cart pulled by one ox. Adolph made everyone walk because the ox didn’t need to pull any extra weight. The family had a small farm just west of the May Town Hall. When neighbors needed advice on sick humans or a midwife, they called on Laura; and for animals in need, they called Adolph.

Adolph's son Alfred and his future wife Clara both attended Bridgeman School. Alfred spent years going to North Dakota at harvest time to find work. He also played fiddle at many local barn dances.

The only thing that remains active today is the Bridgeman Cemetery. It was established about 1886 from land donated by Jesse Monroe Barnett. Over 200 persons have been buried there. Jesse, a Civil War vet, once played his drum at a camp that President Abraham Lincoln attended. Enoch Mannin, Jesse's father-in-law, was the first person buried at the cemetery. Mary, wife of Allen R. Bryant, died May 24, 1888, shortly after coming to Cass County and has one of the oldest stones.

Bridgeman's families had deep roots and ties to Estill County, Kentucky. Prior to pioneer settlement, Estill County was the site of a Shawnee village at Estill Springs, along the banks of Station Camp Creek. In the 1760s and 1770s, after John Finley, Daniel Boone, and Robert McAfee explored the area, many early settlers entered the region by way of an old buffalo and Indian trace that led to Boonesborough in what is now Madison County. Evidence of the once-thriving iron industry can be found in the ruins of the Estill steam furnace, which operated from 1830 to 1874; the Cottage furnace; the Red River iron works; and the Fitchburg furnace. The iron industry declined after 1865 when iron deposits and timber to fire the furnaces were depleted, and innovations in the iron industry made charcoal furnaces obsolete.

George and Flarra Belle Horn both came from Estill County, Kentucky. George and Flarra Belle were married in 1893. George was 20 years old and Flarra Belle was 16. Soon after their marriage, they started their journey to central Minnesota to homestead a track of land at the cost of \$1.00 per acre. They homestead 240 acres. Their first home was a log cabin with a dirt floor and no glass for windows, just openings. It was built on Horse Shoe Pond. As time went on, they eventually built a very large home on Horse Shoe Pond. They had 14 children. George cut trees from which he hewed railroad ties and farmed the land they had cleared. He died in 1933.

Zach and Estella Barnett lived in May Township for nearly 50 years and later moved to Pillager. They cleared about 40 acres of farm land with an axe, grub hoe and a hand-operated stump puller. He also hewed ties for the railroad and cut pulpwood to sell. He bought adjoining land and owned about 200 acres in May and Sylvan Townships. His grandparents and parents were born in Kentucky.

Squire William Walter Bryant arrived in Cass County in 1889 from Kentucky, with the intention of doing surveying, which was necessary before it could be organized as a county. He was followed by his father, Allen Riley Bryant, and his brother Julius, who was also a surveyor.

Will's wife, Sarah Bell (Horn) Bryant died of TB in 1895, leaving six children ages two through ten. Arthur Bryant and M.M. Bryant were Will's sons. A younger brother died of pneumonia and their grandmother died a month after arriving here from a kidney infection attributed to her "shyness" to using the toilet on the Immigrant Train.

Three years after their mother's death, Will married the school marm of North Kentucky School, who was brave enough to take on the responsibility of six children. After her death, doctors advised Will to liquidate his nearly 3,000 acres of land and return to Butler County, Kentucky.

Will was selected to go to the Minnesota Legislature in 1891 to organize Cass County, which resulted in one school district and one road district, to which all county taxpayers contributed. He held three Cass County offices; Commissioner (1893-97), Surveyor (1897) and Treasurer (1897-99) and was Commissioner of Territorial Schools. He moved his family to Walker in 1897, where his family experienced the turmoil deriving from the Battle of Sugar Point in October 1898.

Nearly the entire Bryant family moved back to Kentucky around the turn of the century. The Bridgeman Cemetery reveals the human toll on the Bryant family. Approximately a dozen Bryants – most of them very young – are buried there.

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## Grist Mill Stone

Out in front of the Cass County Museum is a large stone, part of a grist mill which was used in grinding flour for the pioneer homemaker. These grist mills were far and few in the Northwoods. Still, bread bakers needed to get their flour from somewhere. In 1967 Austin T. Larson, who farmed down in Homebrook Township, hauled this extremely heavy stone to Walker where it is now in front of the building. Austin found the stone in 1937 when he was an inspector of the high-line (power) in that area. It was lying on the property of the Pontoria Store east of Backus.

Albert V. Smith put up a store building on his farm near Pontoria and installed a gas filling station on July 31, 1926. Herman and Hannah Albrecht were owners in the 30s. Store owner Herman Albrecht gave it to Austin after he had shown interest in the stone. Thirty years after seeing the stone near the store, Austin loaded it on a low trailer and brought it to Walker. The Cass County Historical Society began searching for the owner and operator of this grist mill. Rose Uhlig and Mrs. Will Shepard ran into a [stone] wall in helping search for ownership of the stone. To date, we still do not know if we had an operating grist mill in the Pontoria Store area. If you have any information, please let the historical society know.



## Birch Bark Canoe

The canoe which sits above the trapper's shack in the Cass County Museum was crafted by the Ojibwe. It was saved from ruin by Warren Huffman of Bungo Township and had a place behind his garage for many years. The canoe was donated to the Walker Wildlife Museum in 1970 and was part of the Ojibwe village diorama before having a permanent home in the Cass County Museum. The canoe was fashioned from large pieces of birch bark, with cedar strips on the inside. The black pitch used to seal the joints was made from ground charcoal and tree pitch. This canoe was mainly used for wild ricing. The hand-made ricing pole came with the canoe. There are only a few canoe makers still practicing their trade today. Building a canoe is so labor intensive and the large pieces of birchbark so rare, that very few craftsmen are building these canoes these days.

Warren Huffman came with his family from Ottertail County to Cass County in 1894 by covered wagon and team. As they traveled northward in their wagon, they came through smoke and small patches of fire. They finally came to their homestead property and set up their camp. There was a tall stand of pine which his father planned to cut for money to start the family farm. Their original homestead was just west of Pine River. As the fire, which became known as the infamous Hinckley fire, roared through the forest north of the family, his father picked up all the cooking utensils he could grab, hitched up the team and drove to a shady hill, where there were only a few low willows growing near Bungo Creek, and prepared the family to ride the fire out.

A large swath of timber through the northern part of Cass County was lost to the fire. All the virgin timber on their 160 acre homestead was destroyed. The fire was driven by high winds which carried the burning tree tops hundreds of feet, dropping blazing wood to start new fires in nearby areas. After the fire had passed, the peat burned all that fall, down six feet and the turf and subsoil burned down 18 inches leaving nothing but stones in

most areas. Everywhere around their homestead, it looked like a blackened prairie. When the fire passed over them, the Huffmans realized that they had saved themselves, the wagon, the cattle, the horses and their food supply. The family spent six weeks on the hill before they could safely walk over the burnt earth.

No rain fell that fall and it was not until the heavy snows came that the underground fires were quenched. The family killed some of their cattle to sell. There was no government help to turn to in those days, and if it had not been for the kindness of George Barclay who ran a general store in Pine River and who gave them credit, the family would have starved to death. Barclay helped out many people who had been burned out during the fire. Fortunately some of the spruce swamps escaped the fire and partridge were still plentiful.

Warren grew to manhood and joined the Navy and fought in WWI. When the war was over, he worked with the Indians near Red Lake and learned the Ojibwe language. He returned to Cass County in 1929 where he logged and built a log cabin typical of the one his father built. He survived the Great Depression, wintered 100 head of stock and through the years expanded his land holdings from 80 to 320 acres in Cass and Crow Wing counties. He wanted to travel and traveled as a hobo on the trains in the 30s. Coming back to Cass County, he harvested wild rice with the Ojibwe men and lived in their camps.

In 1958 he bought himself four buffalo from a ranch in South Dakota. Once a year they shed their wool in large strips. Warren would gather the wool and spin it much the same as sheep's wool. Once a year, he killed a buffalo for meat for his table and sold small amounts locally. The hides, which once tanned, were used to make moccasins. Warren, at the age of 81, made 26 pairs of moccasins during one winter.

Warren Huffman died at the age of 84 on January 19, 1975. His son Ronald of Pine River survived him. He is buried in Pine Ridge cemetery in Pine River.

## 2015 Member List

Virginia Abullarade  
Mike Bergmann  
Steve Bilben  
Margaret Brown  
Clarence Byersdorfer  
Audrey Chelberg  
Robert and Florence Crow  
Jerry and Vera Demars  
Richard & Joan Downham  
Jim & Shirley Dowson  
Dan & Sue Eikenberry  
First National Bank, Walker  
Rudd B. Thabes & Suzanne Frambers  
Neal & Kathy Gaalswyk  
Jerry & Renee Geving  
Hummingbird Press  
Tom & Andrea Girtz  
Bob & Shirly Jewell  
Karen Keener  
Karen Kezele  
Cecelia McKeig  
Keith & Janice Matson  
P. J. Matthews  
Jim & Leona O'Neal  
Chris & Dorothy Opheim  
Lois Orton  
Bob & Sandy Pauly  
Robert Redfield, Jr.  
Robert Rofidal  
Erma Schantle  
Glenna Tappe  
Bob & Ann Winegar  
David Yde  
Don Flyckt  
Boy Lake Township  
Gould Township  
Blind Lake Township  
Powers Township  
Shingobee Township  
Smoky Hollow Township  
Wilkinson Township  
Lake Shore  
Walker