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# The Hilltop

News from the Dodge County Historical Society

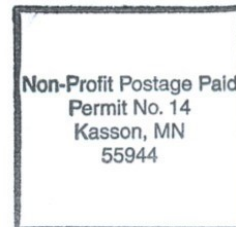
Spring 2019

## COME SEE US AT THE DODGE COUNTY FAIR!

July 17-21

1937 Izaak Walton League Log Cabin (Kasson)

DODGE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
BOX 456  
MANTORVILLE, MN 55955



## IF THESE STONES COULD SPEAK

As usual, Michael Eckers struck the right note. In his keynote address “Reminiscences of Wasioja” for the *Restoration Celebration* on June 8, he reminded all in attendance that the stones of the Civil War Recruiting Station are original. They were here in 1861 when patriotic Minnesotans marched there to enlist. If only these stones could speak, rather than stand as silent witness to the events that unfolded. Eckers is an expert on the subject, having authored the definitive book *The Boys of Wasioja* (2009).

The scope of work in the Legacy Amendment grant through the Minnesota Historical Society was for exterior repointing and reroofing, which was completed last fall by Restoration Services (Faribault). Remaining funds allowed Nick Slavik Painting & Restoration (New Prague) to finish the interior replastering and repainting this spring. The architect for the project was MacDonald & Mack Architects (Minneapolis).

For the occasion, the reenactment unit Third Minnesota Infantry, Company C, was on hand to lend an air of authenticity. The string band Young & Old Timers (Rochester) provided live period music. Lions Club of Dodge Center offered a



Michael Eckers delivers the keynote address in costume as Colonel James George, Second Minnesota Infantry. George repurposed his law office as a recruiting station in 1861. Photo by Diane Bianchi.

lunch for all attendees who wished to partake. In addition to Eckers, another featured speaker was Sara Yaeger of Bluestem Heritage Group (Saint Paul), the consulting firm that has recently prepared an interpretive plan for the Wasioja Historic District (see From the Desk of the Director on the following page for details).



Original chair and desk of James George, graciously loaned by descendant Neil Farnham for furnishing the recruiting station. Photo by Shane Christen.

## MEET US AT THE FAIR

### FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

#### Board Members

Scott French, President

David Hanson, Vice President

Lois Hancock, Secretary

Thomas Monson, Treasurer

James Checkel

David Chicos

Linda Jerviss

Greg Nelson

Mark Packard

#### Executive Director

Donald Westfall

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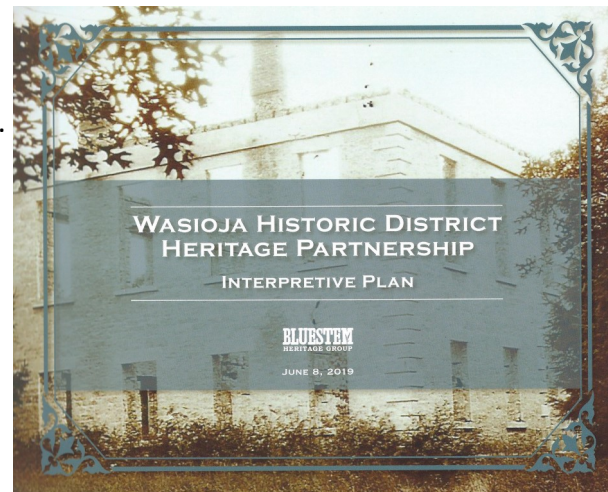
[www.dodgecountyhistorical.org](http://www.dodgecountyhistorical.org)



*The mission of the Dodge County Historical Society is to collect, preserve, and disseminate knowledge of the history of Dodge County and its relation to the history of the state of Minnesota.*

In this space in the last issue, Bluestem Heritage Group (Saint Paul) was reported as the consultant for the Partnership Program grant received from the Minnesota Historical Society to produce a Wasioja Historic District interpretive plan. Funds were awarded through the Legacy Amendment Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund in the amount of \$24,500. This has now resulted in the development of a document for the Wasioja Historic District, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. The publication is available for perusal at the museum.

DCHS worked with Dodge County on the project in what is referred to as the Wasioja Heritage Partnership. Dodge County Engineer Guy Kohlhofer served as the county representative. In addition, a community advisory committee (CAC) was formed to assist with the work. Thank you to all who gave of their time and talent.



*Wasioja Historic District Heritage Partnership Interpretive Plan (2019).*

### DCHS RECEIVES NEW COPIER/PRINTER FROM DODGE COUNTY IT



DCHS is the proud recipient of a new Ricoh copier/printer. This came courtesy of Dodge County IT. It replaced a Konica model that was also here thanks to the county. One notable feature that was not available before: color copying and printing.



Join us at the Dodge County Fair in Kasson from July 17-21. DCCHS will once again be housed in the 1937 Izaak Walton League Log Cabin (pictured at left).



### UNDERWAY FOR FREEDOM: USS DODGE COUNTY (LST-722)

In the nomenclature of the United States Navy, types of vessels have been traditionally named for specific persons, places, or things. Starting on July 1, 1955, LSTs (landing ship tank) were named for counties. As a result, LST-722 was designated the *Dodge County* in the *Chelan County*-class. Technically, this honor applied to all counties with the name Dodge, including those in Georgia, Nebraska, and Wisconsin.



Built by Jeffersonville Boat & Machinery (Jeffersonville, Indiana), the ship displaced 1,780 tons, had a length of 328 feet, and a beam of 50 feet. She was commissioned on September 13, 1944, and assigned to the Asiatic-Pacific Theater of World War II. LST-722 participated in the landings on the islands of Palawan and Mindanao in the Philippines. One battle star was earned for service in the war. In 1962, USS *Dodge County* saw duty in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Decommissioned in 1969, she was sold to Thailand in 1975. Renamed HTMS *Prathong* in the Royal Thai Navy, the LST was utilized as an amphibious warfare training ship for the Royal Thai Marine Corps before being decommissioned in 2003 and abandoned.

# THE WASIOJA BOYS DESERVE A DETAILED ACCOUNT

EXTRACTS FROM CAPT. CILLEY'S LETTER

On June 8, 1906, the *Mantorville Express* published the following from a Civil War letter of Captain Clinton A. Cilley, Company C, Second Minnesota Infantry:

*Capt. Cilley's letter is dated, "Right Wing of the Army of the Tennessee, camp just inside the state line, Mississippi, May 14, 1862," and from it we make the following extracts:*

*Col. George has suffered with acute rheumatism and accompanying fever pain so severe that any other officer would have got a sick furlough for it and with good reason; but he sticks close to us and is determined to see the fight. He looks a little thin, but his color is good and he is the same hearty Jas. George as ever.*

*The Wasioja boys deserve a detailed account. To begin with the tallest, Lee. He joined us soon after we got over this side of the river and behaved very quietly and well until one Sunday, moving with the wagons, as wagon guard, he got beastly drunk, fell to quarreling and gambling and lost two-thirds of his four months pay. Since then he has been stiller and more subdued than ever. His health is good. He is a good soldier when sober, albeit, maybe, a bit excitable in danger.*

*H. K. Couse is first sergeant and makes a good one. He tents and messes with the second lieutenant and myself. The Cassedays, William and John, are as good boys and as good soldiers as ever were in a company. Mrs. Casseday ought to be proud of having three such men as her husband and two sons in the service. They are strong, tough and well.*

*Rossiter's discharge has been made out and forwarded to division and department headquarters. We expect it every day. His spirit is good but he is not tough enough to endure the terrible life we have led. This regiment, I believe, has had the hardest service of any in the pay of the government.*



CLINTON A. CILLEY (1837-1900). Although referred to as a captain in the article, he finished the Civil War as a major and brevet colonel. Cilley received the Medal of Honor for bravery at the 1863 Battle of Chickamauga in Georgia. A professor of languages and mathematics at the Wasioja seminary when the war started, he was instrumental in getting several students to enlist.

The letter of Captain Cilley goes on to mention other Wasioja boys and will be continued in the next issue of *The Hilltop*. The soldiers referenced above were familiar in 1862, but perhaps not today. They are as follows:

James George (1819-1882)

Henry C. Lee (1845-1931)

Harrison K. Couse (1840-1915)

John J. Casseday (1843-1927)

William M. Casseday (1845-1906)

Darwin B. Rossiter (1843-1920)

# DCHS BOARD OF DIRECTORS UPDATE

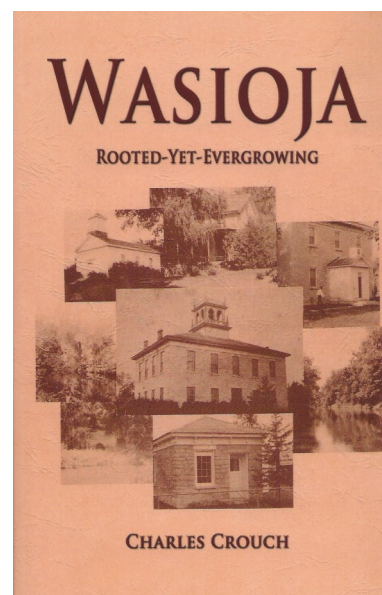


The annual DCHS Membership meeting board election, held on April 6 at the Old School Café (Mantorville), resulted in the return of incumbents David Chicos and Greg Nelson to their positions. However, Philip Haukom was term-limited for the third seat at stake. Mark Packard prevailed over Nancy Smith in the contest for that opening. Then, on April 25, at the next regular board meeting, officers were elected for 2019. Scott French and Lois Hancock were reelected as president and secretary, respectively. The vacancy that existed in the vice president position was filled by David Hanson. Thomas Monson was elected to replace Linda Jerviss as treasurer.

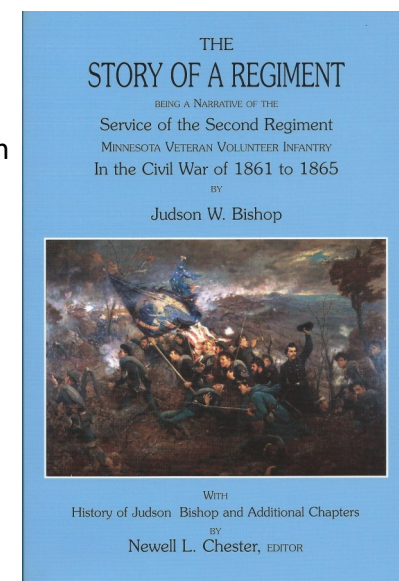


DCHS Board of Directors meets the third Thursday of every month, usually in the 1869 Saint John's Episcopal Church in Mantorville (which houses the Dodge County Museum).

## MUSE NEWS



Thank you to the Friends of Wasioja for resupplying the museum store with these two popular titles. Both are in paperback. *Wasioja* (1977) by Charles Crouch sells for \$16.00. *The Story of a Regiment* (2000) by Judson W. Bishop is priced at \$15.00. The title was originally published in 1890. This reprint from North Star Press (Saint Cloud) was edited by Newell L. Chester and includes additional material. Crouch was raised in Wasioja. Bishop was eventually promoted to colonel of the Second Minnesota Infantry in the Civil War.



## A FUNNY WOMAN (FROM KASSON)

PEG LYNCH: STAR OF HER OWN SITCOM

Astrid King, daughter of comedy genius Peg Lynch, has teamed with *Minneapolis Star Tribune* columnist James Lileks for a show about Peg. Fittingly, their production is called *A Funny Woman*. Although born in Lincoln, Nebraska, Peg was raised right here in Kasson. A broadcast pioneer, she was the first woman to create, write, star in, and have ownership of her own sitcom. Most notable was the *Ethel and Albert* series that ran for many years on radio and television. Incredibly, Peg wrote nearly 11,000 scripts. Astrid and James visited Kasson and Mantorville on May 20 to explore the possibility of putting on a show in Dodge County. They also paid their respects at family graves in a local cemetery and stopped at the childhood home of Peg in Kasson. For more information, go to the website:



business with Moline Plow. Hugh fell gravely ill with the Spanish flu and succumbed in 1918, like millions of others, to the deadly virus. Young widow Frances returned from Nebraska with her baby to her hometown of Kasson and resided at 205 First Avenue Northeast. Various family members looked after little Margaret while her mother resumed her career as a nurse at Mayo Clinic in Rochester.

In 1927, Margaret and her mother finally moved to Rochester. Although only a teenager, she was soon working as both a receptionist at Mayo Clinic and as chief copywriter at a radio station called KROC. Margaret combined the two jobs, landing interviews with

Margaret Frances (Peg) Lynch was born on November 25, 1916, to Hugh Franklin and Clara Frances (Renning) Lynch. Her father was in



*ETHEL AND ALBERT.* Peg Lynch on radio with Richard Widmark as Ethel and Albert in 1944. A native of Sunrise, Minnesota, Widmark went on to a successful career in Hollywood as a star of movies and television.



*TALL TALES.* Prolific scriptwriter Peg Lynch estimated that she invested some ten million words in her weekly *Ethel and Albert* program after six years on radio with ABC. That would be the equivalent of twenty novels. The comparison is seen here in 1950 with the novels on the left side and a stack of Peg's script output on the right side.

In 1944, with little more than \$500 in her pocket, she headed for New York City. There the broadcast of her radio show *Ethel and Albert* was an overnight success. Enormously popular, Peg both wrote the scripts and played the title role of "Ethel." The part of "Albert" on radio was briefly portrayed by future Hollywood star Richard Widmark. Alan Bunce replaced him in the role of the husband and the show moved smoothly into television in 1950. It ran until 1956 on NBC, CBS, and finally ABC.

In 1948, Peg married Odd Knut Ronning (1918-2014), a Norwegian pulp and paper engineer. The couple had one daughter, Astrid, also an actress/writer. She is married to composer/singer Denis King of the King Brothers, considered by many the first British boy band. Peg passed away on July 24, 2015, in Becket, Massachusetts, at the age of 98. Her ashes and those of her husband have been interred at Maple Grove Cemetery in Kasson.

*Starring Peg Lynch*, a DCHS special exhibit from 2016, is now having an encore performance at the museum. Through photographs, text, and personal objects, the exhibit tells the story of this extraordinary comic genius from Kasson, who essentially invented the sitcom.



world famous figures who came to the clinic: Lou Gehrig, Ernest Hemingway, Jeanette MacDonald, and Knute Rockne.

After graduating from the University of Minnesota (Minneapolis) in 1937 with a degree in English, Margaret—by now calling herself "Peg"—was hired as a copywriter at radio station KATE in Albert Lea. It was here that Peg created the husband and wife duo of Ethel and Albert, born as a short filler sketch on a show aimed at women in the audience.

From there Peg went on to positions with radio stations in Maryland and Virginia.

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