

FALL/WINTER 2020

**Our Mission**

*To preserve, document and classify the physical history of the Lake Minnetonka area. To provide a means by which everyone can share in the history of the lake area. To stimulate interest in the cultural heritage of the area.*

Founded in 1972, the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society preserves the history of Lake Minnetonka and the communities of Deephaven, Excelsior, Greenwood, Shorewood, and Tonka Bay.

The Society's Museum and Archives hold a large collection of historical artifacts and documents and the Society regularly presents programs for youth and adults and publishes books on topics of local historical interest.

**ELMHS**  
PO Box 305  
Excelsior, MN 55331  
952-221-4766  
info@elmhs.org  
www.elmhs.org

**ELMHS**  
**Executive Director:**  
Rachel Houck

**ELMHS**  
**Board of Directors**

**President:** Deanna Bunkelman  
**Vice President:** Tom Williams  
**Treasurer:** Cheryl Ahlcrona  
**Secretary:** Scott Dake

**Directors:** Francesca Landon,  
Andrew Punch, Mark Read, Tad  
Shaw, Lisa Stevens.

**Emeritus Board Members:** Jerry  
Holl, Betty Peck

# The Harborage

## Annual Meeting 2020

The ELMHS 2020 Annual Meeting was held on Tuesday September 15 on the lawn outside of the building that houses the ELMHS archives, 261 School Ave. The meeting was originally planned to be held in mid-June, but was delayed due to the COVID 19 pandemic. A quorum of 28 members was present.

President Deanna Bunkelman noted the impact of the pandemic on various facets of ELMHS would be discussed and that we would also be addressing how the organization is adapting and looking at some new opportunities given the current situation.



Members gathered outside of the old Excelsior Public School building on 261 School Ave.

### Financial Position

Treasurer Cheryl Ahlcrona reviewed the financial reports from the previous year and explained the impact of COVID on Society revenues. She noted that we currently have enough money in reserve to keep ELMHS running without major expense reductions (beyond the belt tightening already in the new budget) for the remainder of the fiscal year. The budget was unanimously approved by the members.

### Archives, Museum, Programs

Executive Director Rachel Houck reminded members that their financial support is needed now more than ever because many income producing programs such as Tapping History and Summer History Cruises are on hiatus. As an alternative, the Society has created "History at Home," which includes online presentations and virtual history tours which are being embraced by an even broader audience. The Society has also enhanced its social media presence, reaching people around the country, with campaigns such as the weekly "Water Street Wednesdays." And while the Museum and Archives are currently open by appointment only (consistent with State of Minnesota guidelines), the Museum has new and updated exhibits, audio visual additions and interactives and the Archives continues to offer research and information to those conducting family and property history, in person and via email.

### Board Elections & Bylaws

Board of Director nominees (Deanna Bunkelman, President, Mark Read and Lisa Stevens) were all approved by the membership.

*(Continued on page 8)*

# Ball's Bank Block

By Scott McGinnis

For over 50 years, a gas station has occupied the corner of Water and Third Street at 300 Water Street. The gas pumps are long gone and the building has been vacant for several years now. This has area residents wondering, "What's going to happen now?" This is not the first time the future of a building on this property has raised such a question. In another lifetime, a noble two-story brick building commanded that location. The Bank of Excelsior was established by Miner Ball in 1886 and the construction of Ball's Bank Block became a hometown project. The plans were made by a local resident, Lewellyn B. Stetson, and it was constructed of brick from the newly opened Sampson & Gates brick yard in Excelsior. The Bank Block also housed a grocery store, doctor, lawyer, and real estate offices as well as a hotel and restaurant.

In March 1890, W. B. Mason leased Ball's Bank Block, except for the bank lobby and real estate office on the first floor. The upper floor and part of the main floor were fitted for lodging rooms and a restaurant installed in the basement. Mason titled his establishment, *Lakeside Palace Hotel*. In October 1890, Mason handed the business over to Thomas T. Bacheller, a Minneapolis poultryman, who renamed it the Excelsior House.

Bacheller only remained for a year. In late August 1891, Willard Perry McDonald and his wife Rachel assumed the lease of the hotel, but by early October 1892, they had sold the furniture from the hotel and moved into their house next door to the bank building. Two months later he established his law practice in the Bank Block.

After the McDonalds had moved from the bank, Miner Ball, the owner of the building, decided to try the hotel business himself. He fitted up the Excelsior House for a vegetarian sanitarium. Ball had been converted to vegetarianism several years previous and believed it was the reason for his renewed health. Ball died less than two years later on August 26, 1894.

Ball leased the hotel to G. C. & A. B. Martindale in December 1892, which he continued to conduct as a year-round hotel until February 1895. The owner, The Minnesota Title Insurance and Trust Company, evicted them because they had not paid their rent in seven months. The hotel remained vacant for nearly a



Vacant Pump Gas Station, 300 Water Street, March 31, 2020.  
*Image courtesy Scott D. McGinnis*



*Ball's Bank Block, 300 Water Street, ca. 1891*

year. The following October the local paper still carried ads to rent the rooms under the bank for a dress-making parlor or restaurant. McDonald returned in 1896 to operate a hotel with a capacity for about 10 people.

However, the basement tenant, perhaps it was McDonald himself, had been operating a "blind pig" (illegal liquor establishment) in the basement of the bank. The *Excelsior Cottager*, July 10, 1896, reported on an incident involving a possible undercover detective who visited the bank building as a farmer named "Mr. Schultz, of Barron County, Wisconsin," who was in town looking into land. The Cottager notes, "Only they know what they drank, but it was noticed that "Mr. Schultz" paid more attention to the beverages dispensed in the basement of the bank building than in looking up a farm."

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The building was destroyed by fire on May 4, 1898. The Minneapolis Journal, from that same date speculated that the building was burned intentionally so that it could be burglarized.

*“The bank building burned to the ground, and under the cover of the excitement and the darkness of the night, several burglaries were attempted. There is very little doubt but that an attempt was made by desperadoes to fire and loot the town...The fire started at 2:30, and it is inconceivable that it was due to any other cause than incendiarism. No suspicious characters have been seen about the village, but there may be some scoundrels among the big force of laborers at work on the railway. Although the town was in much excitement, the people looked after their homes, and the would-be burglars failed to get anything.”*

The ruins of the bank building remained an eyesore for at least four years. In 1900, it was rumored that the site would be spruced up by filling the basement with dirt and planting climbing vines to cover the ruined walls. The Minnetonka Record, April 11, 1902, described how someone attempted to take matters into their own hands through the use of dynamite! However, this only loosened a corner of the building.

The last mention of the building was two weeks later after a second blast of explosives landed several hundred more bricks in the basement. The site remained vacant until a gas station was built sometime between 1930 and 1949. The Hennepin County Property website, lists the current gas station as built in 1972. As for the future of the building, according to Emily Becker, Excelsior City Planner, “in order to demolish the building, per our ordinance they need an approved building permit and development plan, none of which has been submitted.” Becker said that there have been expressions of interest on what it could be, but the owner has said that COVID delayed those development plans. And the city hasn’t received an official submittal. That means for now, the future of the site is still a mystery.

## Interested in Historic Preservation?

The City of Excelsior is currently taking applications to serve on its Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC). The Commission is responsible for identifying and preserving historic buildings in Excelsior. Candidates must be residents of the City of Excelsior with expertise or interest in historic preservation, and can apply by completing a Citizen Inquiry Form. Further information is available on the City's website at [www.excelsiormn.org](http://www.excelsiormn.org) or by calling City Hall at (952) 474-5233. *\*The Excelsior Heritage Preservation Commission is not affiliated with the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society. All inquiries must be made directly to City Hall.*

Respectfully submitted by Tim Caron, HPC Commissioner.



H.F. Bullens Store, 221-227 Water Street, ca. 1902.

### **The ELMHS Museum is open by appointment through October.**

Museum visitors will explore the history of Excelsior and the south Lake Minnetonka area as they move through the *new and updated exhibits*. Guests may book a group of up to ten people.

**To schedule a visit please email Executive Director, Rachel Houck at [Director@elmhs.org](mailto:Director@elmhs.org) or call (952)221-4766.**

The Archives, located at 261 School Ave., will remain open by appointment year-round.

### **All New & Updated Exhibits**

- Lake Life
- Excelsior Amusement Park
- WWII Women
- School Days
- Trains
- Agriculture



# ELMHS at Home

## Votes for Women: Minnesota and the 19th Amendment

In honor of the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, ELMHS partnered with the Excelsior branch of the Hennepin County Library for a virtual program titled *Votes for Women: Minnesota and the 19th Amendment*. See the recorded program on the Hennepin County Library's YouTube channel. A link to the recorded program can also be found on our home page [elmhs.org](http://elmhs.org).



## Water Street Wednesday:

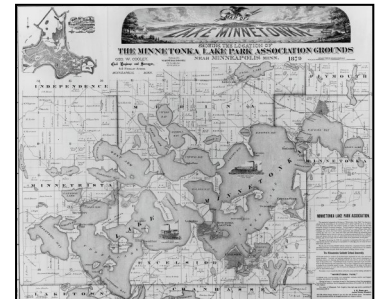
Log on to Facebook or Instagram every Wednesday to see a mystery historic building or event from Water Street. Write your guess in the comments section along with any memories you have that pertain to that building, place, or event. The answers for the mystery image will be posted the following week along with a new image for the current week. The memories that are shared will be collected and preserved for future generations.



Water Street in Excelsior, 1937.

## Lake Minnetonka History Virtual Tours:

Now is the perfect time to see our virtual Lake Minnetonka History Tours. Although the tour can be done completely at home, we recommend you hop in the car and take in the fall colors in person. Download the tours right to your phone and take a tour around the lake at your own pace. **The tours are completely FREE! Download from our website at [elmhs.org/virtualtours](http://elmhs.org/virtualtours).**



Map of Lake Minnetonka, 1879.

## Give to the Max Day is November 19!

Help the ELMHS continue to collect, preserve, and share the history of the Excelsior and South-Lake Minnetonka area with your gift of \$25, \$50, \$100, or surprise us!

*We need your support now more than ever!* Due to the regulations in response to the COVID pandemic, we

have had to cancel many of our in-person events including our annual fundraiser. The funds raised from these events help to support all aspects of the Society including programs, archival supplies, staff salary, rent, and more. Our goal is to raise \$6000 to help make up the revenue lost from these events.

**Please make a contribution today** online via our website [elmhs.org/contributions](http://elmhs.org/contributions), or mail your donation to P.O. Box 305, Excelsior, MN 55331.



# Programs & Events

**Monday, October 12 | 5:30 pm**

## **Oak Hill Cemetery Tour**

With Scott D. McGinnis

Join historian Scott D. McGinnis at the top of Oak Hill as he leads a tour of historic Oak Hill Cemetery—Excelsior’s burial ground since the 1850’s. Scott will highlight the lives and deaths of the area’s settlers and will answer questions about those buried here. [Tour includes steep and uneven terrain.] | **\$5 Donation recommended**

Register at <https://oakhillcemeterytour2020.eventbrite.com> or call (952)221-4766



**Monday, November 9 | 7:00 pm *online***  
**Oakwood: The History of West Big Island\***

**\*Presented in partnership with the Wayzata Historical Society**

Big Island is often in the news, but the west side of the island gets little notice. From the connections to Indigenous history to the cottages that were subsequently erected along its shore, west Big Island has a unique history all its own. Join us

as Aaron Person, President of the Wayzata Historical Society, discusses this multifaceted history. | **\$5 Donation recommended** (All contributions will be divided between the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society and the Wayzata Historical Society.)

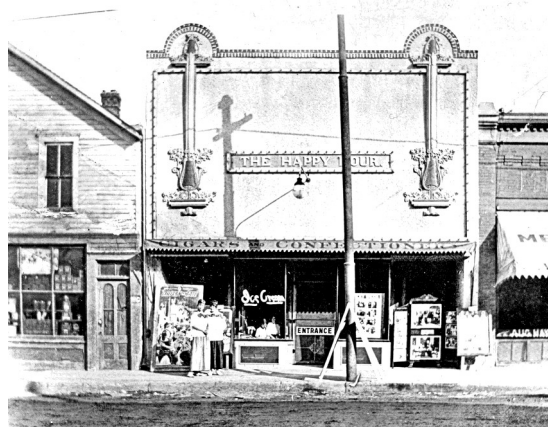
For more information and to register visit <https://westbigisland.eventbrite.com> or call (952)221-4766



**December | Date & Time TBD**

## **Water Street Walking Tour**

Due to popular demand, ELMHS will be providing a walking tour of Excelsior’s historic Water Street in December. Check our website and Facebook for information about this event as it becomes available, or sign up for our email list and never miss an update!



For more program updates and information visit [elmhs.org/programs--events](http://elmhs.org/programs--events).



## From the Director

The ELMHS bid farewell to one of our hardest working volunteers in August, as he decided to retire to the Land of Enchantment, New Mexico. Steve Kobs was the society's Museum Coordinator and was responsible for taking the lead on the complete update of the ELMHS museum over the last year.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of volunteers like Steve, ELMHS continues to get better and better. We are always in need of volunteers willing to use their time and expertise to make this organization great! More information about volunteer roles can be found to the right. If there are any areas you would like to serve that aren't listed, please let me know, I would love to talk to you!

Thank you so much for all your hard work, Steve! The society, and especially myself, are going to miss you!

Rachel Houck  
Executive Director  
Director@elmhs.org



## Volunteer Openings!

The Society relies on volunteers of all ages and abilities to fulfill various critical roles. Right now we are in need of dedicated volunteers to fulfill the following positions:

- **Communications:** Writing press releases, creating marketing materials, contributing to social media, maintaining our website. Must have experience using Microsoft Publisher or similar publishing software.
- **Archives:** Assisting visitors, scanning, filing, researching, data entry.
- **Museum:** Serving as a host, cleaning and upkeep, data entry.
- **Membership and Fundraising:** Recruiting new members, contributors and volunteers, helping with direct mail and special fundraising events.
- **Technology:** Maintaining the Society's computer network and hardware, troubleshooting IT issues.

Training in all areas is provided. Contact us at [info@elmhs.org](mailto:info@elmhs.org) or 952-221-4766 to learn more or visit our website at [elmhs.org/volunteer](http://elmhs.org/volunteer).

Our current COVID-19 Preparedness Plan, can also be found on our website [elmhs.org/COVID-19](http://elmhs.org/COVID-19)

## MEMBERSHIPS

Members shape the Society's policies and programs, and support our work in preserving the area's history.

*Annual member benefits include:*

- ◆ Discounts and special member privileges on select opportunities
- ◆ The Society's newsletter and mailings
- ◆ Invitations to special events
- ◆ Voting privileges

### Membership Levels

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Platinum | <input type="checkbox"/> \$45 Household  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Gold     | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Individual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Silver   | <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 Senior     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Bronze    |  |

Or, make an individual contribution of any amount!

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail form and check made out to ELMHS to PO Box 305, Excelsior, MN 55331. You can also join or contribute online at [www.elmhs.org](http://www.elmhs.org). The Society is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.**

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**Thanks for your support!**  
**NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERS, AND CONTRIBUTORS**  
*May 1 — August 31, 2020*

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**MEMBERSHIPS**

**Platinum**

American Legion Post #259  
 Scott & Joey Dake  
 John Strandell

**Gold**

Dean M. Akins  
 Dan Brattland  
 Michael D Bussey  
 Joseph Schwartz

**Silver**

Cheryl Ahlcrona  
 Kathleen Jewett  
 Ron & Marcia McDaniel  
 Jennifer Morris  
 Larry W. Opfer

**Bronze**

Patrick Dupont  
 Jerry & Justin Holl  
 Sandra Hotvet  
 Darel & LaVerna Leipold  
 Debra & Brent McNamee  
 Alice & John Reimann  
 Julia Sherf  
 Jane Stein  
 Alan & Martha Tollefson  
 LaWayne Yaeger

**Household**

Tom Burton  
 Liz Vandam

**Individual**

Paula Atkins  
 Linda Bean  
 Susan Berdahl  
 Greg Lerud  
 Lin Maki  
 Pat Smith  
 Susan Veazie  
 Ron Wagner

**Senior**

Mary A. Ashley  
 Elaine C. Barber  
 Maureen Burns  
 Francis Butch Colby  
 John & Carole Cranbrook  
 Roger Cuthbertson  
 Kay Derner  
 William Kimber  
 Jim LaHaye  
 Sherri & Jerry McCallson  
 Leone & Patrick McGlone  
 Patrick McGlone  
 Judy Mueller  
 Renee V. Nagel  
 Bob Nygaard  
 Nancy Olmsted  
 Betty Peck

Betty & Douglas Ramstad  
 Rita Sandstrom  
 Kathy Suddendorf  
 Rosemary Dupont Whowell

**Life Members (no longer offered)**

Bart Baker  
 Alec & Marianne Beck  
 Bob & Diane Bolles  
 Suellen Douglas  
 Don & Frannie Douglass  
 Kristin & Ken Dowell  
 Mr. & Mrs. Robert W. Fayfield  
 John Gorecki  
 John P. & Jan Gray  
 Phil & Eileen Hallin  
 Paul Huber  
 Ron Hughes  
 Dr. & Mrs. Randy Julian  
 Mr. & Mrs. Nick Johnson  
 Terrance Kellogg  
 Mark Knowlton  
 Tom & Carol Knowlton  
 Michael Kramer  
 Ann Lundsten  
 Scott D. McGinnis  
 Minnesota Streetcar Museum  
 Robert L. Naas  
 Bill & Steph Naegele

Aaron Person  
 Sharon Provost  
 Kellie & Gary Ringate  
 Kathy Knowlton Schmid  
 Carol Schmidt  
 Dr. Milton H. Seifert  
 Tad Shaw  
 Lisa Stevens & Jeffrey Hatcher  
 Rodney Thompson  
 TSP Architecture, Inc.  
 Ruth Witrak

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Dan Brattland  
 Phil & Eileen Hallin  
 Tom & Carol Knowlton  
 Darel & LaVerna Leipold  
 Renee V. Nagel  
 Mr. & Mrs. Jack Post & Family in honor of Geneva L. Post's birthday  
 Elizabeth Schiltz  
 Jenny Skinner  
 Reed Wahlberg

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**Lake Minnetonka Conservation District Donation**

Doug Babcock, a 25 year board member of the LMCD, has donated his records to the ELMHS which include approximately 20 linear feet of paper files consisting of meeting packets, minutes, studies, reports, lake management plans, and supporting information. The donated records illustrate the LMCD response to Eurasian Watermilfoil which was discovered in Lake Minnetonka in 1987; Zebra Mussels discovered in Lake Minnetonka in 2010; and permits for residential, municipal and commercial docks. Doug served on the Board of Directors of the LMCD from 1989-2014.

**If you or some one you know have artifacts they would like to donate to the society, please contact us via email at [info@elmhs.org](mailto:info@elmhs.org) or by phone (952)221-4766.**

(Annual Meeting 2020 continued from page 1)

Vice President Tom Williams then reviewed the by-law changes proposed by the Board of Directors. These changes included clarification of a number of sections of the by-laws and also updated them to formally recognize the use of email and the ELMHS website for Society business. All the by-law changes were approved.

### Exploring Strategic Alliances

The last major topic of the meeting was an update by Scott McGinnis on the study being undertaken by ELMHS and five Lake Minnetonka historical organizations to explore new ways to collaborate and perhaps consolidate. Scott and Lisa Stevens are ELMHS' representatives on the joint committee working on this project. The committee is currently in the process of selecting a consultant to help with the effort. This project is made possible in part by the people of Minnesota through a grant funded by an appropriation to the Minnesota Historical Society from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.

Recommendations are expected to be available in the Summer of 2021. The ELMHS Board of Directors will keep membership updated throughout the recommendation process.

Scott Dake  
Secretary, ELMHS Board of Directors



*ELMHS President, Deanna Bunkelman listens to questions from the membership.*

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

PO Box 305  
Excelsior MN 55331

