

WINTER/SPRING 2023

**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. 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**

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# The Harborage

## Building Bridges and Making Enemies

*The first of a two-part series*

By Scott D. McGinnis

Building bridges is usually meant to bring people together, but in Excelsior in 1881 it actually led to a feud between a captain and a capitalist. The Saint Paul and Pacific Railroad commenced service to Wayzata on August 24, 1867. For 14 years it was the only rail service to Lake Minnetonka. People had to leave the train in Wayzata and embark on a steam-

boat to complete their trip to Excelsior. The *Hennepin County Mirror*, February 14, 1880,

commented on Captain Charles May who had a near monopoly on Lake Minnetonka steamboat traffic, "May still controls the commerce of the Lake, as well as our local mill-stave interest, and no one seems disposed to butt against him."

Soon after, that unopposed control changed when William D. Washburn, United States Senator for Minnesota and President of the Minneapolis & Saint Louis Railway Company, launched his own steamboat, the *City of Saint Louis*. He also began construction of the long-awaited rail line to the south side of the lake from Minneapolis. It was expected to reach Hotel Saint Louis in what is now Deephaven by July 1881 and continue on to Excelsior thereafter. This extension

took longer than expected to complete, but finally offered service to Wood's Landing on Solbergs Point at the entry to St. Albans Bay in early July 1881.

In preparation for that extension, on April 9, 1881, Washburn's Mpls. & St. Louis railroad started driving piles into the lakebed at Saint Albans Bay for a needed trestle bridge between Solberg Point and Excelsior. Three days later however, Captain May was granted a temporary restraining order to sideline Washburn's plans. Building a railroad trestle bridge would trap



Captain May's steamboats Hattie May, City of Minneapolis, Lotus, and City of Saint Louis, Wayzata docks, 1881.



William Drew Washburn

*(Continued on page 3)*

# The Society Column

## Lake Minnetonka Historical Organizations Strategic Alliance Update

As reported in previous newsletters, the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society, Museum of Lake Minnetonka (Steamboat Minnehaha), Wayzata Historical Society and Westonka Historical Society have been exploring ways to insure our future sustainability. In ELMHS' last fifty years, we have watched the world of small, local volunteer-led historical societies – including ours – experience existential challenges. In this changing world, volunteer leadership has shrunk across the nonprofit sector and finding new, long-term leaders has become increasingly difficult. The future of our four local history organizations now depends on a small number of dedicated volunteer leaders - without whom our organizations would struggle to function effectively. We feel we must recognize these challenges, respond proactively, and search for a solution now.

To that end, the four organizations formed a Joint Committee representing each organization to study the situation with assistance from a nonprofit consultant. A final report with recommendations was presented to the four boards who have now tasked the Joint Committee with creating a governance and operational framework for a new, consolidated organization. This consolidated organization would continue the common missions of the four organizations with increased strength and vitality as we work together toward a common goal – telling the story of Lake Minnetonka's history.



The Joint Committee will present this framework to our boards in early 2023. It will include recommendations for institutional professionalization and continued best practices and innovation, while allowing our volunteers to do what they do best - follow their passions and dreams for the history of each area of Lake Minnetonka. Our boards will then be asked to vote on the proposed consolidation to determine if it should be brought to the memberships

for final consideration. If approved by the memberships, a new organization would be formed, the four organizations would dissolve, and their missions will be carried on by the new, consolidated organization.

Each board will keep its membership informed about the outcome of their framework meetings and any resulting membership vote. Our consultant's final report and data, the framework plan and other information

will be available to our members at that time.

All of us who serve on the Joint Committee are excited about our future together and confident that this step will allow us to continue to collect, preserve and share the history of the Lake Minnetonka area with our members and our ever-expanding world. Please feel free to contact ELMHS Joint Committee representatives Lisa Stevens, ELMHS Board Treasurer; or Scott McGinnis, ELMHS volunteer; for more information or any questions you may have at [info@elmhs.org](mailto:info@elmhs.org), or 952-221-4766.

Lisa Stevens, ELMHS Joint Committee Member  
[info@elmhs.org](mailto:info@elmhs.org)

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Captain May's steamboat fleet inside Saint Albans Bay. Captain May was fighting against Washburn's building apparent powerplay to remove May's boats from competition with Washburn's *City of Saint Louis* and rail service.

Before receiving the restraining order, the railroad had driven 41 piles at 14-foot intervals through the ice and into the bottom of Lake Minnetonka in preparation for the trestle bridge. There was no indication Washburn was constructing a bridge with a span large enough to admit Captain May's steamboats to the lake, which were still ice-locked in their Saint Albans Bay port. Washburn's railroad had also failed to purchase any right-of-way across Captain May's property on the Excelsior side of the crossing, and Captain May's hotel, grist and stave mills were on Saint Albans Bay and would be cut off from lake traffic. While more people could travel to Excelsior, fewer would need May's steamboat rides from Wayzata.

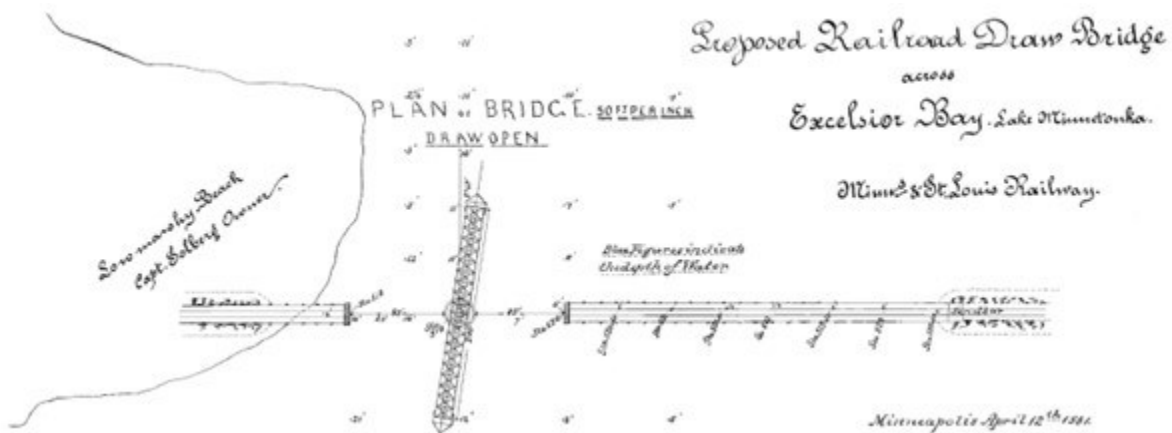
With all this at risk, Captain May must have thought the restraining order needed "punctuation" and he should ensure it was enforced. May and an experienced man planted 500 cartridges of dynamite along the proposed course for the yet to be installed additional pilings and *blew up the ice upon which Washburn's men had hoped to work!*

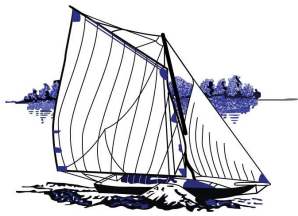
*The Minneapolis Tribune* on April 13, 1881, reported about Captain May's self-enforcement and Washburn's response:

*"The railroad company retaliated by causing the arrest of the parties carrying on the work of blowing the ice out of the bay on a charge of killing the fish in the body of water contrary to the statutes made and provided, etc. The restraining order is not made returnable until Saturday next, and meantime the affair may take a half-dozen or more turns. The hum-drum winter life at Minnetonka is very much relieved by the contest for possession of the right-of-way across St. Albans."*

The charge must have sent a message to Washburn. By May, the Chief Engineer of the Mpls. & St. Louis devised a drawbridge and offered Captain May \$5,000 for the property (not the \$5,500 that Captain May insisted on).

Eventually, Captain May was satisfied, and the railroad was completed into Excelsior running behind Third Street and across Water Street just as its right-of-way (now the bike path) does today. But people just north of Excelsior (today's Greenwood, Deephaven) still had to either go around Saint Albans Bay or row, paddle, sail, hitch a ride on a boat, or try not to fall through the ice to get to Excelsior until this bridge was built. After that, they had to avoid crossing when the train was coming. Ultimately, this ordeal did not delay the railway because the Village Council of Excelsior did not grant right-of-way through the village until June 6, 1881. The brief Washburn and May war illustrates how valuable transit services were to those who wanted to financially experience "progress."





EXCELSIOR-LAKE MINNETONKA  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# TAPPING HISTORY 2023

Second Monday of the month at 7:00 pm

Excelsior Brewing Company, 421 Third Street, Excelsior

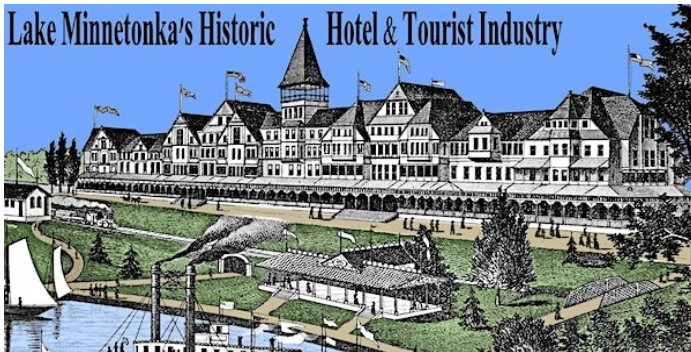
FREE (\$5 suggested contribution)

Doors open at 6:00 pm. Seating is first come, first seated.

Please register at <https://tinyurl.com/5bteuheb>,

or more information: [info@elmhs.org](mailto:info@elmhs.org) or 952-221-4766

## Monday, January 9



with **Scott D. McGinnis**

Join Scott McGinnis in an exploration of the various modes of transportation to and upon the lake; and the grand hotels, not-quite-so-grand hotels and humble boarding houses that drew people from around the country to Lake Minnetonka in the late 1800s.

## Monday, March 13

### A History of Excelsior Churches

with **Scott D. McGinnis**



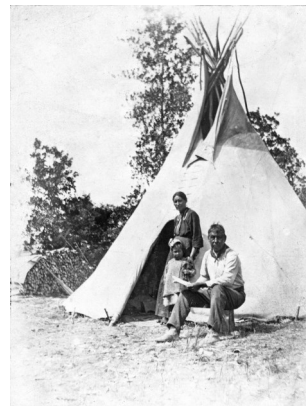
Trinity Chapel moving to its current location, 1907.

Religious activities played an important role in the development of Excelsior since its founding in 1853. Learn more about the influence of churches on the community, how each one formed and their place today.

## Monday, February 13

### Lake Minnetonka as a Native American Place

with **Paul Marvelas**



Campbell family at Howard's Point, Shorewood, ca. 1910.

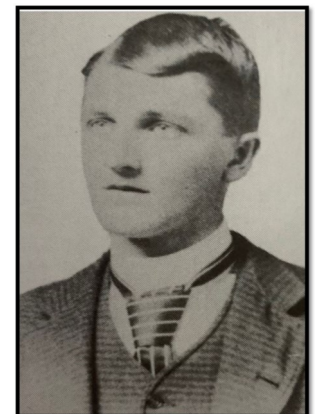
Lake Minnetonka has been an important hunting, fishing, and spiritual place for Native People for more than ten thousand years. Paul will talk about ancient American Indian people, as well as sites connected with the Dakota People of the 1800's.

## Monday, April 10

### Onawa Builder Arthur Dyer

with **Barb Sykora**

Learn about young Arthur Dyer and how he revolutionized yachting in 1892. Barb will share the story of Arthur's family tradition of boat building locally and how he, with Ward Burton, became famous throughout the sailing world.



Arthur Dyer, circa 1890

# TAPPING HISTORY

Monday, May 8

**Excelsior Schools:**

**Learn Something New Every Day**

*with Scott D. McGinnis*

Over the years Excelsior has had its own grade school, high school and college. Learn how they came to be, how some continued on despite setbacks, and what they are today.



*Excelsior Academy, 1885-1896.*

## Cemetery Tour

**Memorial Day, May, 29**

**Oak Hill Cemetery Tour**

*Following the Excelsior Memorial Day Parade and Ceremony, about 12:00 noon*

Join historian Scott D. McGinnis at the top of Oak Hill as he leads a walking 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 citizens and will answer questions about those buried here.

*This tour includes standing and walking over steep uneven terrain.*

**Parking is very limited.** The tour begins at the top of the hill. The cemetery is just east of 810 Excelsior Blvd., Excelsior. Oak Hill is steep so the tour may be cancelled due to wet conditions. Those registered will be notified via email if it is necessary to cancel. Weather related updates will also be posted at [elmhs.org](http://elmhs.org) and [facebook.com/ELMHS](https://www.facebook.com/ELMHS) if necessary.

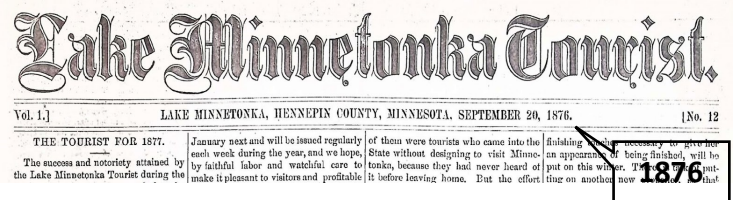
\$5 suggested contribution. Please register at <https://tinyurl.com/5bteuheb>

## Archive Update

### **Newspaper Digitization**

We're always amazed at what a difference a handful of dedicated volunteers can make! A big thank you to ELMHS volunteer Mary Upgren who recently finished scanning her 900th historic newspaper issue for the Society. And thanks to the donation of large format overhead scanners from volunteer Steve Kobs and board member Bill Heyman, the Society now has searchable PDF images of the majority of its physical newspaper collection, allowing us to safely preserve the originals. Archives patrons and researchers can now put a search term into the archives computer and watch articles containing the term pop up.

Lake Minnetonka newspapers scanned include *Lake Minnetonka Tourist*, 1876; *Tourist & Sportsman*, 1877-1882; *The Excelsior Weekly*, 1883-1884; *Northwestern Tourist*, 1883-1886; *Minnetonka Mirror*, 1887; *Minnetonka News*, 1894-1899; *Excelsior Cottager*, 1895-1897; *Minnetonka Pilot*, (Mound) 1940-1946 and 1948-1949. Mary has also scanned 638 issues of Excelsior and Minnetonka school student publications, *The Owl* and *Minnetonka*



*(Continued on page 8)*

*Thanks for your support!*

## **NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERS AND CONTRIBUTORS**

*August 1 through November 30, 2022*

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### **Platinum Members**

Karima & Dan Brattland  
Jon & Becky Ray

### **Gold Members**

Bitta & Kerry Barnard  
Jennifer & Tim Caron  
Travis DeMers  
Derek Sampson

### **Silver Members**

Cheryl Ahlcrona & Carl Floren  
Aaron & Angie Bean  
Ann Sampson Heimerl  
Dan & Allison Kelly  
Steve & Judy Krause  
Jim Ladwig  
Ruth & Allan McLeod  
Nell & Harmon Ray  
Kyle & Melissa Uittenbogaard  
Kathy & Todd White

### **Bronze Members**

Rick & Joan Ahmann  
Tom Burton  
Kay & Bob Derner  
Maud & Brian Duggan  
Mr. & Mrs. Darel Leipold  
Susan & Brian Mark  
John & Audrey Rudberg

### **Household Members**

Eden Prairie Historical Society,  
Chris Honaas-Wildfang  
Maureen Hammer  
Lynn Hannah  
Judith Allen Kim  
Sam Messick  
Robert Milstein  
Cynthia Paul  
Gary Smith  
David Sorensen  
Gordy Straka  
Andrew Trick

### **Individual Members**

Susan Berdahl  
Deb Bierbaum  
Tarah Cummings  
Lindsay Hannah  
William Keegan

Jennifer Morris  
Judy Mueller  
Larry W. Opfer  
Roy Quaintance  
Nancy Smith  
Pat Smith  
Pamela Stanchfield  
Ron Wagner

### **Dual Senior**

Cindy Busch & John Knox  
Roger W. Cuthbertson  
Joanie & Brian Holst  
Amanda & Phil Little  
Devona & Nicholas Long  
Jeff McIntyre  
Marc Mosiman  
Sharon Starks

### **Senior/Student Members**

Scott Appell  
Mary A. Ashley  
Francis Butch Colby  
Carole Cranbrook  
Lucia Cundy  
Martha Decker  
Sue Ginsburg  
Dean Hanus  
Arlene Johnson  
William Kimber  
Jim LaHaye  
Alan Langstaff  
Sherrri McCallson  
Pam McCarthy  
Rena Morris  
Kelly Nehowig  
Gail Ofstehage  
Maybeth and Ed Sheridan  
Kathy Suddendorf  
Rosemary Dupont Whowell  
Rebecca Wiinanen

### **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 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.

### **Contributors**

Doug Affinito  
Mary Jane Barnard  
Michael Arthur Barnard Charitable Fund  
Debby Bluem  
Betty Bright  
Maureen Burns  
Jim Cada & Susanne Egli  
Julie Englander  
Joseph Finley  
Phillip Hallin  
Lindsay Hannah  
Lisa Stevens & Jeff Hatcher  
Ron Hughes  
Judith Kim  
Georgianne Kornfuehrer  
Fran Landon  
Mr. & Mrs. Darel Leipold  
Matthew L. Levitt  
Paul Maravelas  
Jim Prokopanko and Bonnie McPhee  
Jon & Becky Ray  
Maybeth & Ed Sheridan  
Liz Vandam  
Rosemary Dupont Whowell

# MUSEUM VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

## Help Open the ELMHS Museum Doors this Summer!

Volunteer to spend a few summer Saturday hours as a Museum Host. There's nothing quite like hearing the Minnesota Streetcar Museum's clanging trolley bell and feeling the old depot rumble as the trolley comes to a stop outside our Museum. When it does, you know the Museum will soon be full of fascinated guests studying maps and learning about sailboats.

As a host, you'll soon be smiling at kids (and grown-ups) laughing at how their bodies look so strange in the old Excelsior Amusement Park mirror and how big those antique lake ice tongs are! Volunteers attend a 2-hour training session in May and a museum host guidebook is provided, so you'll be prepared to answer visitor's questions.

If you'd enjoy making connections with others who appreciate our local history, please sign up to volunteer at [Elmhs.org/volunteer.html](http://Elmhs.org/volunteer.html), email [info@elmhs.org](mailto:info@elmhs.org) or call 952-221-4766.

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*Breezes* including various issues from 1922-1985. These newspapers are not available in digital form anywhere else! The Society hopes to make these scans available through our website, free of charge in the future. In the meantime, we're happy to schedule appointments to allow patrons to access the digital files on our archive computers. Contact us at [info@elmhs.org](mailto:info@elmhs.org) or 952-221-4766 to make an appointment.

### **Photograph Preservation**

Scott McGinnis has finished an almost 4-year project of inserting all 10-12,000 of the Society's historic into polypropylene, acid-free, transparent sleeves, ensuring their preservation for many years to come. He thanks volunteer Kay Derner for her assistance with this mammoth project.

## Membership Anyone?

Members shape the Society's policies and programs, continuing 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

Become a Member or renew your membership using our at [Elmhs.org/store/c7/Membership.html](http://Elmhs.org/store/c7/Membership.html)

### 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/Student |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50  | Bronze   |                               |                |

Or, make an individual contribution of any amount!

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

### Volunteering

- Please contact me about volunteering.

### Donation of Artifacts

- Please contact me regarding the donation of historical items.

Mail this form and a check written to **ELMHS** to PO Box 305, Excelsior, MN 55331. Or, join or volunteer online at [www.elmhs.org](http://www.elmhs.org). The Society is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

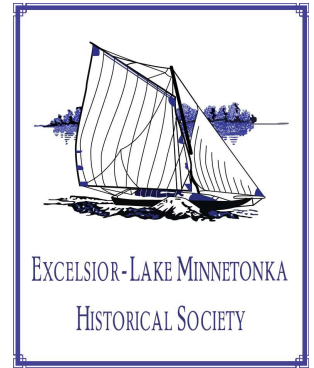
## ELMHS Seeking Board Candidates

*Would you like to get involved with a group of like-minded history buffs?*

*Have you been searching for a way to make a difference in your community?*

*Do you have event planning, fundraising or administrative skills to put to good use?*

*Ever wish more people knew about Lake Minnetonka's fascinating history?*



We're looking for new board members who can shape the vision and direction of the Society as well as actively assist in planning and carrying out our many programs and events in order to serve our mission. Our board is composed of 7-11 members with staggered, three-year terms who meet in Excelsior on the second Tuesday of the month. Fiscal year 2024 Board Members will be elected by the membership at our June 2023 annual meeting.

Each member of our volunteer, working board leads or staffs one of the Society's committees and volunteers up to several hours a week to complete related tasks. To learn more or indicate your interest visit <https://www.elmhs.org/bodopenings.html> or contact Board President Mark Read.

Mark Read, President, Board of Directors  
[President@elmhs.org](mailto:President@elmhs.org)

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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