

Fall/Winter 2016

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 are free and open to the public, and hold a large collection of historical artifacts and documents.

The Society regularly presents lectures and programs on topics of local historical interest.

The Society's publications and memberships are available for purchase on our website:

www.elmhs.org

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The Harborage

Excelsior Fire Department Celebrates 125 Years!

*By Kellie Murphy-Ringate
Fire Inspector for Excelsior Fire Department*

On September 10, 2016, the Excelsior Fire District (EFD) will be celebrating its 125th year. To celebrate this century and a quarter milestone many of the events in the celebration lineup will reflect the traditions of its past.



The Excelsior Fire District's roots trace back to 1868 when the Hook and Ladder Company formed to carry out the task of pulling down standing chimneys after a fire. As the community grew and land developed so did the need for fire protection and in 1882 the Bucket Brigade was organized. More people settled in the area, more buildings were built, and the risk of fire increased. The community needed better fire protection, so in 1891 a group of civic-minded men established Excelsior Volunteer Fire Department. What started out as a handful of volunteer firefighters has become an organization that includes 43 paid, on-call firefighters, a full-time Fire Chief, full-time Fire Inspector, full-time Administrative Specialist, and a part-time Fire Inspector. The firefighters want citizens of our community to celebrate with us as we follow in the footsteps of the firefighters that came before us and pave the path for those who will follow us into the future.

The day will begin with tours of both of the Fire Stations, in Shorewood and Deephaven. The firefighters are excited to open up the stations doors and show the community their state of the art facilities. Over the last 125 years, the progression of the fire stations is very impressive. Originally, the Excelsior Volunteer Fire Department had space in the lower level of the Excelsior Town Hall. The small space had a single garage door that was barely tall enough for the trucks to get under. In the 1920's, the firefighters saw a need for more space and a modern fire station, so they started raising funds to build a brand new fire station in Excelsior in 1957. In just a few decades, they started to outgrow the fire station and in 2004 two new fire stations went into service. At the open house, the EFD photo albums mid-1900's through the current day will be on display for public viewing at both of the fire stations.

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Excelsior Fire Department Celebrates 125 Years Continued...

At high noon, Excelsior District fire apparatus, old and new, along with fire trucks from other fire departments will parade down Water Street in downtown Excelsior. They will be joined by other organizations that are a part of, support, or are involved with the Emergency Response System. Ambulance services, the Salvation Army, and the DNR will all be part of the biggest fire truck parade since the Minnesota State Fireman's Association Convention in the 1930's. Citizens can see over a dozen pieces of apparatus that are currently part of the EFD fleet, a fleet that began with a big hook and a single ladder.



Fire Department Water Fight; Courtesy of Excelsior Fire Dept.

The day's festivities will end with a water fight competition in the East parking lot in Excelsior. Water fights are unique to the fire service and were held so firefighters could compete; showing off their firefighting skills to raise funds. The Excelsior Fire District firefighters used to host many water fight competitions and compete throughout the state. Firefighters from across the area will battle it out as they use fire hose streams to push a barrel across the opponent's goal line. During the water fights, the firefighters will be handing out FREE watermelon to honor one of the many traditions from the past. Along with smelt, brats, hot dogs, and oyster stew, the firefighters used to sell watermelon to raise funds.

After the big celebration on Saturday, join us on Monday for Tapping History. Excelsior Fire Department firefighters will share photos and history highlights from the last 125 years. We will tell you how the progressive thinking and dedication of the firefighters brought us from twelve pails to nineteen pieces of apparatus; a small space in the town hall to two fire stations, and the first dance in 1893 that evolved into a relationship with the community that still thrives today.

Schedule of Events Saturday, September 10th

TOURS OF THE FIRE STATIONS

Time: 9:00 am-11:00 am

Station No. 1
24100 Smithtown Road
Shorewood, MN 55331

Station No. 2
20227 Cottagewood Road
Deephaven, MN 55331

FIRE TRUCK PARADE

Noon

Route: Oak Street to Water Street, up 2nd Street and ending on East Drive Parking Lot, Excelsior

WATER FIGHTS

1:30 pm -3:30 pm

East Drive Parking Lot, Excelsior

Tapping History

Excelsior Fire District 125th Celebration
with Fire Inspector Kellie Murphy-Ringate

Monday, September 12th, 7pm

Excelsior Brewing Company
421 Third Street, Excelsior
Free & Open to the Public.

The Excelsior Fire Department/District is celebrating its 125th Anniversary in 2016. Kellie will share stories of the Fire Chiefs and firefighters, their visions of an innovative, cutting-edge, progressive fire department, and how those goals were achieved and are still part of today's fire district.

We'll travel back to 1868 to learn how fire fighting progressed from passing paper buckets of water to purchasing the department's first Aerial Ladder Truck, how fire alarms moved from word of mouth to cell phones; how cisterns were replaced by fire hydrants, and how making firefighting equipment in the village hall evolved into the two fire stations we have today.

Tapping History Programs

Tapping History events are free & open to the public. Doors open at 6pm, seating is first come, first served. For more information contact the Society at info@elmhs.org, 952-221-4766, or visit www.elmhs.org.

Monday, October 10th 7pm

Excelsior Brewing Company
421 Third Street, Excelsior

Public Grounds: A presentation on the past, present, and future of The Excelsior Commons.

with Scott D McGinnis, The City of Excelsior, and Community for the Commons

The Excelsior Commons has been a treasured piece of public land for over 160 years. First identified as "Public Grounds" on the original plats of Excelsior, The Commons has since been enjoyed by generations of residents and visitors. Relatively unchanged for over a quarter century, its historical iterations have included several bath houses, a dance pavilion, a casino/entertainment pavilion, boat works, commercial and resident docks, and restaurants.

During its history, The Commons has often straddled the line between a neighborhood park and regional destination. Enjoyed by many but funded by few, the park is beginning to show signs of stress and the misalignment of its use and funding model.

Momentum is gaining for enhancements and better long-term stewardship of The Commons. This fall, the City of Excelsior is engaging residents to help shape the vision for the next phase of The Commons. The newly formed Community for the Commons park conservancy is working to infuse new thinking and practices, as well as private funding, into the stewardship of Excelsior's most important public asset. Join us for a night about the past, present, and future of The Commons with historian Scott McGinnis, and representatives from The City of Excelsior and Community for The Commons.

Monday, December 12th 7pm

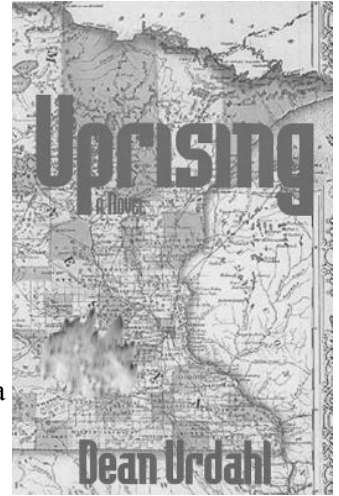
Excelsior Brewing Company
421 Third Street, Excelsior

The Dakota Tribe of Lake Minnetonka and US Dakota War of 1862

with Dean Urdahl

The abundant waters and big woods around Lake Minnetonka and the Minnesota River Valley were fertile and sacred grounds to early Dakota for hundreds of years. As white men began to discover the area in the 1850s, the US Government aimed to displace Dakota tribes of the area to allow continued westward expansion. An agreement was ultimately made in which the Indians of the area ceded 24 million acres of land in return for relocating onto two reservations and government payments of over \$3 Million over a 50-year period.

Current Minnesota State Representative Dean Urdahl has lived in and represented several communities central to the conflict variously known as the Sioux Uprising, The Dakota Conflict, and the US Dakota War of 1862. He is the author of four historical novels set in Minnesota during the US Dakota War of 1862 and will share accounts of the conflict, including how it has impacted the communities of Minnesota 150 years later.



Monday, November 14th 7pm

Excelsior Brewing Company
421 Third Street, Excelsior

Historic Boathouses of Lake Minnetonka

with Melinda Nelson & Karen Melvin

If you've ever sailed, boated, or paddled past a vintage boathouse on Lake Minnetonka and wished its rustic wooden walls could talk, you'll be fascinated by this month's Tapping History event. Photographer Karen Melvin and author and Excelsior resident Melinda Nelson will share gorgeous images of the lake's most iconic boathouses and fascinating stories from *Boathouses of Lake Minnetonka*, their soon-to-be-published coffee table book.

Peter Miller Gideon

The Father of Fruit Breeding on the Prairies

Written by Terry Bolin

ELMHS Volunteer

The apple was arguably the world's first superfood. Unfortunately, Minnesota's harsh winter conditions prevented apples and many other kinds of fruit from growing and early settlers to the Upper Midwest could not afford to import fresh fruit. Self-educated horticulturalist and spiritualist Peter Miller Gideon migrated to the Minnesota territory from Illinois in 1853 bringing with him a bushel of apple seeds. In 1854 Gideon planted 350 apple trees and 50 varieties of several other fruit trees on the 160 acres he claimed near Lake Minnetonka, just a short distance from Excelsior. In doing so Gideon had hoped to do what no one else had done — develop an apple tree that would survive harsh winter temperatures and regularly produce good quality fruit that kept well.

Life for Minnesota's early settlers was not easy. By some accounts, the Gideon family lived on the verge of starvation. Over the years the tenacious Gideon planted more than 10,000 apple, peach, cherry, pear, plum, and quince trees with little success. By 1861 Gideon's orchard was said to have consisted of a single Siberian crabapple seedling. It was reported that at this point, Gideon claimed that an invisible being came to him and told him to write to a certain man in the state of Maine for apple seeds. Peter Gideon would invest his last \$8 in those apple seeds. Minnesota horticultural history would be made when Gideon crossbred the seeds of the Siberian crabapple seedling with the seeds of that common apple from Maine. Gideon would name this new apple in honor of his wife, "Wealthy."

The Wealthy apple was the first apple known to thrive in Minnesota. In fact, it was said to have been superior to any new variety of apple that had been introduced in the decade between 1860 and 1870 and by the early 20th century the Wealthy was one of the top five apples grown nationally. Ironically, while the Wealthy apple brought recognition among horticulturalists and growers, it yielded little actual wealth for Peter Gideon.



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Peter Miller Gideon

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In 1878 the Minnesota Legislature appropriated \$2000 to purchase 116 acres of land adjacent to Peter Gideon's farm as a fruit breeding initiative for the University of Minnesota. The colorful and often controversial Gideon was named superintendent of the State Experimental Fruit Farm and he received a small stipend. As superintendent, Gideon planted thousands of trees and introduced several new varieties of apples. Gideon had a reputation for being a man of strong religious beliefs and political views. He supported women's rights, and the prohibition of alcohol and he condemned slavery, abuse of Indians and horse racing. As a result, he was often at odds with the horticultural community and University administrators.

Gideon's position as superintendent was revoked (some accounts say he retired) in 1889, the farm was abandoned and the property was sold. Earlier that same year his wife Wealthy died after a long illness. Gideon remained active in the nursery business for 10 years and continued to experiment until the end of his life. Peter Gideon died on October 27, 1899, at the age of 81—a poor man even though he was responsible for bringing millions of dollars in horticultural wealth to the Midwest.

In 1907 the Minnesota Legislature established a fruit breeding farm between Excelsior and Chaska. The Minnesota Fruit Breeding Farm, now the Minnesota Horticulture Research Center and part of the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, became the center of fruit breeding for the next century. Charles Haralson served as the first superintendent of the farm at a time when several hardy fruits and trees were developed including his namesake the Haralson apple. DNA testing has proven that there is a genetic link between the Haralson apple and the Wealthy apple. The fact that Wealthy apples are still grown today is a testimony to the quality of Peter Gideon's research. Every time you bite a crisp Haralson or a sweet Honeygold, whose parentage includes the Haralson, you're enjoying progeny of Peter Gideon's Wealthy apple.



Apple Day 1935

Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Chamber of Commerce Presents Apple Day on Saturday, September 17th, 9am-10pm. For more information visit excelsior-lakeminnetonkachamber.com/apple-day

Visit the ELMHS Booth from 9am-6pm. The Society will be selling discounted books, maps, postcards, and memberships!

If you're interested in Volunteering at our Booth, please email info@elmhs.org or call 952-221-4766.

MEMBERSHIP

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

Annual member benefits include:

- Members-only special events
- Discounts on certain events
- Newsletter and Society mailings
- Voting privileges

Membership Levels

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

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Mail to ELMHS, Box 305, Excelsior M. 55331. Make checks payable to ELMHS. You can also join online at www.elmhs.org.

This membership is a gift for:

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

The recipient of your gift membership will receive a hand-written card acknowledging your gift. You will also receive an acknowledgement.

Membership makes a nice gift

Looking for a meaningful & unique gift? Why not give the gift of an Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society membership so that your friends and family can enjoy our newsletters, programs, and special events all year long! When you buy a gift membership, the recipient will receive a hand-written note to acknowledge your gift, along with a full year of membership in the Society. For more information about Gift Memberships contact Membership Chair Molly Loomis at molly@elmhs.org or fill out the form at left.

Volunteers Needed:

Love history and like to meet people? We're looking for volunteers to assist visitors and work with the collection in our Museum and our Archives.

We need hosts in our museum on Tuesdays, 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM and Saturdays, 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM (two shifts) from May until October.

The Archives needs volunteers every Wednesday and the second Saturday of each month, 10:00 am to 1:00 pm.

The more volunteers we have, the more hours we can be open. Training is provided.

Contact us at info@elmhs.org or 952-221-4766 to learn more or visit our website at www.elmhs.org/volunteer.

Like Us on Facebook!
[Facebook.com/ELMHS](https://www.facebook.com/ELMHS)

Thanks for your support!

New and Renewed Members, and Contributors

April 1, 2016 to July 31, 2016

MEMBERSHIPS

Gold Level

Dean Akins

Silver Level

Rick and Joan Ahmann

Doc and Meric Dougherty

Tom and Mary Jo Fulkerson

Lorrie Hall

Ralph Hatch

Ann Heimerl

Thomas and Sarah Kolar

Doug and Lori McDougal

Anne and Keith Obermeyer

Larry Opfer

Mary Pat Peterson

John Strandell

Bronze Level

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Shirley and Bill Baxter

Melanie and Charles Christianson

Sandra Hotvet

Bryce and Paula Johnson

Betsy and Charlie Jones

Susan Mark

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Nick and Kathy Ruehl

Patrick Schiltz

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Conley Brooks

Cindy and John Busch

Brianna DePauw

Connie Frederick

Cathy and Cam Guthrie

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William Kimber

Ken Kotzer

Dennis and Sharon Lander

Francesca Landon

Darel Leipold

Beth Maloney

James Moffett

Wendy Morical

George Noren

Harold Roberts

Sandy and Bob Robertson

Lori Schlottman

June Seamans

Maybeth and Ed Sheridan

Jim Stiller

Paul Tierney

Tom Williams

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Paul and Bridget Borgeson

Carole and John Cranbrook

Maxine Dickson

John DuPont

Drue Gisvold

Jerry and Justin Holl

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Bruce and Judy Kobs

Alan Langstaff

Janice Leafer

Clare Link

Linda Loomis

Gary and Joan Marquardt

Leo Meloche

Jean and Dick Mueller

Ed and Charty Oliver

David Pfeffer

David and Judy Rients

Will and Kathleen Skadsberg

Sally Sprengeler

Nina Stark

Gregory Thomas

Gary and Kay Thompson

Joni Tompkins

Lee Webster

Nan and Bob Woodburn

Edna and Cyrus Zulghadr

CONTRIBUTIONS

Mr. & Mrs. Jack Post in

Memory of Geneva L. Post

ACCESSIONS

April 1, 2016—July 31, 2016

- Rolf Erickson: Misc. Excelsior property assessor's records
- Molly (Finley) Fields: 1968 Excelsior PTA Cookbook
- Tom Knowlton: Photos of Augustus Hay home and butcher shop
- Sarah Burton Marshall: Misc. items from John Burton collection including Deephaven maps and framed sketch by Deephaven pioneer Lydia Ferguson Holtz.
- Scott D. McGinnis: Misc. photos, letter and programs
- June Seamans: 1932 photo of Water St. parade, Apple Day memorabilia
- Barbara Spannaus: Postcards
- Paul E. Tierney: "Tuning and Trimming the C" by Gordy Bowers



Above: Sketch signed "Lydia Ferguson, 1847." Likely created when the artist 22 years old and living in Rockland County, NY. Donated by Sarah Burton Marshall.

Address Service Requested

Excelsior MN 55331

PO Box 305

