

Winter 2016/17

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

E L M H S
P.O. Box 305
Excelsior, MN 55331
952 221 4766
info@elmhs.org

The Harborage

Ice Boating on Lake Minnetonka

By Terry Bolin

If the conditions are right on Lake Minnetonka you might see what looks like sailboats flying across the ice at speeds you didn't know could be achieved by anything without a motor — that's ice boating or as some call it, ice yachting. One of the thrills that has always been associated with summers on Lake Minnetonka is racing with the power of the wind. So it's no surprise that ice boating followed suit in the winter months.

The sport of ice boating in America was born on the Hudson River in 1869 when John A. Roosevelt (uncle of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt) built "Icicle." "Icicle" was nearly 67' long with about 1000 square feet of sail. It wasn't until the

1880s that ice boating came to Lake Minnetonka. History tells us that the first ice boat race on Lake Minnetonka was held in 1886. Ten-year old Ward Burton sailed "Blizzard," a boat owned by T. B. Janney, in that race. When he didn't win he was quoted as saying: "Will Ray, a farmer at Point Lookout, licked the tar out of us."

On September 23, 1899 the Minnetonka Ice Yacht Club (MIYC) was incorporated. Theodore Wetmore of New York, "Father of Ice Yachting in the West" and owner of "North Star," the fastest ice boat on Lake Minnetonka, became the club's first commodore. The MIYC, also known as Wetmore House, was located on Tahtu (Bug) Island in St. Louis Bay. A racing club that started as a group of 15 avid yachtsmen grew rapidly. Within 2 years MIYC had 167 members and 17 boats.



Ice Boat "Reindeer" on Lake Minnetonka

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Ice Boating on Lake Minnetonka Continued...

Many of these magnificent ice boats were owned by wealthy sportsmen who demanded the very finest in fittings and riggings. The boats themselves were of fairly simple construction: body/cockpit, rudder and sail. A running start or a shove by the crew was required to get the boat moving. Depending on size, one or more crew members crouched in the cockpit as the boat skated across the ice. These boats achieved speeds rivaling the fastest trains. The larger the sail area, the faster the boat

Ice boating on the Hudson River ended in 1902 when the decision was made to keep the river open year-round for commercial shipping. That's when Mr. Norman Wright, who represented several of the Hudson River owners, sold several of these magnificent boats to Lake

Minnetonka sportsmen. Ward Burton purchased "Northern Light" and "Zero." On February 18, 1885 "Northern Light" had won the Ice Yacht Grand Challenge Pennant on the Hudson River. According to Burton, "Northern Light" was clocked at a speed of 118.2 miles per hour. In her book *Minnetonka Yacht Club Centennial 1882-1982*, author Virginia Brainard Kunz wrote that Burton made his record-breaking run from Gideon's Bay to Wayzata in "Zero." On that afternoon in 1902 Burton and his crew, Harry Bowdoin and A.M. Robertson, made the approximately five mile journey in 3 minutes and 45 seconds.



Minnetonka Ice Yacht Clubhouse St. Louis Bay. Burned in 1904. .

Unfortunately, the MIYC was destroyed by fire on January 14, 1904 and never rebuilt. "Northern Light, the most famous ice boat on Lake Minnetonka, saw its last season one year after being sold in 1959. And, today's ice boats are no longer the gigantic boats of the past. But, a community of avid ice boaters still exists on Lake Minnetonka and we are still able to marvel at the incredible rates of speed modern ice boats achieve. Those of us who have had the pleasure of taking a spin around Lake Minnetonka aboard an ice boat know it's a thrill like none other. In 2012 a representative of the Minnesota Ice Sailing Association was asked if the sport is safe — "Nope, not a chance."

Tapping History Programs

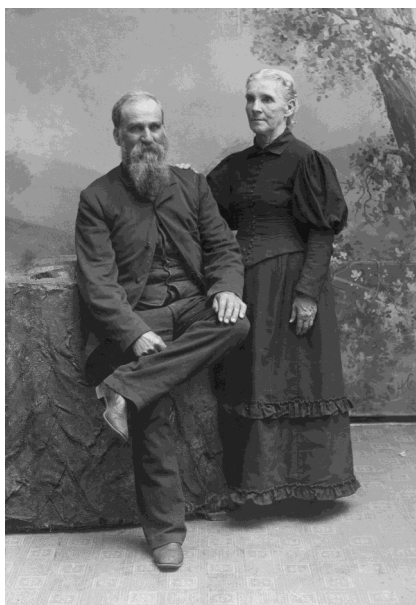
Excelsior Brewing Company—421 Third Street, Excelsior

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, January 9, 7pm

Amos and Susan Gray & their Bay
with Jon & Mary Gray Monson

Jon and Mary Gray Monson have always wondered what life was like for Mary's great-great grandparents, Amos and Susan Gray. They know the eastern most bay of Lake Minnetonka bore the family name. They know Amos and Susan are buried in the Groveland Cemetery with other Gray relatives. They had seen photos of the Gray descendants. Though, there were few details of how Mary's family lived back before Minnesota was a state. Last year, they commissioned historian Scott McGinnis to discover: What was life like for the Gray family 150 years ago?



Amos and Susan Gray.

Photo courtesy of Deanne Gray Straka

What Scott uncovered was of great interest to them. We hope it will be of interest to you as they share the story of one pioneer family who came to Lake Minnetonka in 1854.

Monday, February 13, 7:30pm*

*Please note special time

Lake Minnetonka's First Steamboats
with Aaron Isaacs

Steam navigation of Lake Minnetonka began as early as the 1860's when *The Governor Ramsey* was built for the Rev. Charles Galpin to carry mail from Excelsior across Lake Minnetonka and down the then navigable Minnehaha creek to Minnetonka Mills. The early steamboats had names like *Mercury*, *May Queen*, *Rambler*, *Seventy-Six*, and *Lotus*. In 1881, the 160 foot long *City of St Louis* was launched as the first inland vessel in the United States with electric lighting. It was quickly eclipsed the following year by the 300 foot *Belle of Minnetonka*, the largest vessel ever to navigate the lake.

Historian Aaron Isaacs of the Minnesota Streetcar Museum will tell the story of how early steamboats navigated the lake long before the Twin City Rapid Transit Co launched its iconic streetcar boats like the "Minnehaha." He is co-author of the book "Twin Cities by Trolley."



"Belle of Minnetonka" with "Hebe" in foreground at Lake Park Hotel docks 1882.

Monday, March 13, 7:00pm

Mr. Jimmy: Excelsior's Roving Ambassador
with Friends of Jimmy

Legends abound about the late Jimmy Hutmaker – Excelsior's cigar-puffing, street-roving ambassador. For decades, "Mr. Jimmy" was a fixture of the Excelsior streetscape, pacing the sidewalks with a suitcase in hand and a mumbling conversation. Legend has it that he inspired one of rock &

roll's greatest songs by a chance encounter with Mick Jagger at Bacon Drug.

But who was the real Mr. Jimmy? Join several of Jimmy's friends and family to get an inside look at the real Jimmy Hutmaker - and how his adopted hometown at times shunned him, supported him, and ultimately legendized him.

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

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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 Anderson 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 Archives.

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

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Thanks for your support!

New and Renewed Members, and Contributors

August 1, 2016 to December 1, 2016

MEMBERSHIPS

Gold Level

Ron Haberkorn
Jennifer Morris

Silver Level

Deb & Rick Rodgers
Barbara Spannaus & Thom Weddle

Bronze Level

Aaron & Angie Bean
John & Julie Einhorn
Jane Johnson

Individual Level

Birdhouse Inn & Gardens
Elaine Dunn
Joanie Holst
Judith Kim
John Purdy
Roger Smith
Eric Snyder
Tim Soboleski
Ron Wagner
Kathy White

Senior Level

Mary Anderson
R.N. Burns
Butch Colby
Elaine Dunn
Patrick Dupont
Paul Giovannetti
Bruce & Carol Hedblom
Janie Hill
Jerry & Kathy Martin
James Ogland
Nancy Olmsted
Susana Robinson
Nancy Steege
Richard & Stephanie Wing

Thank you to our Museum Volunteers!

ELMHS would like to give a Big Thank You to all our Volunteer Museum Hosts from Summer 2016.

Cheryl Ahlcrona	Jerry Holl	Maybeth Sheridan
Molly Anderson	Cate Honzl	Lisa Stevens
Mary Ashley	Sarah Kuhn	Sue Toffanetti
Deanna Bunkelman	Francesca Landon	Kevin Vander Velden
Kay Derner	Judy Mueller	Jacob Westman
Brianna DePauw	Jodi Noll	Bob Woodburn
Meric & Doc Dougherty & Maureen	Charty Oliver	
Kathy Endres	Alice Reimann	

ACCESSIONS

August 1, 2016—October 31, 2016

- Marge Bosacker: Atlas of Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, 1898.
 - Gene and Sandy Clapp: AS Apgar bottle. Excelsior Amusement Park KiddieLand Miniature Train Co. crossing signal light.
 - Itasca County Historical Society: Map of Lake Minnetonka.
 - Sarah Burton Marshall: Ward Burton Lake Minnetonka photo collection.
 - Margaret and Jim Ogland: Two piece woman's suit with matching hat, ca. 1860s and dressmaker's form.
 - Daniel Ostroot: Half of a propeller found on Shady Island, Lake Minnetonka. Believed to be from "May Queen," 1879.
 - Douglas R. Sather: Atlas of Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, 1898. Atlas of Minnesota, Andreas, 1874.
 - Louis Zakariasen: Three piece suit from Olds Dry Goods, Excelsior.
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PO Box 305
Excelsior, MN 55331
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