

# Crow Wing County

HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
MUSEUM & LIBRARY - EST. 1927

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PRESERVING HISTORY NEWSLETTER

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## MISSISSIPPI RIVER HISTORY SIGNS



Carl "Fert" Faust has a mission to add signage to every historic site in Brainerd. Most signs stand next to buildings or in parking lots marking buildings of the past. Soon there will be signs in less conventional locations—along the shore of the Mississippi River. Paddlers float past some of the most historic locations in the city. Without signage, they are missed. This new set of signs will ensure that the history of these sites is there for history lovers and hopefully gain the interest of newcomers.

This project began in 2022 when the Historical Society was tasked with creating a river tour for the "Smiles on the 'Sippi" event, a collaboration between the Mississippi Headwaters Board, Smiles for Jake, and the Brainerd YMCA. As the resident expert, we turned to Faust for help. What transpired were two tours: a paddling tour and a walking tour. The tours share the obvious and not-so-obvious points of interest along the river in Brainerd from Cemetery Landing down to First Island.

The signs will be accompanied by a mobile interactive map. A QR code on the signs will link to a webpage map with all the locations. Clicking on these locations will bring up information and photos of the site. The QR code also provides a link to a drone video tour of the Mississippi created by the Brainerd Dispatch in 2021. We thank CTC for the map design and web hosting. The signs were made possible with funding from Brainerd Community Action's Community Empowerment Fund through the Brainerd History Group.

## Tour Highlights:

**Ferry Crossing:** Before a pedestrian bridge, the only way to cross the river was by boat or ferry (unless you dared to cross the railroad bridge).

Ferry rates in 1872 were as follows:

- Foot Passenger - 10 cents
- Loose ox, cow, or mule - 10 cents
- Single Team - 20 cents
- Double Team - 25 cents



**Pilings:** There are many remnants of logging days found on the tour. These pilings (left) were large trees pounded into the riverbed upside down (sharp end first!) and held log booms.

**Whiskey Creek:** In 1875, a railroad spur ran to this area as a place to unload logs. There is a piling at its mouth, likely left from a small dam that raised the creek for log booms. The creek now drains the low areas west of Highway 371. The source of this creek's name remains unknown.

**Washington Street Bridge:** (see back page) This short span of river includes four of the five bridges that cross the Mississippi in Brainerd. The tour includes histories of all of them, but the view of 1930s Art Deco Washington Street Bridge is the best.

**J. J. Howe Lumber Co.:** From 1875 to 1899, the entire area south of College Drive on the east side of the river, including the present soccer field area and all of the Boom Lake area was a sawmill and lumberyard. By the late 1880s, the J.J. Howe Lumber Company was a major business and employer. They had boomage for 2,500,000 feet of logs and milled up to 25,000,000 feet of lumber annually.



**Do you know what these are? If not, take the tour and find out!**

## President's Report

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year! This will be my last article in our newsletter. After 21 years as your President, it is time to step down. I'm lucky all this time I had the privilege of working with some very good Executive Directors, their staff, and many good volunteers. All our staff has been super. I am proud of our many fine volunteers. Everybody has done a great job. During the past 21 years I have seen a lot of changes. Our museum looks great and our staff has made it look great. I want to thank the Executive Directors that I worked with as well as the staff and volunteers. I was lucky to have such good Board Members to work with all these years. I thank everybody for the 21 years of working with you. And I know you will continue to do a good job and make our County proud of what we have accomplished. My very best wishes and good luck.

Sincerely,



Don Samuelson  
President

### FROM THE DIRECTOR

According to the American Association for State and Local History there are 21,588 history organizations in the United States. "That's more than the number of Walmarts, McDonald's, Starbucks, and even public libraries." That is exciting news, right? But why do we need so many history organizations?

History organizations are a relatively recent invention. Throughout time, families and groups kept their own history. Not until the Renaissance did the idea of a public history display take form as a collection of portraits of important individuals. This concept spread and eventually diversified to include military battle displays, architectural preservation, and outdoor heritage sites with the common goal of creating cultural pride and patriotism. In the United States it took form as the historical society, the earliest being the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1791. Initially broad collections have refined their scope to include specific local histories and objects.

When we preserve and share our local history, we show that everyone is important and small events still shape our future. I recently read an article in which the author writes that "nothing in my education prepared me to believe, or encouraged me to expect, that there was any reason to be interested in my own place." I think this is typical of rural areas. Society teaches us that important things happen in important places, but when we examine local history, we find that important things happen everywhere. It creates a sense of pride for our community.

This is why we need 21,588 history organizations ...and probably even more.



Hillary Swanson  
Executive Director

# What Used To Be...

By Brian Marsh

One thing that's been important in our society is the formal education of our children. How that was carried out in the earlier days of rural Crow Wing County was much different than it is today.

Back then, it was impractical for rural children to attend school in a nearby town due to the lack of reliable transportation. The solution was to build schoolhouses throughout the rural areas of the county, making education more readily available to those living on farms.

Rural schools tended to be one room structures where students of all grades (up to 8<sup>th</sup>) gathered together. Each student would sit at a desk. At the front of each row of desks, there was a seat with no desk in front of it. This is where the individual classes would sit for their study and recitation. After being given their assignment for the next day, those students would return to their regular desks and work on their assignment, and another class would come forward for its instruction. Usually, there were only 3-4 students per class, and class periods were short – typically 10-15 minutes.

Almost universally, female teachers had to be unmarried, and, upon marriage, their employment ended. One such teacher in rural Crow Wing County was my great-grandmother, Blanche Turner.

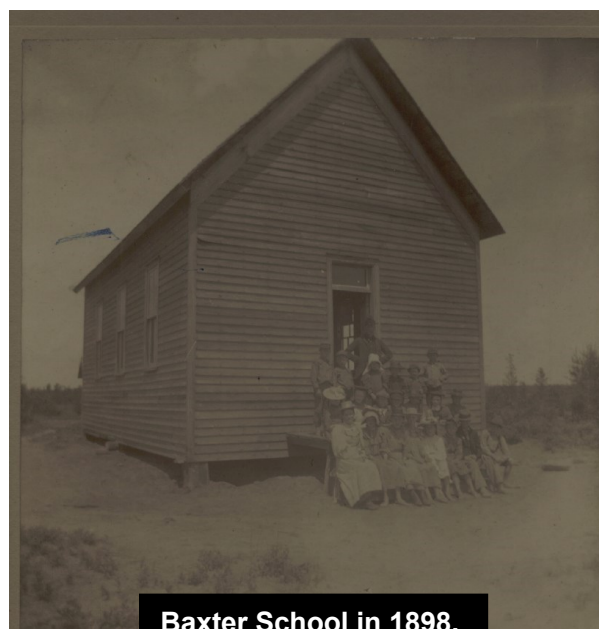
Rural schools each had an assigned District number, but usually were referred to by a name given to them by where they were located. That name could be of the person on whose land the school was, a nearby lake, or a township. Over the years, there were 115 different rural school buildings in Crow Wing County. Many wound up be annexed or attached to another rural school. From the late 1950's through the mid 1960's, these rural schools were consolidated with the city schools, and the era of rural school education vanished.

## RULES FOR TEACHERS 1872

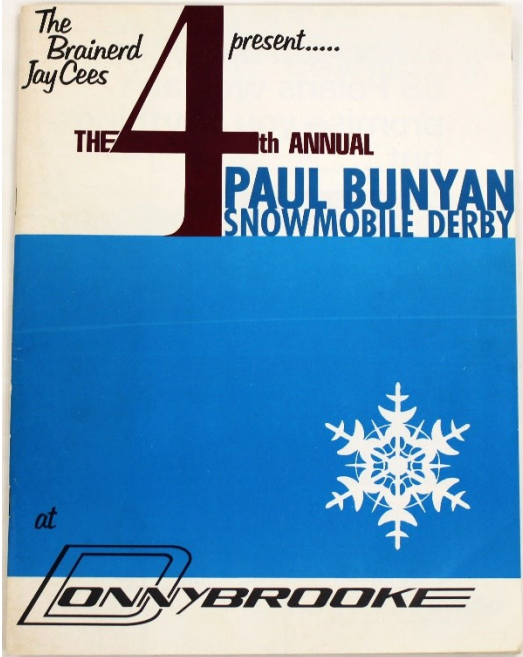
1. Teachers each day will fill lamps, clean chimneys.
2. Each teacher will bring a bucket of water and a scuttle of coal for the day's session.
3. Make your pens carefully. You may whittle nibs to the individual taste of the pupils.
4. Men teachers may take one evening each week for courting purposes, or two evenings a week if they go to church regularly.
5. After ten hours in school, the teachers may spend the remaining time reading the Bible or other good books.
6. Women teachers who marry or engage in unseemly conduct will be dismissed.
7. Every teacher should lay aside from each pay a goodly sum of his earnings for his benefit during his declining years so that he will not become a burden on society.
8. Any teacher who smokes, uses liquor in any form, frequents pool or public halls, or gets shaved in a barber shop will give good reason to suspect his worth, intention, integrity and honesty.
9. The teacher who performs his labor faithfully and without fault for five years will be given an increase of twenty-five cents per week in his pay, providing the Board of Education approves.



Lake Edward School circa 1910.



Baxter School in 1898.



# From the Collection

By Dayla Hart

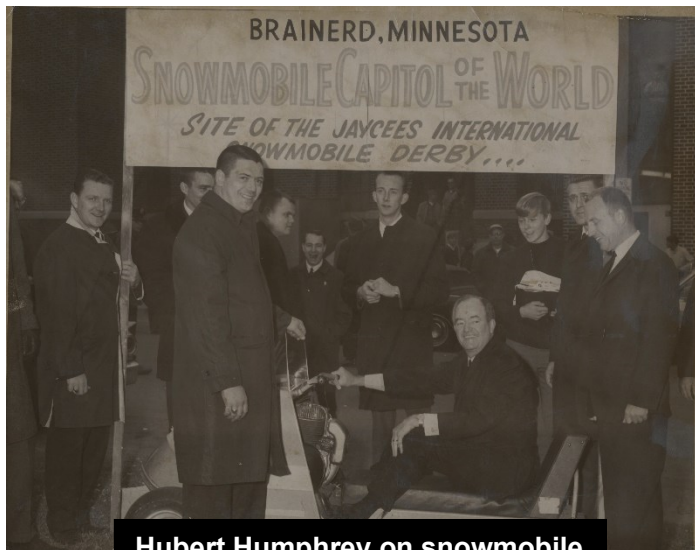
Anyone who has spent time in Crow Wing County in the winter knows that snowmobiling here is amazing! With 700 miles of groomed trails, the fun today can be practically endless. Snowmobiles were in use around the area since at least the 1960s. This led to some resorts, at that time, beginning to stay open in the winter using snowmobiling as a draw to bring in more guests. In our collection, we have a program that shows just how serious the sport would become for many and some very amusing predictions were being made about its future.

This program was put out by the Brainerd Jaycees for their 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Paul Bunyan Snowmobile Derby at Donnybrooke in 1969. The first page proudly declares “Welcome to Brainerd - The Snowmobile Capital of the World.”

Further in the program is an article by an unknown author that makes the bold predictions. It states, “Our theory is that the snowmobile will come into such universal use in northern climates that it will be the snow plowed streets that are the exception. We believe the tremendous problem of snow removal and disposal that now frustrates our governments and drives them to the point of bankruptcy will be completely solved by the snowmobile. Police departments will be equipped with souped up and sired snowmobiles. Hospitals will have warm, safe, swift, oxygen equipped snowmobile ambulances. Schools will drive snowmobile buses. There’ll be



**First snowmobile races on Gull Lake.**



**Hubert Humphrey on snowmobile at Jaycees snowmobile derby.**

snowmobile taxis and snowmobile delivery trucks.” They may have known their vision was a stretch, because they argue later “If you’re snickering now, we’ll take this opportunity to remind you that when the telephone was first offered to the public it was greeted by the general public and captains of industry as a rather interesting gadget, but primarily a toy . . . now look at Mother Bell!!”

Although their theory has not yet come to pass, it sure is fun to consider, especially for enthusiasts of the snowmobile.

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Your continued support is  
essential to our success.**

**And thank you to those who  
made donations at our Annual  
Meeting. This was our most  
successful year yet!**



## The Roundhouse

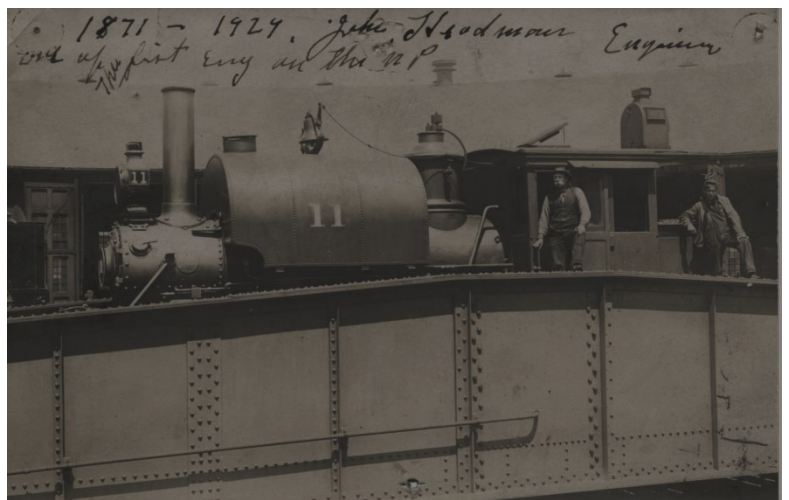
Once a common fixture of all railyards, most railroad roundhouses have ceased to exist. In early days, turntables were essential to railroads. As steam locomotives moved only in one direction, turntables were necessary to turn them around. Oftentimes, buildings were built around the turntables acting as a garage.

The original 1872 Northern Pacific shops on the north side of the tracks had a 12-stall roundhouse (see photo on opposite page). Like many, it was only partially round. As the shops grew in importance, plans for a full-round forty-four stall

roundhouse were made. Like all other new shop buildings, it was meant to be fireproof. It had a granite foundation, full iron trusses, brick interior and exterior, completed with a slate roof. Each stall had a vent to attach to for exhaust while working on the locomotives. Knowing the size of locomotives at the time and the size of the other shop buildings brings into perspective how large this building was. It was one of if not the largest and most complete roundhouse in the United States at the time. Its size speaks to the importance of the Brainerd shops to the Northern Pacific as a whole. They serviced all locomotives from Duluth to western Montana.

As diesel engines replaced steam locomotives, turntables and roundhouses became obsolete. Diesel engines required less maintenance and were equipped to go forward and backward. Today, we see them on both ends of trains for that reason; they can not only pull but push. The roundhouse was razed in 1968. The only evidence that remains at the Northern Pacific Center are a few pie-shaped concrete slabs and a crescent of the foundation from the turntable.

The Historical Society is currently working with local artists Chris Smith at Woodsy Creative and Chase Vreeland to create a working model of the roundhouse. This will give new generations an idea of how they worked. It will be on view at the grand opening of our Northern Pacific exhibit, which will take place in early 2024. You can also see more photographs of the roundhouse on our new digital display!



**Caption reads: "1871 - 1929 Jake Headman Engineer one of the first engineers on the NP." The engine is on the turntable with the roundhouse in the background.**



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PHONE:  
218-829-3268

EMAIL:  
HISTORY@CROWWING.US

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