New book from MNHS Press Features Local Girl’s Story

In October 1943, sixteen-year-old Marilyn Barnes was told that her recent bout of pneumonia was in fact tuberculosis. She entered Ah-gwah-ching State Sanatorium at Walker, Minnesota, for what she thought would be a short stay. In January, her tuberculosis spread, and she nearly died. Her recovery required many months of bed rest and medical care.

Marilyn loved to write, and the story of her three-year residency at the sanatorium is preserved in hundreds of letters that she mailed back home to her parents, who could visit her only occasionally and whom she missed terribly. The letters functioned as a diary in which Marilyn articulately and candidly recorded her reactions to roommates, medical treatments, Native American nurses, and boredom. She also offers readers the singular perspective of a bed-bound teenager, gossiping about boys, requesting pretty new pajamas, and enjoying Friday evening popcorn parties with other patients.

Selections from this cache of letters are woven into an informative narrative that explores the practices and culture of a mid-century tuberculosis sanatorium and fills in long-forgotten details gleaned from recent conversations with Marilyn, who “graduated” from the sanatorium and went on to lead a full, productive life.

About the author: An independent researcher and historian, Mary Krugerud is the author of Interrupted Lives: The History of Tuberculosis in Minnesota and Glen Lake Sanatorium. She discovered Marilyn’s letters during a project funded by an MNHS Legacy Research Fellowship. Mary lives in Hutchinson.

The Girl in Building C will be released September 1, 2018 and available for purchase from your favorite major book vendor and at the Treaty Site History Center. Join Mary Krugerud and special guest Marilyn Robertz for a book launch celebration on September 7th at 7 p.m. at the Saint Peter Community Center Rm. 219. The event is sponsored by St. Peter Reads.

Dr. Helen Bynum, author of Spitting Blood: The History of Tuberculosis
During the last 90 years the Society and its leadership have been through a lot. From our inception at the Nicollet County fair in 1928, through our fledgling first years, to searching for a permanent home for much of its early life, to floods, more floods, still more floods, a major tornado, repairs and construction, tough financial times, adding more historic sites, and more. I wonder if my predecessors felt the same way?

The more I think about it, the more in awe I become of all the hard work and dedication my predecessors put into NCHS so we can have what we do today. And we’re pretty awesome (but I might be a little biased). Today we own and operate two historic sites and manage three others. Individually they all tell very different stories—that of a frontier family home, an interpretive center, a general store, a Civil War fort, and a restored prairie over a town site and treaty signing location. Collectively they tell our story. We produce dozens of programs annually and welcome thousands of visitors to our sites. We house and care for tens of thousands of artifacts. And we tell still more history to passersby with our historic roadside markers.

Ninety years later we continue to collect, preserve, and interpret our shared history of Nicollet County. Here’s to celebrating the past 90 years of the Nicollet County Historical Society and looking forward to the next 90!
New Face at NCHS: Introducing Ruth Einstein!

After spending several months searching, we are pleased to introduce to you our new Research Coordinator, Ruth Einstein. Ruth started her new job with us on July 10 and has hit the ground running.

We’re excited to add Ruth to our team. She brings us 13 years of experience working in this field as an Assistant Archivist at the William Breman Jewish Heritage & Holocaust Museum in Atlanta, Georgia. She also has years of experience and training as an educator, webmaster, musician, and more.

Ruth’s time at The Breman includes managing two documentation and oral history projects. The States of Georgia and Alabama Project focused on Jewish families, communities, and organizations. New Lives was a project concerned with documenting the lives of the Holocaust of survivors who came to Georgia which includes 130-plus videotaped interviews of survivors who talked about their lives and thoughts in the aftermath of the Holocaust; over 2,000 family photographs; interactive maps; and historical background on ghettos, camps, and the fate of Jews and other persecuted groups in each European country and Russia.

In her position, Ruth is the public face for the Society’s archives. She’ll be around to assist researchers, help answer queries, grow and maintain the archival collection, accept new donations, document our collections, and promote the use of the NCHS archives.

Please help us welcome Ruth to NCHS. Join us for light refreshments between 1–3 p.m. on August 15 at the Treaty Site History Center.

History Center Bits...

Board of Directors

Now Accepting Applications for 2019 NCHS Board of Directors

The Nominating Committee is seeking individuals to fill vacant seats on the Board to begin in January 2019. We are looking for individuals from any of the cities or townships across greater Nicollet County and from various professional backgrounds.

The Historical Society has big goals for the next five years and this is an exciting time with a lot of work ahead of us.

Applications are due by Friday, November 16. For more information or to request an application, please contact Executive Director Jessica Becker at (507) 934-2160 or e-mail director@nchsmn.org. Application packets are also available on our website at nchsmn.org/about-us/board-of-directors.

Get to Know Ruth

What was your first job?
Librarian at the Hillel at Indiana University

What are you currently reading?
I’m reading and editing a novel written from the perspective of a Jewish man looking back at events that took place during his teenage years in his hometown of Birmingham, Alabama, during the ’50s, when formerly Nazi scientists, such as Wernher von Braun, were brought there to help build the nascent American space program.

What is your favorite saying or motto?
Ruth is Stranger than Fiction.

What is your favorite hobby?
I like to read and to hike.

What are you most excited about in relation to your job this year?
Populating our archives database so that it will be easier to provide information to researchers and to descendants of Nicollet County residents who have questions about the people who lived here and what they contributed to their communities.

Treaty Site History Center Events

Film Series | The Wrecking Crew
Sept. 6 | 7 p.m. | SPHS Theater | FREE
Music lovers will be astonished at the influence The Wrecking Crew wielded over rock and pop music in the 1960s and early 1970s. These unsung instrumentalists were the de-facto backing band on hit records by The Beach Boys, Phil Spector, Frank Sinatra, Sonny & Cher, Elvis, The Monkees and many more. Runtime: 102 minutes Rated PG for language, thematic elements, and smoking images.

Resurrection Cemetery Tour
September 15 | 10 a.m. | Free*Registration required
Few places in St. Peter hold as much history as Resurrection Cemetery and the St. Peter State Hospital Original Cemetery. Join historian Nita Aasen on a tour through the grassy knolls and stately trees as she shares stories on some of the individuals laid to rest within the grounds and interesting facets of cemetery history.

To attend please RSVP to Jessica at director@nchsmn.org or call 507-934-2160.

Historical Markers, Monuments and Memorials placed by the Minnesota Daughters of the American Revolution
September 27 | 2 p.m. | $3 for non-members, Free for NCHS members
Join DAR State Regent Faye Leach for her presentation about markers that have been erected by the DAR since 1916, including those in Nicollet County. Some markers are historical, some memorials, and some monuments. Discover who placed them and why and learn about markers that were removed, lost or stolen. Enjoy before and after photos of marker restorations from across the state.

Volunteer Opportunity

Back-to-school is around the corner and our student volunteer is heading back too. Starting in September we have openings on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 10 a.m.–4 p.m. in the gift shop. Main responsibilities include greeting visitors, collecting the admission fee, ringing up shop purchases and answering phones. If you’re interested or have questions, please call Jessica at 507-934-2160.
Artifact & Archival Donations
accepted into our collections since the May 2018 Crossing.
PLEASE NOTE: This donations list may not be entirely up-to-date because we're are slightly backlogged due to our staffing transition.

David Mines: World War Two items from his father, John Mines: Bronze Star and two bars in box, Honorable Discharge document, two photographs of John Mines in uniform, two identification cards, Eisenhower jacket with patches from both the 8th and the 9th Army Air Forces, bronze patch from 450th Bomb Sq. patch, European Theater of Operations bar, Good Conduct bar; Medical Corps round, metal insignia; piece of German "flak."

Jean Olson Andreen: two District 46 School photos.

Fay Choban: six Nicollet, MN, postcards, including two showing the Fourth of July parade in Nicollet in 1910.

Brian Oviatt: check from Wheeler & Bennett Brickmakers in North Mankato to Chas. Dubke, November 1, 1900.


Susan Bogenschutz: Veih Bakery plastic bag.

Betsy Sagnes: wedding dress from 1897.

Lois Johnson: digital copies of images from the 1998 tornado.


Daniel Groebner: Johann Schmatz family history.

Tuff Miller: smudge pot (torch) found by Hoffman Concrete of Mankato. These "Toledo Torches" were used as warning devices for highway motorists during road construction.


Gerald Strand: photos of damage from the 1998 St. Peter tornado, clippings from John LaBate: scraper for dug-out canoes, found near the Minnesota River near Courtland by Leonard Pries, c.1930.

S. Ken Ziegler: weaving loom; home-spun natural wool blanket, 1856.

Gene Retka: transit and tripod used throughout southwestern Minnesota for surveying. Family of Raymond Hein: scrapbook with information about service members from St. Peter and the surrounding area.

Robert Menk: collection including a wedding dress, shoes from Carol Johnson Menk, 1951; photos from Martin and Carol Menk; William August Menk Family History; Christ Conrad Menk Family History.

James Kollmann: model threshing machine and tractor.

Steve Scholl: brass bell from Lincoln School.

Ashley Thronson: cornet, books, and roller skates belonging to Stanley Youngblom of Lafayette, MN; business history.

James Erickson: miscellaneous items owned by Ethel Erickson.

Cleaning out the attic, clearing out your parent's home, ARE YOU NICOLLET COUNTY CONNECTED? If so and you have items connected with the history of Nicollet County, we may be interested in adding them to our collections. Check with us first, before using the dumpster!
State of Mind
by Beth Zabel, Volunteer Services Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Human Services

What’s in a name? It’s everything! This exhibit is about a state facility; the evolution of mental health treatment; and the education of the public about what happens at the St Peter Treatment Center now. It’s the State of Mind exhibit.

There are pictures of the buildings, patients and employees. Artifacts include the master key cabinet, camisole, electroconvulsive shock machine, nurses’ pins and hats, uniforms, a cemetery marker and shroud. Items recovered from shack sites are displayed within a shack-like structure. Vocational Services projects and books are available for sale.

The showpiece of this exhibit is the Centennial Timeline. The piece is in remarkably good shape indicating it has not been on display over the last 50+ years. Created in 1966 for the St. Peter State Hospital’s centennial celebration, it includes state, national, and international people and events that shaped the care and treatment of those with mental illness. Fashioned with black marker on newsprint and glued to two 4’x8’ sheets of particle board, it has been reproduced – printed vinyl mounted on aluminum sheets – for display. After the closing of this exhibit, this reproduction will move to the St. Peter State Hospital Museum located in historic Old Center on the St. Peter Treatment Center campus.

The timeline is divided by superintendent terms. Trends and theories are highlighted in drawings and words. “Moral Therapy Era” with its emphasis on good food, work and the calming influence of living with staff gave way to “Detention–Custodial Care”, a period when there was little hope for the chronically mentally ill patient. Later, “Instant IQs,” “Group Process,” and “Psycho-Chemo-Therapy” ushered in new hope along with the introduction of “social worker” and “Clinical Psychology.”

Tying together the historical events of mid-century 1800s, “1866,” “Iowa,” “Civil War,” and pictures of Native Americans and soldiers appear. Prior to 1866, citizens with mental illness needing residential care were sent to Mount Pleasant, Iowa. Early in 1866, Iowa notified Minnesota that they did not have room for Minnesotans. While not documented, there are several historical events that could have triggered this request. Since the Civil War ended in 1865, Iowa could have seen an increase in citizens with traumatic military experience. Cession of Native American lands in Iowa and Minnesota continued aggressively during this time. Waves of immigration with its emotionally taxing demands appears to have triggered mental illnesses requiring residential placement.
Upcoming Events
All programs take place on Sundays at 1:00 p.m. Programs are included with site admission of $6 adults, $5 seniors and college students, $4 ages 5–17, free age 4 and under and MNHS members.

Aug. 12 - Afternoon of Leisure
Aug. 19 - Bees and Honey
Aug. 26 - Old Schools Day
Sept. 2 - The West Arrives in West Newton
Sept. 9 - Grandparents Day
Sept. 16 - Snakes of the Minnesota River
Sept. 23 - Horses, Horseshoes, Leather, and Ropes
Sept. 30 - Preparing for Winter
Oct. 7 - Sheep, Wool, and Quilts
Oct. 14 - West Newton Post Office
Oct. 21 - Lonesome Ron's Round-Up

Program planning for the 2019 season is already underway. Mark your calendars for June 7, 8, and 9 next year for the “Company B Weekend”! We will have over 60 re-enactors and a few canons. It's quite an experience! Reserve your campsite and bring the family so you can take it all in from the morning bugle playing reveille to the soldiers drilling on the parade ground with their muskets.

See you at the Fort!
2018 Calendar of Events:

Event/Program information:
Harkin Store and Fort Ridgely: $6 adults (18–64), $5 seniors (65+) and college students, $4 children (ages 5–17).
Free for age 4 and under, MNHS and NCHS members.

TSHC: Treaty Site History Center events are free unless stated otherwise.

Please watch the NCHS website, Facebook and Twitter and MNHS website for further events and details for additional programming.
Your membership dollars at work…

NCHS Membership Application

Name _______________________________________________________
Address ______________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
Phone ( _______ ) _____________________________________________
E-mail _______________________________________________________
My check is enclosed □  Please debit my credit card □
Acct. Number ________________________________________________
CVV Code Expiration Date _______________________________________
3 4s on rev-VISA, MC, Disc, 4 4s on rev-AE
Authorized Signature __________________________________________

□ Please save mailing costs, I will read my newsletter online.

Yes! I would like to support my Nicollet County Historical Society in 2018 at the following level (please check one).

- Senior (65+) $ 30
- Individual $ 40
- Family $ 50
- Sustaining $ 75
- Patron $ 100
- Supporter $ 200
- Benefactor $ 500
- Life Member $ 1,000

Business Memberships

Please make checks payable to:
Nicollet County Historical Society
Membership applications should be mailed to:
Nicollet County Historical Society
1851 North Minnesota Avenue
St. Peter, MN 56082

PAPERLESS?? Now you can purchase or renew your membership online! Visit nchsmn.org/membership for details.