Interview with Lillian Mathews, BSU graduate and Shevlin School teacher
by Janet Kelly Moen

The life-story of a woman that encompasses an entire century is by necessity one that reaches back not only into another time, but into another continent as well. The changes over this period of time were staggering, and involved new lands, new cultures and languages. All of these changes were mediated through family life, in a time when families were both extended and large, and deeply imbedded in the special environment of their particular place.

Lillian Mathews’s father, Lars Larsen, immigrated to the United States in 1891, at age twenty-one, from Aarhus on the east coast of the Jutland Peninsula in Denmark. Moving westward, as land and opportunities opened, across America from New York City, he took a job working on a farm in Avoca, Iowa. There he met, fell in love with, and was married to Anna Dorothea Olsen. At the turn of the century they moved north into Minnesota to settle on a small shack while building a larger one.

Lillian, as the youngest, received the usual attention older siblings pay to the youngest child. As she was left alone while they were at school, when she was about five years old, she would walk over to the nearby school every afternoon. She would enter the classroom on tiptoe and sit in one of the double seated desks with one of her sisters, or one of the others girls who vied for her company. She was very quiet and observed in class, and would find something to give to her before she left for home.

When she was ready for first grade, she went to the local country Hendrickson School, built on land given by her uncle (this location was later called the Pond school). Lillian went to ninth grade at Leonard for one year, and completed high school over the next three years at Clearbrook, graduating in 1939.

At that time she knew that women had essentially two choices of a ‘profession,’ either teacher or nurse. As a student who had very much enjoyed school herself and liked her teachers, she decided on teaching; and also, she says, due to her slight aversion to blood.

Lillian, at the age of thirty, received her B.S. from Bemidji State College (now BSU) and took the two-year program to livestock. It was a life requiring dawn to dusk labor and, as well as work off the farm as necessary to make ends meet. Here Lars and Anna raised their family of ten children: six older siblings were followed after a time by four younger children. Lillian was the youngest child, born April 3, 1918.

True to their Danish roots, the family valued education, and Lars was a long time member of the school board, continuing to serve long after his own children were out of school and gone. He also served as township chairman, taking care of both the infrastructure and the welfare of the community. Their homestead was a site of regular visiting by neighbors and served as the site of 4th of July celebrations involving potluck dishes and ice cream made in the shade.

‘Centennial’ Teacher with a Passion for Teaching and Learning
Visitors to the Depot
Bring Priceless Information

By Sue Burns (President)

Visitors to our museum often bring us as interesting items and information as we provide them. Take, for instance, RaeAnn Krause Goin from Prosser, Washington. Mrs. Goin and two of her daughters stopped in one day in April after having spent the better part of an afternoon at the Woolen Mills, where she purchased Cecelia McKeig’s books Bemidji: A Snapshot of Bemidji 1940-1960 and Bemidji: Images of America.

RaeAnn was born in Bemidji to Ray and Margaret (Stevens) Krause in 1936. She lived on the 1300 block of Bemidji Avenue near her paternal grandparents, William and Anna Krause. Her grandfather worked at the roundhouse, which was located east of Lake Bemidji near the current site of the Sanford Center. She recalled that her grandfather walked to and from work every day.

During RaeAnn’s stop at the Woolen Mills, she saw the large framed print of early Paul Bunyan with a man standing near the statue. “That’s Uncle Bunchie!” she said. RaeAnn only lived here for about five years before her family moved to Washington. Prior to this visit, she had returned only once, when she was eleven and her father’s body was sent back from Texas for burial in Greenwood Cemetery. (He was electrocuted when an arc welder he was working with malfunctioned.)

Her memories of those early years when she lived here, however, are remarkably vivid and interesting. She is just one of many individuals who have colorful, interesting and historical memories to share about Bemidji and northern Minnesota. Visitors to the museum, as I said earlier, bring us interesting details and stories to flesh out what we can find in newspaper stories and other records of the area. Please stop in to see what the museum has to offer, to use our research facilities, and to share your memories with us. Your recollections can then become part of local history.

From the Desk of the Director

By Gary Rozman

On August 22nd, the Historical Society commemorated the 70th anniversary of the Count Beltrami Monument on the spot our namesake explorer stood at the culmination of his search for the headwaters of the Mississippi River. That same week I embarked on a trip to Filottrano, his final resting place to help encourage a Sister City relationship with Bemidji.

I met with Marzia Luchetti, the daughter of a distinguished gentleman who took it upon himself to curate the many Native American artifacts, botanical specimens, and other objects transported to Europe by Beltrami at the conclusion of his north American explorations. Those artifacts had not been on accessible to the public for nearly two hundred years, and his efforts represented the first attempt to catalog and interpret the collection. The building in which it is housed is one in which Beltrami spent his later years, in study and contemplation. It’s located in the heart of Filottrano and owned by the Luchetti family. I am proud to report that their latest display includes a framed copy of the proclamation signed by Mayor Albretch describing the Bemidji-Filottrano connection.

I also met with Lauretta Giulion, Mayor of Filottrano, and several other city officials. An unexpected bonus during my visit was the presence of an anthropologist, Cesare Marino, who recently discovered a graphite etching on a section of birch bark which, he estimates, might represent the earliest known depiction or map of the Red Lake area.

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Past Events

The Historical Society has been actually been requested by Professor Marino to contribute a foreword to scientific paper he plans to publish documenting his discovery, something we’re very excited about.

Over the course of nearly three days in Filottano I had the privilege and pleasure of touring churches (including the one in which Beltrami’s remains are interred); government buildings, eco- and agro-tourism resorts; private villas (including the former residence of Giulia de Medici, special friend to Giacomo, and the countess for whom he named Lake Julia); and schools, including the G.C. Beltrami Elementary School, with whom it’s my hope the Bemidji Area School District can engage in a postcard exchange program. I returned with several objects given to me as gifts – a small tapestry featuring the official crest of Filottano has already been delivered to Bemidji City Hall, a book describing historic residences throughout Filottano, and a botanical text book, representing the horticultural community’s interest in the plant samples collected by Beltrami.

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to qualify her to teach lower elementary, which prepared her to teach grades one through eight, although she taught mostly first grade. She taught in rural schools near Clearbrook.

This was a fascinating and innovative time in the development of the country school, the proverbial one-room schoolhouse, or some variant thereon. The history of the social organization of these small country schools attests to both a desire for education for the children of the settlers, as well as a primer in a localized form of grassroots democracy. In the decade during which Lillian was born, families would gather in one of the larger homes in formally recorded meetings to advance the necessary decisions for the formation and maintenance of these schools. One of those gathered might donate a parcel of land, one was assigned recording functions, people volunteered to gather to clear the land on a specific day, votes were taken on details such as the size of the school, funding was secured and official school boards were elected. This dynamic grassroots history has been well documented in a number of well-researched local sources.

In this formal, yet simultaneously informal process, schools were authorized by the Beltrami County board of commissioners (and subsequently those in Clearwater County after the split in December of 1902), and the schools often changed names. For example, in School District #31, organized in 1914, the building was called the Mogster School, based on the ownership of the donated land, and was then called the O. M. Johnson School.

The conclusion of this interview appears on our website. http://beltramihistory.org/2018/10/06/centennial-teacher-with-a-passion-for-teaching-and-learning/

Many, many thanks to Jeremy Seibel of Beltrami Electric Cooperative and his technical expertise for narrowly averting a crisis of historic proportion in the aftermath of a computer crash which almost jeopardized the entirety of our museum’s digital record.

Calendar of Events

LEFSE POSTCARDS

‘Waldsee,’ meaning ‘wooded lake,’ is the name of the German camp at Concordia Language Villages. It is also a name associated with a dark period of German history; before they were led to the Auschwitz gas chambers, Hungarian, Greek and most likely other Jews were told to fill out postcards telling family and friends that they were well. These were postmarked Waldsee to deceive recipients into believing that the sender was enjoying time in a picturesque location.

“Waldsee Postcards 1944,” now on view at the History Center, features artistic renderings of this horrible history. We’re grateful to both Concordia Language Villages and Hebrew Union College for making this exhibition available to us.

(Through November 17)

GENEALOGY WORKSHOP

November 17th
10:00 am at the Depot!
A genealogy workshop in partnership with the Daughters of the American Revolution
RESERVATIONS REQUESTED
PLEASE CALL 218-444-3376

WORLD WAR II LECTURE

November 8th at 6 pm at the Depot!
Autumn May, a student at Red Lake High School, will lecture on a winning research project she submitted for a National History Day competition called “Normandy: Sacrifice for Freedom.” Awarded by Albert H. Small Student & Teacher Institute, it asked pairs such as May and Marcia Roline, her history teacher, to talk to still-living descendants of D-Day veterans and report on their findings in a public forum.


SAVETHE-DATE: December 31st
HISTORY MYSTERY

BONFIRE and FREE COCOA
On the evening of November 23rd we’ll be participating in Bemidji’s annual NIGHT WE LIGHT parade with a bonfire and free cocoa!
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Annual Halloween Festival
November 1, 2018
5-7 pm
at the Bemidji Eagles Club
1270 Neilson Ave SE
Tickets are $5
Please see pg 7 for more information

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70th Anniversary of the Count Beltrami State Monument (Aug. 22, 2018).

Best Town in Minnesota party, June 2018 at the Tourist and Information Center, Paul Bunyan Park.

Patrick Scully as Walt Whitman (far right) joins the Historical Society board members after his performance of "Leaves of Grass - Illuminated at the Fall Fundraiser (Oct. 4th, 2018).

In celebration of its 105th birthday, BCHS commissioned an interpretive sign covering over a century of the Great Northern Depot's history, from its inception as Jim Hill's last train station, to its becoming home to the history center at the turn of the Millennium. The sign is affixed to the exterior of the building, thus allowing visitors to learn of Bemidji's first center of transportation and communication even during non-business hours.

Past Events

Pint Night at Bemidji Brewing. (June 13, 2018).

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Historical Melodrama: The Shagwood Secret (July 26, 2018).

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Over the course of nearly three days in Filottano I had the privilege and pleasure of touring churches (including the one in which Beltrami’s remains are interred); government buildings, eco- and agro-tourism resorts; private villas (including the former residence of Giulia de Medici, special friend to Giacomo, and the countess for whom he named Lake Julia); and schools, including the G.C. Beltrami Elementary School, with whom it’s my hope the Bemidji Area School District can engage in a postcard exchange program. I returned with several objects given to me as gifts – a small tapestry featuring the official crest of Filottano has already been delivered to Bemidji City Hall, a book describing historic residences throughout Filottano, and a botanical text book, representing the horticultural community’s interest in the plant samples collected by Beltrami.

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During RaeAnn’s stop at the Woolen Mills, she saw the large framed print of early Paul Bunyan with a man standing near the statue. “That’s Uncle Bunchie!” she said, identifying the previously unidentified man in the photo. RaeAnn stood in the foyer of the museum, cradling the two books. When she started to talk about her father, visitors to the museum, as I said earlier, bring us interesting details and stories to flesh out what we can find in our research facilities, and to share your memories with us. Your recollections can then become part of local history.

“My dad was a big time athlete,” she said. “He played hockey, basketball, and football with his brothers and with Anna’s brother Arthur (Stevens). The Krauses took hockey very seriously – rough, even. Other teams’ coaches might call to see if the Krauses were playing and might not come if they were. They were pretty ruthless – they left marks,” she said.

Although RaeAnn would only be in Bemidji for one more day, she agreed to spend part of that day visiting with me. RaeAnn only lived here for about five years before her family moved to Washington. Prior to this visit, she had returned only once, when she was eleven and her father’s body was sent back by train to Bemidji for burial in Green wood Cemetery. (He was electrocuted when an arc welder he was working with malfunctioned.)

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Patti jo McNeillan, Administrative Assistant

Do You Recognize these objects?
Here Lars and Anna raised 3 hours of free assisted research.

Lillian at her 100th Birthday celebration at First Lutheran Church, April 2018 (Photo: Lois Jenkins)

and was encouraged to do so due to the relative flexibility of the country school.

She also began a life-long love of school, of teachers, and of learning.

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