



The Carnegie Courier

Newsletter of

The Mitchell Area Historical Society (MAHS)
& The Mitchell Area Genealogical Society (MAGS)

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Spring 2019

Ice Dealer: An occupation of the past

In the late 1800s, the only means of refrigeration was block ice. It was the only way to cool food.

The ice was cut in blocks from the creeks, rivers and lakes, stored in buildings and covered with straw or sawdust for insulation. If done properly it would last a long time.

There were businesses and households willing to pay for a supply and delivery of ice. A new occupation was created — the Ice Dealer.

The earliest known ice dealer in Mitchell was A. W. O'Dell who was in business pri-

or to 1884. Most information available is found on Isaac Spears in 1898, a teamster for Spears Ice Company.

Isaac's brother James had a contract with the railroad to fill the Milwaukee Ice House that serviced the railroad cars and hired men and teams of horses to haul ice from Firesteel Creek to the ice house.

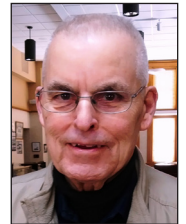
The ice was cut by hand with an ice saw and hauled to Mitchell with horses and sleds or wagons. Ice was hauled to an ice storage house and packed well with sawdust or straw.

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Lyle's Corner

Since I took a day off, so to speak, in our last Courier I'll catch you up with a few thoughts.

First of all, a big thank-you to all of our volunteers who work so hard to make it all happen at your Mitchell Area Historical Society.



Without them, none of this would happen.

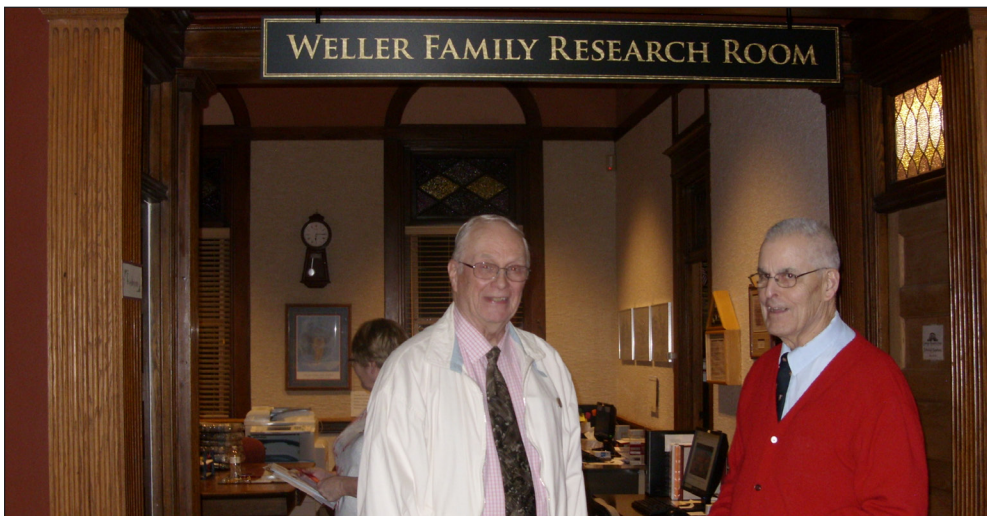
Let's back up to "Christmas at the Carnegie." Linda Swenson and Chuck Oster

led a team of volunteer decorators to set the scene for another outstanding performance by the Mitchell Barbershop Harmony Chorus and Wanema Wieczorek. Nearly a full house helped set the tone for a beautiful Christmas that followed.

Donations have continued to come in and add to our files as well as display items. One of the new items on display is a lighted "Menu Board" from the old A & W Drive Inn here in Mitchell. The Roger Erickson family donated it and our in-house electronics expert, Mel Pooley, rewired and repaired it so now you can come in, look and listen to memories of years gone by and check out the prices!

The Archives room in the low-

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James Hunt, treasurer, and Lyle Swenson, president, are two of the 1988 founding members of the MAHS. They stand at the entrance to the east room of the CRC beneath the new overhead sign which names the room the "Weller Family Research Room." The sign is in honor of the major endowment that Richard "Dick" Weller established to ensure future funding for the historical society in its Carnegie home for many years. The Weller family has contributed to the Mitchell community in so many ways since Frank Weller moved to Mitchell in 1880. The Sam F. Weller Family Foundation, also established by Dick, honors his father who is the grandson of Frank. See page 7 to read about the black walnut nutcracker that Frank brought to Mitchell.

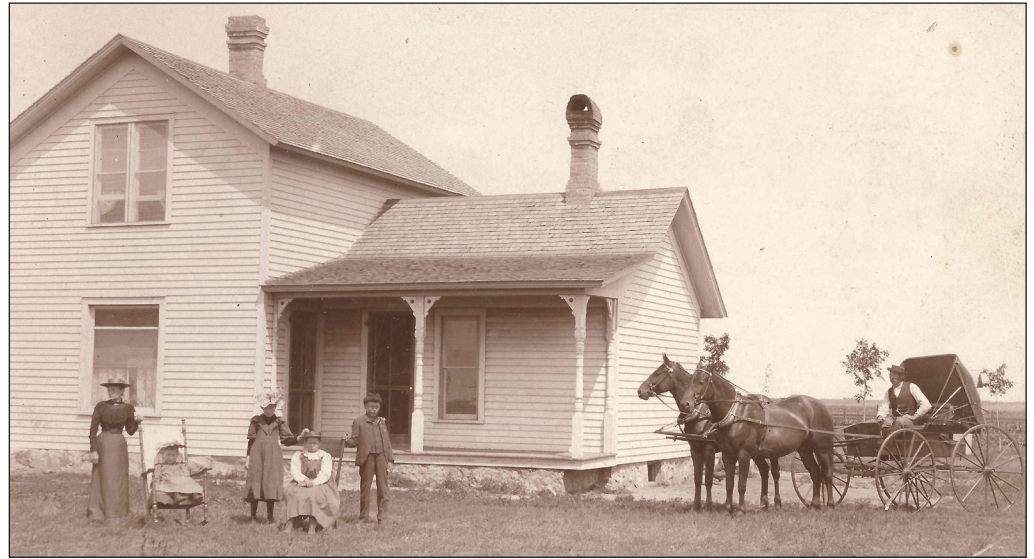
DON'T FORGET

Renew your 2019 membership if you haven't already done so. Enclosed or attached is a form. MAHS membership is \$20 for an individual or \$30 for a couple. MAGS membership is the same.

We live on memberships and donations, so that money is very important to us; We need it to keep the lights on and the building heated, especially this winter.

If you have already sent in your membership—THANK YOU! Hope you enjoy this newsletter.

Who, What, Where, When?



This section of the Carnegie Courier is dedicated to labeling our “unknown or partially unknown” photographs or items in our collection. We will list known information when possible. This picture has Mr. & Mrs. C.D. Wilson & Family written on the back of it. We would love to know who C. D. and his family are. It would be great if we could identify the house or area where the picture was taken.

Lyle's Corner ...

Cont. from page 1



er level is undergoing changes since we have had to add new steel shelving and many more archival boxes to house and protect old newspapers and other items.

Perhaps you have noticed that the upper front of our building has a major problem. It requires a specialist in rock construction to disassemble part of the building, replace damaged rock and rebuild it. As soon as weather allows

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the work will begin. We are seeking support from the City of Deadwood and the South Dakota State Historical Society for money from the Deadwood Fund to help pay for this very expensive and crucial repair. If you are so moved, you may donate to the cause.

As always, we are ready to assist you to find your family history in the Mitchell area. We spend a good deal of time and effort to find information in

old newspapers, books, etc., and get it filed by subject so we can find it when you need it.

We are always elated when you come looking and we are able to help with information and photos.

Come visit us, look around and view our new WWII military display featuring Jack Thurman from the Iwo Jima flag-raising.

~ President Lyle Swenson

Ice Dealer ...

Continued from Page 1

The ice deliveries to businesses and homes were made with a team of horses and an open wagon.

As time went on the ice wagons had rather high sides with the front area of the driver having a roof over his head, and advertising on the truck.

People put ice cards in their windows with the number indicating the size of the block needed.

The ice would then be cut and delivered according to the needs of the household.

These wagons were in use to deliver ice to businesses and households for years after the appearance of motorized trucks.

After Lake Mitchell was completed in 1928 the lake was the source of ice for cutting and storage in warehouses. Cutting the ice on the frozen lake was the most difficult part of being an ice dealer. It could take 10 to 12 days to cut the ice needed to store the maximum capacity of 5,500 tons they needed.

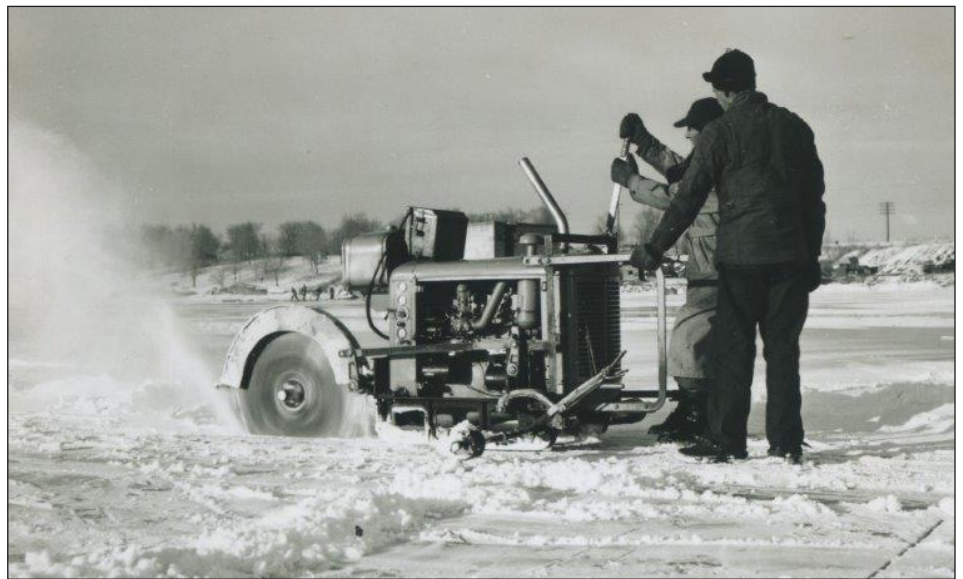
The invention of the power saw made for much easier work, but Mother Nature was always in charge, it could be very cold and windy or there may be a heat wave in January.

The Spears Ice Company remained in business until 1948 when Michael Giez and Michael Giez Jr. purchased the business and continued to run it. The Spears Ice Dealership and supplier for the Mitchell Area served the town for 50 years.

Other ice dealers continued in the business until 1969 by which time ice was being sold in grocery stores in five-pound or 10-pound bags of crushed or cubed.

The ice man was no longer needed, invention and prosperity eliminated his job.

D.E. Brick, D.D.S., contributed to this article



From above: Cutting ice on Lake Mitchell; Spears Ice House truck delivery, driver unknown; and Arthur "Ike" Theilsen holds a large ice block on his back while working for the Spears Ice Company in Mitchell.



History of the Branson Bank Building

By Jeff Logan

You may have noticed the small but attractive tan brick building at 110 E. Second Street that has Mitchell's only gargoyles and a 36 foot wide stained glass transom window spanning the front. The interior has a mezzanine along the length of the back wall. It was built as a bank building in 1916 and currently houses Kelly Gross's insurance agency.

It was built by George E. Logan (my grandfather) for local banker O.L. Branson. Fortunately Grandfather commissioned prominent Minneapolis architects Purcell and Elmslie, leading proponents of Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School of Architecture to design it. The resultant Branson Bank building is not only architecturally significant on a local, but also a national level.

Otis L. Branson was a banker and attorney from Osmond, Nebraska, who left his law practice and business interests to move to Mitchell in 1900 to take control of the struggling First National Bank. According to his biography in "Who's Who of South Dakota" written by O.W. Coursey and published by the Argus Leader in 1913, Branson was able to quickly raise the deposits of the bank to \$550,000. He sold his interests in the First National Bank in 1915 and laid plans to open the O.L. Branson Company bank. He persuaded another former partner



This is a current photo of the former Branson Bank Building, which now houses Kelly Gross's insurance agency. It was built in 1916 by George E. Logan.

in the First National Bank, My Grandfather, to build a suitable building for his new enterprise. The building was built for a reported total cost of \$10,500.

According to "The History of The Mitchell Banks and their Notable Presidents" self-published in 2006 by local historian Garvin Bertsch, construction on the building was completed by April 1, 1917 although the bank didn't hold a grand opening until sometime later as all the furniture hadn't yet arrived.

Branson was a noted orator who while in Mitchell served as mayor and two terms as Davison County's representative to the state legislature. He also served as president of the local Rotary Club and was active in com-

munity and political affairs.

In an August 9, 1967 article by P.F. Brennan in the Daily Republic, Milt Kudlacek, head of the Fine Arts department of Dakota Wesleyan University, said the building is

"The best building architecturally in Mitchell. It reflects a significant style, blending function, ornament, proportion, and space into a revealing artistic experience."

He went on to describe the building:

"It reflects the functional style of pioneer modern American architect Louis Sullivan and the organic architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright. The building shows a sensitivity of proportion and warm materials such as the unusual brick, the terra-cot-

ta ornamentation over the doorway, and natural wood used on the interior. As Sullivan and Wright developed a concept of space in their buildings, so too, did Purcell and Elmslie create a dynamic sense of space on the interior of what was the Branson Bank building, rising to the full height of the building inside with an exposed mezzanine over the vaults. The building has since been remodeled and much of the spatial effect has been lost."

An amazing amount of the building is still intact with almost no changes having been made over the years to the exterior and very few to the interior. Much of this can be attributed to the soundness and

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Branson Bank Building ... cont. from page 4

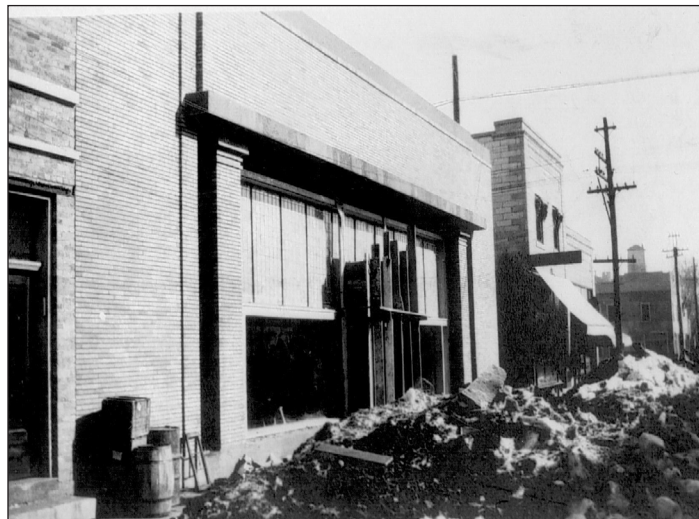
functionality of the original design and the small number of tenants to have occupied it over the years.

Frank Lloyd Wright himself visited the building in the mid-1930s while in Mitchell on a brief stopover between trains. Wright had spotted the building and stopped in to inquire who the architect was and ask a few other questions.

The building is also highlighted in H. Allen Brooks 1972 book, "The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries." Besides using an illustration of Purcell and Elmslie's drawing of the front elevation of the bank, Brooks talks about the Woodbury County Courthouse in Sioux City, Iowa and continues,

"Another Purcell and Elmslie essay on the post and lintel theme is the one story bank for O.L. Branson and Company (1916) at Mitchell, South Dakota (fig. 125). Here the volume of space enclosed is clearly expressed by the structural frame which frees most of the long front from intermediary supports. This support system made possible the installation of a glass screen consisting of small leaded squares of mottled glass, under which are located the long plate glass windows."

With the stock market crash and dustbowl plunging the country into the great depression, President Roosevelt ordered a "bank holiday" closing all the nation's banks to allow time for federal examiners to go over the books



Above, 1916 when the building was under construction; Below, the interior of the building today showing the balcony.



of all the banks before allowing any to re-open. The Branson bank did not survive the audits. It was rumored that with interlocking partners of several of Mitchell's banks, some weak loans had been secretly swapped for sound loans back and forth between banks in an effort to keep others open.

After sitting vacant for a few months, a tea room with a telephone ordering system

occupied it for a few years after the bank went out. The next tenant was the Mitchell Abstract Company, who would luckily use the bank building and furnishings almost intact for the next forty years until 1999 thereby preserving most of the building's features. E.H. Millen and his son George owned the Abstract office and also sold insurance from the office. For many years, they sublet the west section of the building

to R.L. Dice for his insurance agency. They painted the word "Insurance" in large letters across the stained glass window across the front.

The Mitchell Abstract changed hands and moved out in 1999. The American Red Cross rented the building from 1999 until 2001. In 2001, Handi-Cash U.S.A., a loan and pawn shop, rented the building for about a year until a street reconstruction program cut off traffic making access to the building so difficult, that the shop soon went out of business. From 2002 to 2009, Lady Di's Beauty Shop occupied the space.

While little was changed in the building, time had taken its toll. In the early 1960s in an effort to air condition the building and cut utilities, a drop ceiling was installed at the level of the top of the handrail of the mezzanine. This cut off the view of the original ceiling and plywood was installed behind the stained glass to further insulate the building. Ten years later, the stained glass was deteriorating and the zinc moldings holding the glass were beginning to collapse on themselves.

But I always recalled the beauty and spaciousness of the building from visiting it as a child with my father. After Lady Di moved out, I embarked on an extensive remodeling project to restore the building to its former beauty. We were awarded a

Cont. on p. 6

MAHS projects supported through grants

Grant awards to MAHS since January 2018 have supported several projects, including:

To add climate control to the Archives Room in the lower level.

~ Mitchell Area Charitable Foundation \$4,500

~ Sam F Weller Family Foundation \$4,500

Purchase of five new computers with Windows 10 to replace five computers over 10 years old.

~ Mitchell Area Charitable Foun-

ation \$1,500

Purchase of 100 archival newspaper boxes for storage in the Archives Room

~ Mary Chilton DAR mini-grant \$1,000 (No matching required)

Total MAHS matching money for the climate control and the computers was \$10,614.

Mel Pooley and Dan Mika provided countless donated hours of costly expert work to install the computers and design and build a

network.

Without dues and donations, MAHS could not seek the grant awards.

Thank you to donors and charitable organizations for your generosity.

Volunteers are seeking grant funds to aid in the expensive and crucial "stitch in time" to remedy the problem of water intruding on the front exterior wall of the Carnegie building.

Branson Bank Building ... Cont. from page 5

Deadwood grant which covered most of the cost of restoring the stain glass in the building. The drop ceiling was removed, new heat and air conditioning installed along with rebuilding light fixtures. Energy efficient double pane windows were installed in front of the stained glass as has been done in many churches to protect it from the weather and better insulate the building. The walk in vault on the main floor and in the basement are still operable.

Early pictures show two lightposts fronting the entrance. According to my father, since they rose only about eight feet off the ground, the globes were frequent targets of vandals from the beginning. They were often broken or damaged. Later pictures show different shaped and/or missing globes. The lampposts themselves disappeared



At left, a close-up view of the gargoyle on the side of the terra cotta facade on the front of the former Branson Bank Building. At right, a view of the stained glass from the inside of the building.

in the thirties. My dad said that after returning from a weekend trip to Minneapolis, they returned to find the lamps gone. They had been unbolted from the building and the wires snipped. The police were never able to find the lamps or who stole them



and guessed it was someone from out of town who was passing through.

The remodeling and restoration have been a great success and the building continues to inspire visitors. The south exposure lets the daytime sun shine through the

stained glass illuminating the interior with a golden glow. In the evening the interior lighting shines out with the same warm glow.

Kelly has done a beautiful job of furnishing the building and will be happy to give visitors a tour.

The Black Walnut Nutcracker

As any viewer of the Antiques Roadshow television program understands, the history of an object can affect its value.

For those who inherit items, knowing the history can be gratifying. Sam Weller and his wife, Edna, who were parents of Richard "Dick" Weller, cherished the history of Mitchell and of unique objects.

An example is the nutcracker that Carol Ragle, their granddaughter, recently donated to the Mitchell Area Historical Society. A note was written by Sam that accompanied the object stated:

"Nutcracker -- Bo't about 1890 by Frank Weller, Mitchell, SD. He moved to Mitchell 4 years after it started in 1880, and was in lumber business and bo't SD land and because there were very few trees at that time and no black walnut trees -- like he was used to in Spencer, Ia., he shipped one-half railroad car of black walnut tree seed and gave one-half bushel to anyone that would promise to plant them, and give 10 other people walnut seeds which would be grown. This nutcracker was used to crack mostly black walnuts and Frank Weller, my grandfather, claimed that all black walnuts growing within 25 miles of Mitchell, SD are from seed shipped in from Spencer, Ia by him. - Sam Weller, Mitchell, SD."

Cont. on back page

Stickney man receives Early Settler Certificate through MAGS

The Mitchell Area Genealogical Society (MAGS) recently issued an Early Settler Certificate for Andries (Andrew) and Lena (Groeneweg) Vlasman. Andrew and Lena both emigrated and settled in Illinois with their respective families from Holland. They were married in a church in Roseland, a suburb of Chicago. Most of their children were born in Illinois. In 1904, twins, Andrew and Albert, were born in Chicago. The birth certificate for son Andrew lists the occupation for Andries as a teamster. This was a particularly dangerous time to be a teamster in that area. The Teamsters Union was beginning its formation and there was a lot of violence on both sides of the issue.

Approximately six months after the twins were born, the family moved to South Dakota. They settled in Douglas County. The earliest proof that was found was the birth on Apr. 18, 1907 of another son named Johannes or Joe. A school census was also found dated May 1, 1907.

Andries and Lena's son, Andrew married Jeanette Stulken and lived in Aurora County. Andrew and Jeanette had a son named Bernard Vlasman. Bernard married Mildred Menning from Corsica, S.D. Bernard now 85 lives on the same farm in Aurora County that his parents moved to in 1940. Bernard and Millie's children are Alan, Beth and Karen. Beth Vlasman Walz applied for the certificate to give as a gift to her father.

To qualify for an Early Settler certificate you must be able to provide proof that your ancestors lived in South Dakota prior to Nov. 2, 1909. There are



Above, Bernard Vlasman with his Early Settler Certificate. Below, Vlasman's grandparents, Lena and Andries Vlasman.



two other types of certificates that can be applied for. To qualify for a Pioneer Certificate a person must have lived in South Dakota prior to Nov. 2, 1889. A Century Family Certificate can be issued if you have proof that your family lived in South Dakota for 100 years.

All of these certificates require proof that you are a direct descendant of that Ancestor. MAGS only wants copies of these important documents. Applications can be picked up at the Carnegie Resource Center or downloaded from the Carnegie website <http://www.mitchellcarnegie.com>.

COMING EVENTS

Upcoming Events at 7:00 p.m., unless noted

March 4 – MAGS Program
Vlasman Family Genealogy & History

March 18 – MAHS Program – The History of Chef Louie's Steak House

April 1 – MAGS Program – The Key to the Court House – Unlocking the Past

April 15 – The History of Bittner Funeral Chapel

May 6 – 6:30 pm MAGS Meets at the Register of Deeds Office.

May 15 - Dr. Hannus & Dr. Outram will be featured on NOVA on PBS

May 20 – MAHS Program
History of the Depot

June 17 – Dr. Hannus & Dr. Outram from the Prehistoric Indian Village

Nutcracker ... Continued from p. 7

Mitchell still has black walnut trees. Perhaps they continue the lines of the original seeds that Frank Weller brought from Spencer, Iowa.

A black walnut tree will grow from 70 feet to 100 feet tall, and 2 to 4 feet in diameter, with large leaves that have nine to 12 narrow, textured leaflets.

It bears a large spherical nut with a one-piece husk.

The black walnut is one of the most beautiful and valuable native trees with heartwood that is heavy, strong and easily worked. It is in great demand for veneers, cabinet making, interior finishing and gun stocks.

Its habitat is in the eastern half of the United States west to the middle of the United States and in South Dakota into the southeast corner of the state.

(George A Petrides Peterson Field Guide, Eastern Trees, 1988, pp. 94-95.)



Carnegie Resource Center
119 West Third Avenue
Mitchell, S.D. 57301

