

Litchfield Heritage Preservation Commission

# Historic Context Report 2009



Central Park 1874

“Litchfield is built on its people. It seems that the people who live here now have much in common with those whom they have replaced.”

P. J. Casey, Litchfield Centennial Book, 1969

*Litchfield....a community that comes together to  
protect, provide for, and enrich itself.*



No. 1 Litchfield Fire Department

# Thank You!

The members of Litchfield's Heritage Preservation Commission would like to thank everyone who helped research and write this report.

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# Summary



No. 2 Brightwood Beach Resort, 1889

“This is SMILE Country”  
*1973 Litchfield Chamber of Commerce Report*

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Litchfield....a community that comes together to protect,  
provide for, and enrich itself.

- 1856** Dr. Frederick Noah Ripley, an appointed Commissioner to help organize Meeker County, dies in March near the lake that now bears his name.
- 1858** The settlement was in Ness Township, honoring Ole Halvorson Ness, an early settler.
- 1869** The St. Paul and Pacific Railroad arrived in August. In 1869, the town was named in honor of the man who helped establish the railroad. In November, Litchfield won over Forest City to become the county seat.
- 1872** Litchfield was recognized as a village by the Minnesota Legislature.
- 1880** Litchfield built Washington High School.
- 1882** The Litchfield Fire Department, organized in 1872, formed a citizen bucket brigade of 25 members to assist with fires. The group had stations near the big 1876 Babcock pump on the south side of Second Street East.
- 1885** The Civil War Veterans built the GAR Hall and sold it to the Village of Litchfield for \$1. The agreement provided for perpetual maintenance.
- 1890** On July 4, the Village of Litchfield turned on electric lights for the first time
- 1899** The Village of Litchfield commissioned a “Municipal Progress Book” to promote industry and commerce for the community.
- 1900** The Litchfield Commercial Club and Litchfield Township cooperated to build the Litchfield Opera House which opened in November. Also in November the village was in the throes of a smallpox outbreak. The Village Council erected a six by six foot “guard shack” by the Litchfield House Hotel and staffed it 24 hours a day to check people arriving by train.
- 1904** The Carnegie Library opened in May.
- 1905** The Village levied \$5000 in taxes. The general fund received \$2000 and a sum of \$1000 each for the poor, roads, and the library.
- 1906** Dr. James Robertson erected the building at 301 and 305 North Sibley Avenue. The street level was retail space and the second floor and basement were a hospital. Appendectomies and tonsillectomies were preformed in the hospital. The patient rooms had electric call lights.
- 1911** Alfred Anderson started Anderson Chemical Company in his garage.
- 1914** Litchfield voted to go “dry” before the federally mandated prohibition. Between 1900 and 1914, the Village issued 15 to 20 liquor licenses a year for a population of 2,700.
- 1918** In the fall of 1918, the Meeker County Farm Bureau “placed” 684 men on farms to help with the harvest crisis created by World War I. Sheriff Kronshol visited the pool halls and soda fountains in Litchfield to find able-bodied men fit for working. He had orders that men should either “fight or work.”



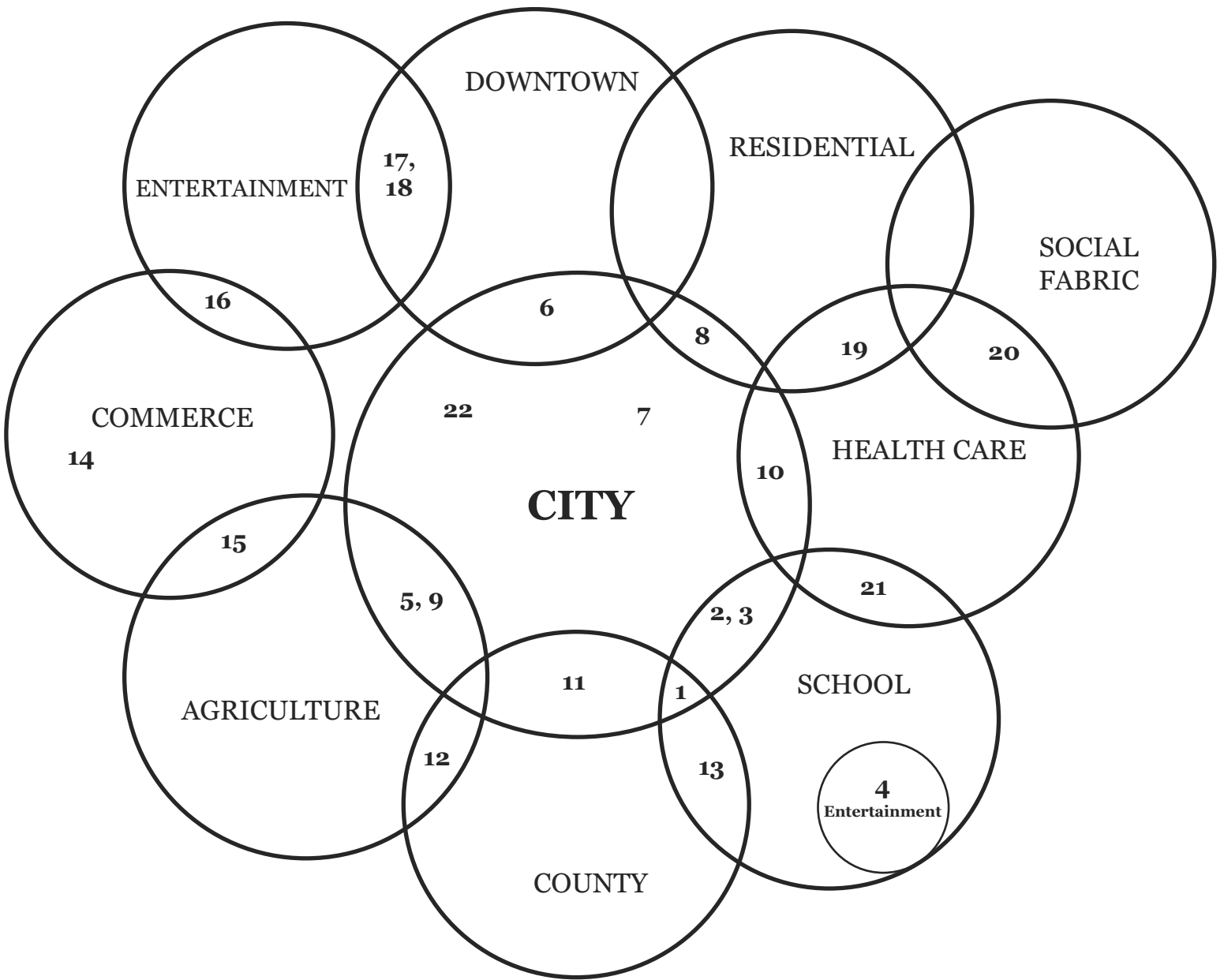
- 1923** Meeker County banks sponsored a “Big County Alfalfa Meeting” at the Litchfield Opera House for all area farmers. This meeting introduced the cold-tolerant Grimm alfalfa. Meeker County farmers were encouraged to grow this “Queen of Forages” to support their growing dairy industry.
- 1926** The Litchfield Fire Department purchased a LaFrance Fire Truck.
- 1929** The Washington High School burns in March. The community responded by holding classes in various locations all over town until the new school opened in 1930.
- 1933** In November, there was a National Dairyman’s Holiday in Litchfield. Mayor Alfred Anderson had to step in and calm the crowd.
- 1934** The Village of Litchfield purchased a new diesel electric generator with a capacity of 600 KWH for \$57,423 with \$17, 226 coming from a federal grant. Earlier the Council had rejected a second-hand boiler for \$15,000. The ability to provide power served Litchfield and Meeker County well in the future.
- 1935** The Litchfield Opera House was remodeled with “relief labor.” The building was renamed the Litchfield Community Building. Mayor Alfred Anderson stated this building would be the “civic and social center for the whole community” and that “farmers and businessmen are working together in harmony for our mutual interests.”
- 1936** The Village of Litchfield declared a “war on rats” and hired a sanitary officer to go block by block to rid the city of vermin. The School Board made heating and plumbing improvements to Longfellow School with a \$5,175 WPA project. In November, the Hollywood Theater opened in Litchfield. It featured “mirrophobic” sound, a cry room, and a water fountain with an electric eye.
- 1937** The Litchfield School Board hired Floyd Warta to teach English, Speech, and Drama for \$135 a month.
- 1946** Litchfield’s Land ‘O Lakes was featured in the national farming magazine, *The Country Gentleman*, with colored pictures. The magazine stated that Land ‘O Lakes was the largest dairy marketing co-operative in the world.
- 1947** Agatha Casey Caylor started her “walking blood bank” using blood types of returning soldiers, the fire department, and Knights of Columbus. When blood was needed, these men were contacted to donate.
- 1949** Litchfield opened the new \$1 million power plant on West 4th Street. The plant served 18,000 people in a 20 mile radius.
- 1952** Fire Chief Herm Kruger recognized four volunteer firemen for 193 years of service to Litchfield: Axel Johnson (49 years), Ole Mortenson (45 years), Joe Happ (52 years) and Luther Nelson (47 years). Augustana Lutheran Homes Inc. was formed by First Lutheran Church. Augustana purchased the former hospital building on North Holcombe Avenue after the new Meeker County Memorial Hospital opened on South Sibley Avenue.

- 1954** A Litchfield resident, ten-year-old Mickey Shaw, had surgery at the University of Minnesota Hospital to repair a heart defect. Dr. Walter Lillehei's pioneering surgery using controlled cross circulation saved Mickey's life. Litchfield resident, Bob Sparboe, started his poultry business.
- 1958** The Meeker County Civil Defense, a forerunner of Litchfield Rescue Squad was organized.
- 1959** Litchfield's Christmas decorations were declared "unconstitutional" and the community came together to raise the funds, assemble, and put up the decorations with volunteers.
- 1966** Litchfield's trucking industry logged 6,300,000 miles, the equivalent of eleven round trips to the moon.
- 1968** Dr. Lennox Danielson retired from the ISD 465 School Board. He started in 1936 and was Chair from 1946 until his retirement. During his tenure as chair, he saw the completion of three new schools and rural consolidation.
- 1970** Litchfield surgeon, Dr. William Nolen, wrote *A Surgeon's World* describing his life in Litchfield. It became a national best seller. After the death of Dorothea Kopplin, a trust was established to use her home as a residence for women who were students. The home is called the Rosemary Home after her daughter who died of leukemia in 1934.
- 1975** Bernie Aaker started the Litchfield Community Theater.
- 1978** Harriett Wagner, daughter of C.W. Wagner, left one-fourth of her estate to the Litchfield Public Library for "library expansion purposes."
- 1988** Herbert Chilstrom, a Litchfield native and former member of First Lutheran Church, was elected bishop of the newly formed Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
- 1990** Natalie Talbot, a cousin of Andrew Anderson, donated his property on the east side of Lake Ripley to the City of Litchfield. The property became Anderson Gardens, a mini-arboretum.
- 1996** The Litchfield downtown was designated a Commercial Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service.
- 2001** The new Litchfield Public Library opened on the southeast corner of Central Park.
- 2006** City Hall was built at 126 North Marshall.
- 2008** The City of Litchfield passes an Historic Ordinance and established a Heritage Preservation Commission.
- 2009** Meeker Memorial Hospital opened a major expansion that includes new patient rooms, emergency room, and surgery.

# Relationships

1. ISD 465 + City + County = 2008 Bernie Aaker Auditorium project
2. ISD 465 + City = 1969 Lake Ripley School sewer lines
3. ISD 465 + City = 1965 Litchfield High School road improvements
4. ISD 465 + Entertainment= 1975 Litchfield Community Theater
5. City + Agriculture = 2009 FDA expansion
6. City + Downtown = 1996 Commercial Historic District
7. City + Parks = 1992 Anderson Gardens
8. City + Residential = 1971 Lincoln Apartments
9. City 1934 diesel generator + 1936 REA loan = 1936 rural power
10. City + Healthcare = 1900 Guard at railroad depot
11. County + City = 1999 Law Enforcement Center
12. County + Agriculture = 1912 County Agent
13. County + Education = 1859 Taxes for education
14. Commerce + Transportation = 1967 trucking drives the equivalent of 11 trips to the moon
15. Commerce + Agriculture = 1911 Anderson Chemical
16. Commerce + Entertainment = 1900 Litchfield Opera House
17. Downtown + Entertainment = 1936 Hollywood Theater
18. Downtown + Entertainment = 1942 Pan American Celebration
19. Residential + Healthcare = 1964 Gloria Dei Apartments
20. Social Fabric + Healthcare = 1947 Walking Blood Bank
21. Healthcare + Education = 1968 Dr. Lennox Danielson's retirement from the School Board
22. Library + City = 1904 Carnegie Library

# Relationships



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# Introduction



No. 3 1889 GAR Encampment

Litchfield’s Heritage Preservation Commission, newly formed in November of 2008, began the task of researching and writing the Litchfield Heritage Preservation Commission’s Historic Context Report. The Commission chose not to hire a consultant to prepare the context report. Instead, the Commission decided it was their civic duty to do the research and writing of the context report themselves.

The Commission focused the context report on how the community came to be and how the community grew by protecting, providing and enriching itself.

“Litchfield . . . a community that comes together to protect, provide for, and enrich itself.”

The Commission identified themes – industry, transportation, agriculture, residential, health care, education, churches, parks, entertainment and social fabric. Within the themes, the following timeframes were used as the identification process.

<b>DATES</b>	<b>TIMEFRAME TITLES</b>
1869 – 1885	Settlement Era
1886 – 1919	Building Boom
1920 – 1932	Agricultural Co-operatives
1933 – 1946	Depression and Rationing
1947 – 1965	Baby Boomers
1966 – 1985	Growth and Government Socialization
1986 – 1995	Community Collaborations
1996 – present	Big Box Retail and .com Era

The timeframes were selected with a general knowledge of events in Litchfield, rather than national events. The context report relates to local issues primarily with appropriate focus on state and national issues where pertinent.

The evaluation of each timeframe is under the heading of significance and follows each timeframe. After the significance sections, there is a section for recommendations. The recommendations include suggestions to define heritage resources, identify protection mechanisms, and educate the community.

During the research process, community groups and individuals asked for access to the finished document. The context report will be available at the school libraries, public libraries, and Meeker County Historical Society.

# Purpose & Goals



No. 4 Wheeler's Barbershop, between 1908 and 1915



The purpose of the Litchfield Historic Context Report is to identify a framework for protecting the community's historic resources. It is hoped this framework will assist future planning and decisions related to the community's heritage.

The Litchfield Heritage Preservation Commission has identified four goals for the use of this report.

1. Maintain the historic integrity of the City of Litchfield including, but not limited to structures, landscapes, and parks.
2. Promote the wise use of Litchfield's heritage resources through planning and education.
3. Identify properties for possible nomination and recognition.
4. Serve as an educational document for elected officials and the public.

This report is not focused on reiterating the local, state, and federal regulatory mechanisms in place to protect, preserve, and restore/rehabilitate historic places. Instead, the references for additional resources can be found in the appendix and will provide direction for those unfamiliar with regulatory issues.

No part of this document should be used for commercial purposes.

# Methods



No. 5 Ames Brickyard

Vital research resources include records at Litchfield City Hall, Litchfield Public Library, Meeker County Courthouse, and Meeker County Historical Society; church histories; Farm Bureau and/or Extension Service minutes; ISD 465 School Board minutes; Oral History Project 1990; several books written about Litchfield or Meeker County history; and the Minnesota Historical Society Library. A complete list of resources included in the bibliography.

Primary sources included city property records, minutes from governmental meetings, maps, oral histories and personal memories. Secondary sources included books, reports, previous studies, National Register of Historic Places nomination information, and newspaper articles.

The field survey was a “windshield” reconnaissance survey of Litchfield by the Commission. The geographical boundaries of the context report are the city limits of Litchfield.

The Commission tried to be as inclusive as possible. At times, information was difficult to obtain or conflicted. Sources are documented. If there was discrepancy found, clarification is given. If a person or business or story or historical information was overlooked, it was not done with intent.

# Background



No. 6 Litchfield 1875

In 1855, Litchfield was a prairie with a nearby lake and rich black earth. Prairie grass grew down Sibley Avenue. From the corner of Sibley Avenue North and Second Street to Lake Ripley grew a wheat field until the mid-1870s. (A,B)

**George B. Waller, Sr.** had a “shack,” an apple orchard, and a beet field in 1858 on the Litchfield town site. (A) This constituted a pre-emption by Waller and he was able to keep his property when the railroad was granted land because he had a dwelling, showed improvements to the land, and had an occupation. The 1857 Railroad Land Grant gave the railroad property rights to sections unless someone was on the land. (tt)

Prior to 1863, bands of the Dakota tribe roamed the area. After the Dakota Conflict of 1862, which began in Meeker County, the Dakota bands were moved to the Dakota Territories under the 1863 Indian Removal Act. (uu)

The U. S. Census from 1865, shows that 80 people were living in the area that became Litchfield. ( US Census) The area was not organized at that time as a community but rather as a Township of Meeker County. (M)

The **original town site** was a portion of a Congressional township named Round Lake. The area was most often called Ripley after the lake just south of town. Lake Ripley was named after Dr. Frederick Noah Ripley. Ripley, an appointed commissioner, was scheduled to help organize Meeker County on paper in 1856. However, he froze to death a half a mile from the lake in March 1856. In spring, friends found his body and buried it near the lake that bears his name. This makes Dr. Noah Ripley the first person buried in Ripley Cemetery. Later, his remains were moved to the Mason’s section of the cemetery. (T)

The first **education** in Meeker County was in 1858. The first taxes, \$102.80, raised in the County were used for education. The taxes were divided into three units, or townships, where there were settlers. In 1864, Meeker County hired a Superintendent of Schools, Charles E. Cutts. He was followed by John Blackwell in 1868. (T)

Meeker County farmers organized an **Agricultural Society** on February 21, 1867 but no organizational documents exist. That summer, investors from the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad visited Meeker County. Forest City, the county seat, made a pitch for the railroad but George Waller, owner of section 12 in Ness Township, made the railroad an offer that was accepted.

Electus Darwin Litchfield was a stockholder in the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad. Electus Darwin Litchfield (1817-1888), Egbert E. Litchfield (dates unknown), and Edwin Clark Litchfield (1815-1885), three English brothers, were instrumental in building the railroad through Meeker County. When the current town decided to form, it was suggested it be named Ness; however, Litchfield was chosen in honor of the brothers. (T)

The **village** was platted in July of 1869. The railroad provided the platting north of the railroad tracks after the land was purchased from George Waller. The downtown area had lots that were 25 by 140 feet. These sold for \$50 to \$100 initially. Residential lots were 50 by 150 feet. The roads were all 70 feet wide except Sibley Avenue which was 80 feet. Depot Street was only 50 feet because the railroad owned several feet north of the tracks. The St. Paul & Pacific Railroad deeded three blocks to public

use. Block 53 which became Central Park and Block 33 which became Ness Park were both designated to the Village of Litchfield. Meeker County was deeded Block 74 on North Sibley for public use. (vv)

George Weisel owned land south of the railroad tracks. This was platted in October 1869. Block 87, was deeded for public use and became South Park. (vv) In November 1869, the people of Meeker County voted to move the **county seat** from Forest City to Litchfield. (T)

The **railroad construction** brought many changes to the prairie. Railway construction northwestward would reach the Dakota line in about two years. For a time, this construction was focused in Litchfield. The railroad stopped three miles west of Dassel. Cost was \$1.50 per person to be taken by wagon from Dassel to Litchfield.

On June 1, 1869, Pehr Pehrson and his little family came to Litchfield, Meeker County, Minnesota. Pehr had brought, from Sweden, a trunk, weighing 300 pounds, containing all the hand tools a farmer and lumber man would need. He paid \$3.00 for his wife and himself. This was a considerable price but his children and the tool chest were transported for free. (ii)

The town was wilder than the wilderness, with a gang of a thousand men, most of them young bachelors who could labor all day (12 hours) and carouse half the night. Pehr looked out of the hotel window aghast! To himself he said (and he swore rarely even to himself), “What a hell of a place to bring a family. In all of Sweden, poor as we were, I doubt one could find a single town or village so dirty and ramshackle. Perhaps we should have stayed home as Anna wished.” Pehr went to work for the railroad cutting ties. He made \$1.25 per day and his family’s new lodging at Mrs. Jonson’s cost \$4 per week. (ii)

Later Pehr rides the stage to the land office in Greenleaf to learn about homesteading land and was told he would have to travel north to Christina Lake in Otter Tail County to find any open land. On June 9th he rode in a wagon for 50 cents to Forest City for his first naturalization papers. On June 27th, he and three others walked to Alexandria to the land office and then to Christina Lake area. They found their sections and walked back to file their claims in Alexandria. Then they walked to Litchfield. There were no towns between Litchfield and Alexandria.

Pehr made preparations to take his family to Alexandria. This included purchasing oxen, a wagon, and food. No nails could be found except odd sizes all rusted but the empty kegs were given to him. Pehr used them for storage on the wagon. He considered the kegs a find. There would be no where else to get supplies because Litchfield was the last settlement. (ii)

In 1869, the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad (later, Great Northern and now, Burlington Northern), one of the first to build a railroad ahead of settlers, worked in conjunction with the State of Minnesota to **encourage immigrants to come and settle along the railroad routes**. On August 13, 1869, the first train – a construction train – arrived. The railroad workers were paid from the train’s “pay car” by Bernard Dassel. William Crooks Engine No. 1, the railroad’s first locomotive, brought the first ladies to town by rail, Marietta Porter, on August 26, 1869, and Mary L. Pixley, on the following day. (T) The village of Litchfield prospered; the total value of



improvements for the first year of existence was reported in the newspaper as \$100,000. (J)

With no trees on this prairie, the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad had to go back to the big woods for lumber along the land it was given by the government. (ii) The “**Big Woods**” ended at Darwin. The railroad recorded tree planting as part of its monitoring system. In 1873 the railroads planted 55,455 trees and in 1874, 54,024 trees. These trees were usually planted on the north or west side of the rails to decrease problems with snow. (hh 1875)

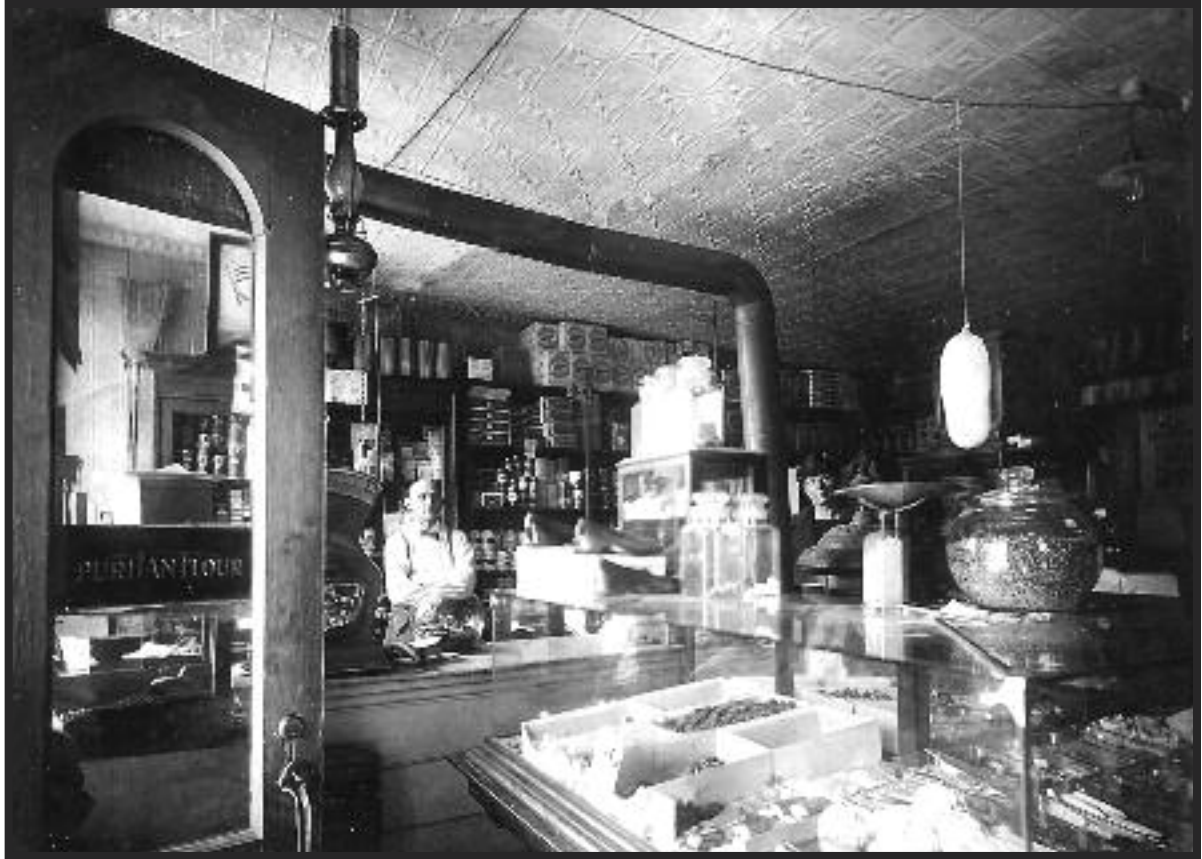
A **letter in August of 1873** from a Greenleaf Township woman, Lucy Garland, to her Cousin Clara out East described the city very well.

“I used to read of the growth of the villages in the west and will give you a sample of the village of Litchfield 10 miles north of us. When I came out it contained one house-out on the open prairie- no wood within a mile to the nearest and but a little within 5 or 10. When I came two months later there was a hotel, depot, stores, saloons, and quite a number of dwellings.

Now there are 4 churches-nice ones, 7 stores, 2 drugstores, 2 hotels, 2 saloons, 2 meat markets, a bakery, 3 millinery stores, 3 doctors, one dentist, barber, 6 to 8 lawyers, and more inhabitants than Barton but how many I can't say. There are some fine buildings and the place grows daily. Building lots sell for \$400 to \$600 on back streets. There are 2 papers printed there. They are as dressy and aristocratic as any place of its size on the earth I guess.” (jj)

Litchfield had grown from a small, treeless group of homes to a thriving community with churches and shops. It was poised for more growth in the next years. The subsequent themes will review people, places, and events that shaped the community.

# Themes



No. 7 City Grocery between 1892 and 1896



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# Downtown



No. 8 Sibley Avenue 1870

“There are a lot of old memories in those buildings down there.”  
Donald C. Larson, Oral History

## **TIMEFRAME**

*Settlement, 1869 to 1885*

During this timeframe, Litchfield had mostly **wooden structures**. Several of the wooden structures still remain but have other external materials covering the wood. The lot size on the original plat, 25 feet by 140 feet, produced long, narrow buildings. Several streets off Sibley Avenue were platted for business rather than the 50-by-150 foot size for residential lots. Businesses off Sibley Avenue included hotels and livery stables. Many of those businesses followed the railroad tracks on both the north and south side of the tracks. (ww) Toward the end of this timeframe, structures were two stories and bricks were used. The Village of Litchfield grew by 13 buildings during this timeframe.



No. 9 Brown Building, 1880's

The data in the following chart was obtained from a variety of sources. At times sources varied with the date of construction by a year or even two. The Litchfield Heritage Preservation Building History Sheets can be referenced for more complete information about each building. (H, xx , vv, T)

<b>DATE</b>	<b>ADDRESS</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
1870	134 Sibley Avenue North	Wood structure under stucco
1871	208 Sibley Avenue North	Wood structure under stucco
1878	237 Sibley Avenue North*	One of three identical
1879	112 Sibley Avenue North	Covered with brick and steel
1879	26 & 28 East 2nd Street	Covered with vinyl siding
1879	12 East 2nd Street	Now part of 134 Sibley Ave. N
1880	125 Sibley Avenue North*	Double building
1883	109 Sibley Avenue North*	Maintains recessed storefront
1884	202 Sibley Avenue North*	Corner lot, anchor building
1884	215 Sibley Avenue North	Storefront altered, date ?
1885	234 Sibley Avenue North	1955 fire, alteration to save the structure
1885	231 Sibley Avenue North*	Triple building, 1993 damage
1885	241 Sibley Avenue North	Corner lot, anchor building

\* denotes Italianate-style



No. 10 North Sibley Avenue, west side about 1890



No. 11 North Sibley 200 block, east side, December 21, 1889

## BUILDING BOOM, 1886 TO 1919

This timeframe was named the building boom because Litchfield did truly experience a building boom of 24 fine structures. The Ames brickyard was able to furnish many bricks locally. The quality of the buildings, and fine style, were exceptional. The preponderance of cream colored brick and deep reddish brown brick accents in an Italianate style is rare in a small mid-western town. (yy)

These buildings were planned as generic retail space that improved their flexibility over the years. Some buildings attained an identity for a specific use, while others fluctuated with the market demand. Before 1900 the building addresses were double digit numbers. Then in 1919, the numbers changed to the 600, 700, 800 blocks. (H) The storefront alterations listed are not specific to each building and may indicate the alteration of the bulkhead to accommodate the changing height of the street.

*The Album of History and Biography Meeker County, 1888*, described Litchfield's downtown in these words.

“The business portion of the city presents a substantial and thrifty appearance, owing to the large number of fine brick stores, offices, hotels, etc. all in fine taste. The stores are well lined with well-selected merchandise of a character above that usually found in cities of the size of Litchfield, and are doing a splendid business.” (K)

The architect(s) of these buildings are not known but the *Independent Newspaper* reported that Mr. G. B. Phelps had \$20,000 worth of construction by February 1889.

DATE	ADDRESS	COMMENTS
1886	226 Sibley Avenue North*	Triple building
1886	129 Sibley Avenue North*	Double building
1886	217 Sibley Avenue North	Minimal alterations
1886	113 Sibley Avenue North*	Double building
1886	225 Sibley Avenue North	Double building
1886	223 Sibley Avenue North	Double building
1886	230 Sibley Avenue North*	Triple building
1887	115 Sibley Avenue North*	Double building
1889	242 Sibley Avenue North*	Corner lot, anchor building
1889	119 Sibley Avenue North*	Double building
1889	130 Sibley Avenue North	Storefront alterations, date?
1892	100 Sibley Avenue North	Corner lot, anchor building
1893	207 Sibley Avenue North	Joined with property to the N
1898	227 Sibley Avenue North	Storefront alterations, date?

DATE	ADDRESS	COMMENTS
1898	201 Sibley Avenue North 1993 storm damage	Corner lot, anchor building
1900	229 Sibley Avenue North	Storefront alterations, date?
1902	229 Sibley Avenue North	Storefront alterations
1906	310,301,305 Sibley Ave. N Fires 1943 and 1968	Corner lot, anchor building
1907	19 Depot Street East	No parking
1909	309 Sibley Avenue North	Painted brick
1913	18 East 2nd Street	Second story added
1915	222 Sibley Avenue North	Double wide building
1916	126 Sibley Avenue North	Storefront alteration, date?
1917	21 Depot Street East	Storefront alteration

\* Denotes Italianate-style building

*The Litchfield Independent Review* summarized a **fire at the current 237 Sibley Avenue North** in February 1907.

“The alarm of fire sounded again in our little city on Wednesday morning about 6:30 o’clock and was discovered in the rear (west) of the Newburg Bakery in the Harris building. The fire department responded promptly though it was a difficult matter to get to the exact location of the flames on account of the location and the dense smoke. The flames were confined to the addition to the rear of the building which contains the oven. Considerable damage was done there by the flames and also to the store room in front by smoke and water damage. The west wind drove the dense smoke and heat through the full length of the building and into the adjoining buildings which made the atmosphere rather difficult to inhale for a number of days following. The stock and building were insured.” In March 1907 the paper reported that “O.A. Newberg, the baker, has adjusted his fire loss on account of the recent blaze in the rear of his place of business with the insurance company for the sum of \$450.” (J)

In November 1908 there was only one item in the news on main street: **the fire at the spectacular Wells Building**. “Wells Store Ruined...Fire Wednesday reduced the Stock of the Big Store to Ashes; Some Salvage.”

“The Litchfield fire department was called upon Wednesday to fight one of the most stubborn blazes ever handled by the fire department. Much of the stock of the Wells Bros. Co. was reduced to ashes and the triple front of the building, owned by Richard Welch, in which the store was located, was badly damaged.



The fire was first discovered shortly after 6 o'clock in the morning in the clothing department in the vicinity of the elevator shaft by Mike Owen, harness maker, who occupied a room on the second floor as sleeping quarters. Mrs. Windle and Richard Welch found it more convenient to come down the ladders placed by the fire department rather than risk finding their way through the darkened hall.

The elevator shaft sent the blaze to the basement in the clothing department and the stock of clothing carried by the firm became a total wreck, and to the ceiling where the opening into the shaft communicated the fire to the ceiling and roof joists over the dry goods, grocery, and shoe department portions of the store.

Viewed day after, the wreck shows the first floor of the clothing department store gone, with the ceiling and roof more or less intact, and that on the second floor over the dry goods, grocery, and shoe department, there is little left of the partitions and roof, tho the first and second floors are intact. Of course water poured through everywhere as thru a sieve. In the dry goods and shoe departments the bulk of the stock has been successfully removed.

Wells Bros Co. had a stock of \$55,000 to \$60,000 in the building with an insurance of \$33,000. The firm estimates that it will sustain a net loss of from \$10,000 to \$15,000. Mr. Welch had insurance on the building to the amount of \$8,000 and it will take \$5,000 to put the structures in complete repair again.

The fire department was promptly on the scene and made as clean and effective fight as it was possible for any fire department to make. There were five streams of water at play during the height of the fire for the greater part of the forenoon, and it was night when the last hose was finally removed from the scene.

The loss on this account is unusually heavy. However, the "Big Store" will rise to the occasion with customary vigor."



No. 12 Wells Building fire, 1908



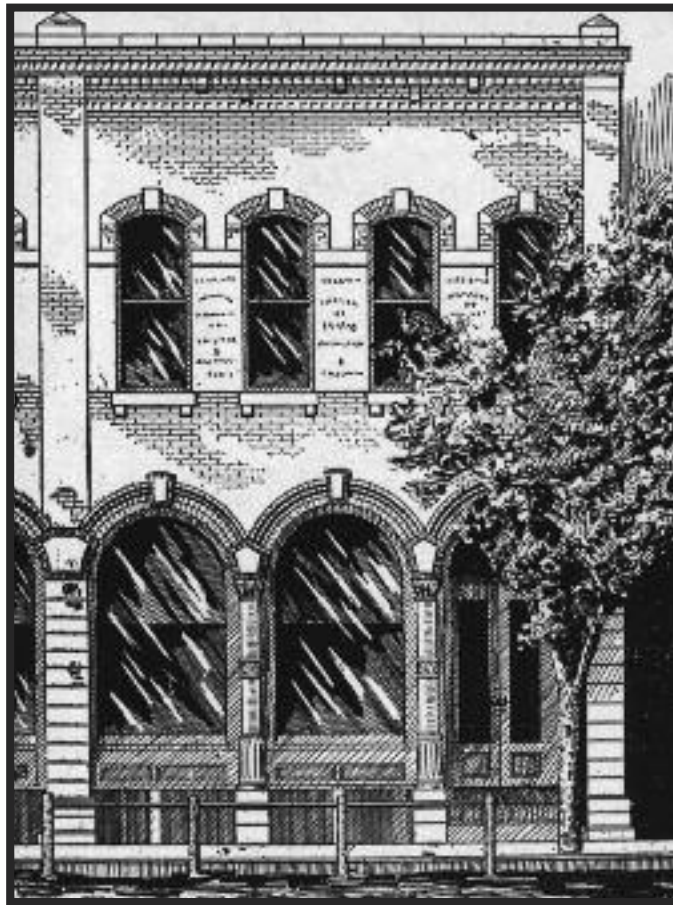
Then in January 1909, the *Independent Review Newspaper* reported

“the merchants from the Wells Bros. Co. entertained the members of the Litchfield Fire Department at a banquet Monday evening at City Hall. The supper was given to the fire department boys as an appreciation of the good work done by the department at the time for the disastrous fire which gutted the store last November. A delightful time was had by all.” (J)

New buildings were also in news that month when the *Independent Review* reported:

“John Beckstrand has perfected all of the arrangements for the execution of a brick building on his lot north of the Robertson Hospital to which, when completed, he will move his exclusive shoe stock. The basement to the street level will be of cement and the super-structure of brick. It will be two stories and 85 feet in length.” (J)

In 1909, the Litchfield Independent newspaper moved into its current building on North Sibley. This makes the newspaper the oldest business in the Commercial Historic District and also the longest in any one location.



No. 13 100 Block Sibley Avenue, December 21, 1889,  
currently DeeAnn’s County Village



No. 14 200 Block Sibley Avenue, west side,  
December 21, 1889, Carincross Building,

### **AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVES, 1920 TO 1932**

The four buildings constructed during this timeframe reflect commercial style buildings without the parapets or cornices. They were not as tall as the previous structures but all were two stories. The bricks used were dark tones and no architectural details are present on the windows or parapets.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>ADDRESS</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
1920	213 Sibley Avenue North	One of the most intact storefronts
1923	25 West 2nd Street	Intact with a back addition
1929	214 Sibley Avenue North	Dark brick, intact
1932	311 Sibley Avenue North	Ceramic faced brick

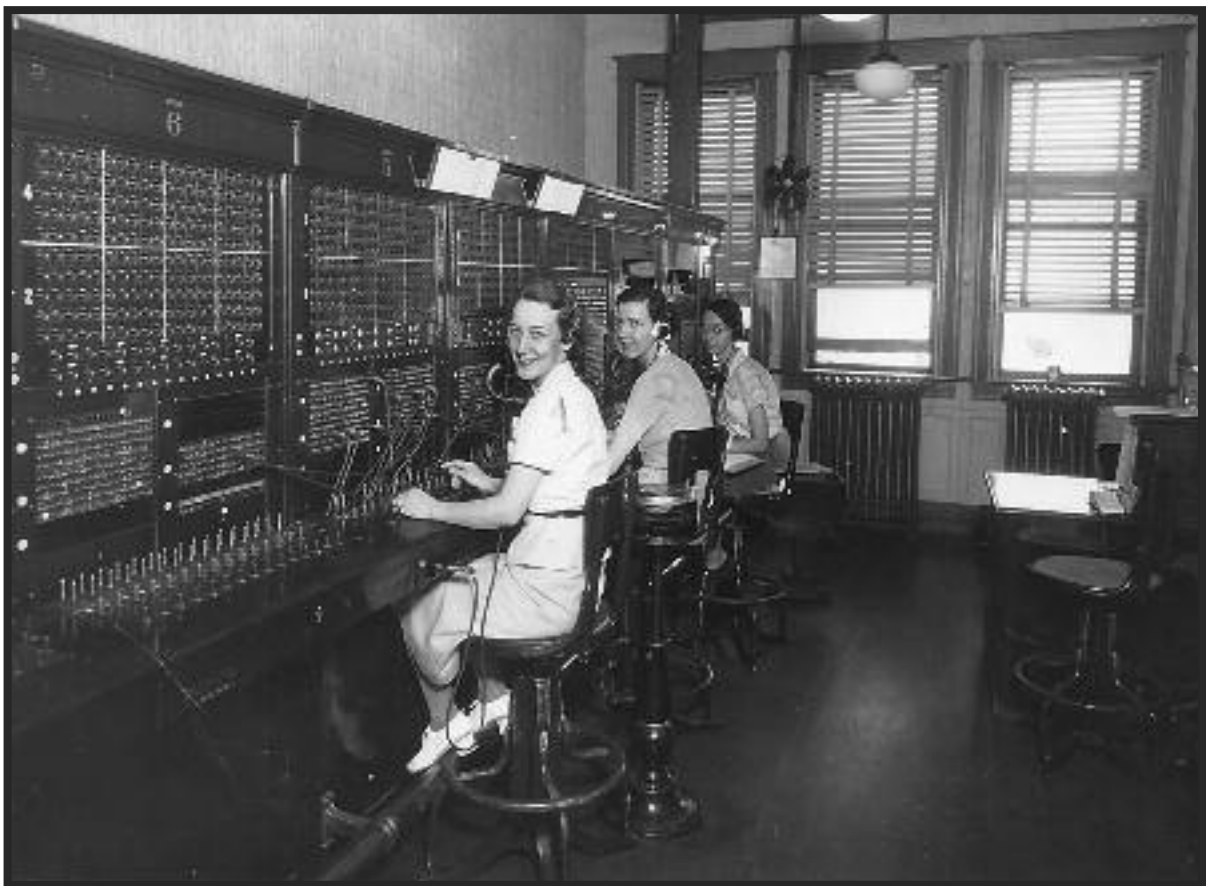


No. 15 Sibley Avenue, East side, 200 block, 1930s

There are many memories of downtown. Don Larson remembers,

“Before going to the Unique, everyone would stop for penny candy at Axel Johnson’s Candy Store. The little tables had marble or oak tops with wire legs. The penny candy was two for a penny, three for a penny, or four for a penny. Axel had the patience of Job to let us kids all decide which one we wanted. He was also open on Sunday afternoons.” (dd-1)

The work week was much different also. Helen Evenson worked at the Telephone Exchange in 1930. She earned \$10 a week for a 54 hour week. “No overtime, none.” It took her two years to earn a week’s vacation. During the armistice Day Blizzard in November 1940, Helen worked 2 1/2 days without a break. (dd-2)



No. 16 Litchfield Telephone Exchange, 1940s

### **DEPRESSION AND RATIONING, 1933 TO 1946**

The **depression and war years** saw little construction. The **1936 Hollywood Theater** was a grand addition to Litchfield’s main street at the height of the depression. Of the remaining buildings, one was built just after the war to fill in an alley and the other was a two story commercial building. The final building was a relief labor post office that had been approved in 1929 but not built until 1934.

DATE	ADDRESS	COMMENTS
1934	35 East 2nd Street	Post Office, relief labor
1936	210 Sibley Avenue North	Movie theater with intact marquee and ticket window
1938	236 Sibley Avenue North	Commercial building
1946	219 Sibley Avenue North	Building filled in the alley

Litchfield was not considered the heart of the **dustbowl** but business owners remember the dust. Barber Ray Nelson reported in his oral history that he

“bought the business in 1934 and the dust bowl years were so bad he had to line the windows with paper, like ’34, ’35, ’36. Those days it was terrible. There were six barber shops in Litchfield at that time. We all were in basements because it was low rent.”(dd-3)

**Rationing** also hit Litchfield. Iva Scarp Pearson remembers when the war broke out. Her father was listening to the radio. He said,

“Girl if you want anything you better buy it right now because pretty soon there won’t be anything to get.” So she went to the Greep-Trueblood Store and bought 12 pair of nylon stockings. “And boy I took good care of them.”

In 1945, she was going to get married and she wanted that 24 hour salad for the wedding luncheon. Well, pineapple was in the recipe and it was rationed “That nice Mr. Salls who worked at Cox’s Meat Market saw to it we got the pineapple.” (dd-4)

### **BABY BOOMERS 1947 TO 1965**

The post-World War II years produced four buildings that are considered non-contributing to Litchfield Commercial Historic District. These were all one story structures. One replaced three wooden buildings and included one lot for a parking lot. One “wrapped” two adjacent wooden buildings with brick and steel, and one was erected after a fire in an adjacent building destroyed the structure. During this timeframe, in 1952, the first major work was done on Sibley Avenue since the 1927 paving. This work required some changes in the bulkheads (lower portions below the windows) along Sibley Avenue. (J)



No. 16 A Sibley Avenue, about 1950

<b>DATE</b>	<b>ADDRESS</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
1950	240 Sibley Avenue North	One story
1959	120 Sibley Avenue North	Three lots, one building, one lot for parking
1962	135 Sibley Avenue North	Two lots, parking in rear
1963	110 Sibley Avenue North	Three buildings, one new, two wrapped





No. 17 Christmas photo 1964

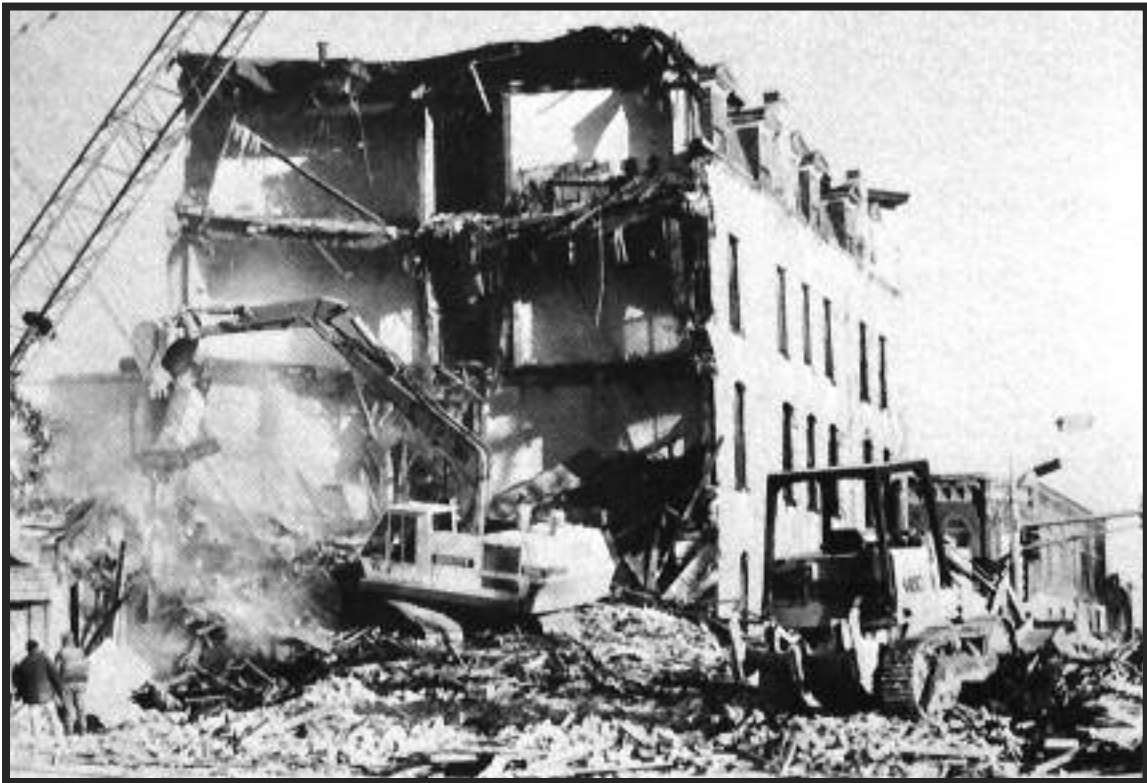
### **GROWTH AND GOVERNMENT SOCIALIZATION, 1966 TO 1985**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>ADDRESS</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
1981	105 Sibley Avenue North	Replaced hotel

After 1981, no additional buildings were erected. There were some losses; the Unique Theater and a building on East Depot Street were demolished. In both cases, the city attempted to contact and work with the property owners. (xx) There have been no subsequent requests for new structures. This will be a challenge because of the dates of significance, orientation of the buildings, and exterior facades.

The second story windows of some of these structures were boarded up as early as the 1970s. While many original windows remain, many were replaced with non-conforming coverings. Also, in the 1970s, there was a tendency to use wide wood on the exteriors and mansard roofs.

During this timeframe the most significant loss for downtown still mourned today, was of the Lenhardt Hotel in December 1978 because of neglect.



No. 18 Lenhardt Hotel, December 1978

### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS, 1986 TO 1995**

A December 1986 fire destroyed the building at 130 Sibley Avenue North and also threatened two adjacent buildings. The north brick wall of the destroyed building saved the adjacent wooden structure, a 1870 wood building. (Z)

A storm struck Litchfield on Saturday morning, July 31, 1993. This storm caused damage to several buildings in Litchfield's Commercial Historic District. At **Schaefer's Photography** on main street the winds tore bricks off the roof area and water began seeping into an upstairs apartment and then into to the photography shop. Ceiling tile was damaged and the floor carpet had to be replaced as the storm left water standing on the firm's business area. Cliff Schaefer was in his store preparing to photograph a wedding. He heard some dripping and went to inspect. There was water everywhere. Cliff called friends to help clean so he and Becky could shoot the wedding. (J)



The storm also damaged the rear of the bank building at the corner of Sibley and Second Street, currently the Pizza Ranch. The most serious structural damage due to the storm occurred to a building which had been housing the used-clothing store on West Second Street. High winds had torn away bricks from the roof exposing three upstairs apartments to the elements. Clothing was removed from the main floor. Initially, it was uncertain whether it would be necessary to raze the rear portion of the building completely due to the building damage caused by the storm. In January 1984, the back third of the structure was removed. (H)



No. 19 Pizza Ranch, January 1994

### **BIG BOX RETAIL AND .COM ERA, 1997 TO PRESENT**

Again in February 2005 a fire threatened five downtown businesses. It was started by an overloaded circuit in an apartment at 225 Sibley Avenue North. The structure shares a stairway with 223 Sibley Avenue North. The fire was contained in one apartment but smoke damage occurred in the offices of the Chamber of Commerce, and the jewelry store at 227 Sibley Avenue North. (H)

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

The downtown is a Commercial Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. The period of significance ranges from the late 1800s to the end of World War II.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Litchfield Heritage Preservation Commission has the following recommendations concerning Litchfield's Downtown.

1. The age of these buildings necessitates an evaluation of their structural integrity. This is best done as a district rather than individually. The subsequent information could be used for grants and planning.
2. It may also be appropriate to more clearly define a period of significance for planning purposes. A clearly defined period of significance would provide the potential use of a theme or style that could be promoted in design and businesses.
3. The economic development issues for the downtown will need to be addressed in a coordinated manner that promotes business and heritage tourism.
4. The culture of Litchfield's downtown and uniqueness needs to be documented and protected.

# Commerce



No. 20 Litchfield Glove Factory, 1904

*“Large enough to serve you, small enough to know you.”*

1950’s billboard by Lake Ripley

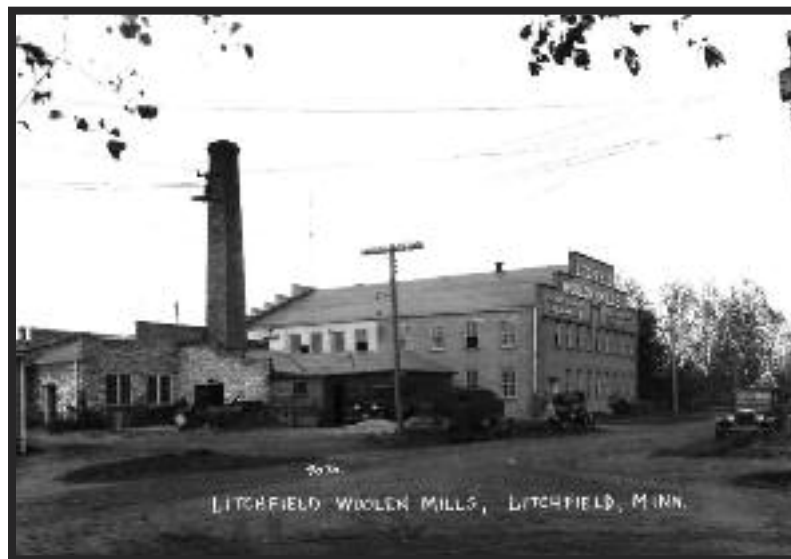
## TIMEFRAME

### *Settlement , 1869 to 1885*

Litchfield's **brewery** started in 1873 on the north shore of Lake Ripley by Erhardt Lenhardt. He turned the clear waters from Lake Ripley into some very palatable brew. Erhardt used the profits to purchase and run the Lenhardt Hotel on the corner of Sibley and Depot Street. His brewery continued until Prohibition, the noble experiment, started in 1918. (T)

The **Litchfield Bottling Works** was started in 1878 by John Rodange and Jacob Reese. John also owned a saloon at 210 North Sibley Avenue. The bottling works acted as a distributor for larger breweries. In 1888, the business was moved to the corner of 6th Street and Ramsey Avenue, the site of the current Doug's Auto Repair. Subsequent owners include Johnson & Roos, Leslie Berens, and Oscar and George Anderson. ( H, AA)

The **Litchfield Woolen Mills** started in 1885 by a stock company. The capital stock, at the time of organization, was \$25,000. The manager hired had 48 years of experience. John Rodange was the secretary. The 1886 advertisement states "the mills are now in operation, and ready to manufacture." (J)



No. 21 Litchfield Woolen Mills, 1909

The **Howard Elevator** was built in 1872 by Col. Howard. It was the first elevator of its type in Minnesota. Colonel Howard sold the elevator to Cargill in 1884. Cargill is the oldest business in Litchfield and still in their original location. The process of shipping grain uses the same principles used as 1872. The use of cups and pulleys to lift the grain to the top of the storage unit and divert it into distributors to fill the train cars is a concept that has not changed. A disadvantage in the early years was

that Cargill workers spent half a day repairing the wooden railroad cars and making new doors to replace the ones that were taken off to unload the grain. Only one to two cars could be loaded a day. (zz-2)

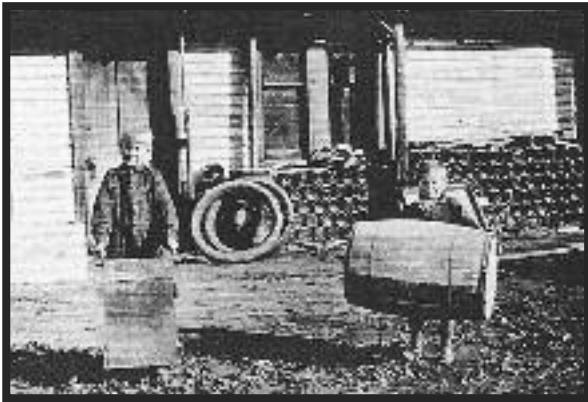
The *Cargill News* documents that W.B. Hudson was a buyer in 1888 in Litchfield. Sam Cargill in Litchfield, and brothers W.W. Cargill and James Cargill in La Crosse, operated 150 country elevators. At one point, Sam Cargill referred to the Litchfield elevator as a “chicken coop.” He stated that the company could do more business if Litchfield’s Cargill Elevator was enlarged and improved. The report says that “Litchfield was the first elevator to make any real money.” At that time, there were seven elevators and one flour mill and that they had “more business than they can handle.” The Litchfield Cargill also handled hides and Sam Cargill reportedly liked this commodity. They made an excellent profit from this business, more than the grain profit. (BB)

Henry F. Hanson, from Sweden, became a manager at the Litchfield Cargill in 1889. He transferred to North and South Dakota before returning to Litchfield. He stayed in Litchfield until 1912. At that time he became one of Cargill’s five Traveling Superintendents. (BB)

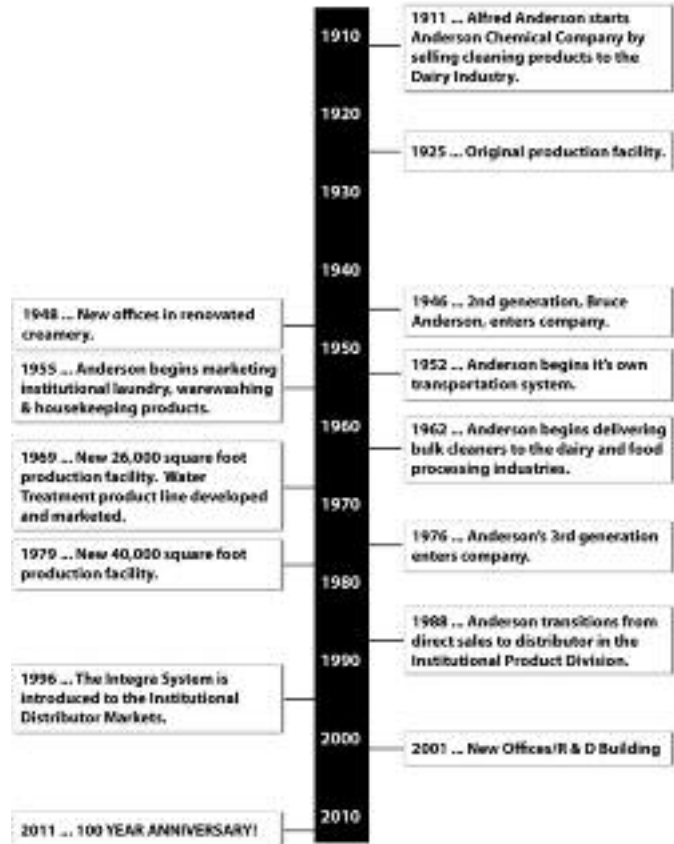


## BUILDING BOOM, 1886 TO 1919

In 1911, Alfred Anderson started Anderson Chemical in his garage. He manufactured chemical to clean dairy equipment. (DD)



### ANDERSON CHEMICAL COMPANY HISTORY 1911-2011



Photos from top to bottom:

1919

1969

2001

Brothers John C. Peifer and Frank A. Peifer, and John's son, Arthur F. Peifer, started the **Litchfield Produce** in March of 1912. They dealt in eggs, poultry, cream, hides, and fur. Initially, the partners did the work and hired a few people in the busy season. (H)

During this timeframe, Litchfield had several industries that made the growing community self-sufficient. These included a glove factory, a cigar factory, marble works, and several large lumberyards.

### **AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVES, 1920 TO 1932**

The **Litchfield Hatchery** was started in 1924 by Leo L. Baumgartner on Ramsey Avenue North. The business dealt with poultry from hatching eggs to laying hens. In the 1930s the hatchery moved into turkey poults. (H)

The Litchfield Produce, operated by Arthur and his son John, incorporated in 1931. They marketed dressed poultry and butter under the "ELPECO" brand. Later, they expanded into frozen whole eggs, frozen egg whites, and sugared egg yolks. Their market area included local and the east and southern part of the United States. (EE)

**Cargill** started supplying coal to Litchfield businesses, schools (X), and homes. The rail cars leaving Litchfield for the east would return filled with coal. The coal was unloaded by hand to wooden storage sheds on the west side of the elevator. Coal then was delivered to various locations. (zz-2)

### **DEPRESSION AND RATIONING, 1933 TO 1946**

In 1934, the Litchfield Produce expanded their market to include ice cream. They started the **Litchfield Ice Cream Company** and marketed their product to central Minnesota with a fleet of trucks. Along with ice cream, the trucks also marketed Grain Belt beer. (EE) Early in 1941, the Litchfield Produce received an order for 25 carloads of eggs to be followed by another 25 carloads of frozen eggs. (T)

Henry Klause, owner of the Litchfield Woolen Mills, died in 1936 and shortly thereafter a fire almost destroyed the business. The building was quickly rebuilt and in 1937 had one of its best years. There were three shifts and 150 employees. During the war, the Litchfield Woolen Mills supplied woolen products used by America's fighting men. (FF)

The Litchfield Hatchery moved into new quarters on the corner of East Depot Street and North Marshall Avenue, the site of the current Wells Fargo Bank, in the mid-1940s. In the 1940s, the business started selling the "Beltsville Whites," a turkey bred for large white meat breasts. Also during the 1940s, Leo Baumgartner was the President of the National Poultry Association. (dd-5)





No. 23 Litchfield Hatchery, 1940

During the Depression, Litchfield's **Land 'O Lakes** plant employed 15 people and produced 10 million pounds of milk. The dry milk plant, started in 1926, was the first in the nation. During the war, dry milk was in great demand. Land 'O Lakes increased its plants to handle the demand. Production also increased from 22 million pounds in 1941 to 119 million pounds in 1945. During that period, more than 204 pounds were manufactured for the U.S. Government. (GG)

During the 1940s, **Cargill** expanded and delivery of grain was done by motorized vehicles.



No. 24 Cargill, 1940s

## **BABY BOOMERS, 1947 TO 1965**

In August 1954, Robert Sparboe, a Korean War veteran, came to Litchfield. He started Hy-Line with day old chicks and 21 week old laying pullets. He employed nine people. The company became **Sparboe Companies**. (AA)

**Conventional Homes** started in 1956 and built pre-fab homes. By 1965, the company supplied buildings and home buyers in seven states and employed 32 people. By 1969, two homes a week were made in its 22,000 square foot facility. (AA-1)

The **Litchfield Produce** had sales of 17 million in 1955. The company was one of the largest turkey producers in the world and employed 300 people. (AA-2) In 1957 the Litchfield Produce closed and was sold to Earl B. Olson of Willmar. He called the business Farmer's Produce and later renamed it Jennie-O. The Jennie O plant closed in 1985. (H)



No. 24 A Litchfield Produce

The **Litchfield Garment Factory** or Butwin Sportswear had about a 25 year history in Litchfield from about 1970 to 1995. The business first had a space downtown and then moved to the East edge of town. It employed up to 200 people and produced a sportswear line of clothing. (AA-3)

## **GROWTH AND GOVERNMENT SOCIALIZATION, 1966 TO 1985**

In the late 1960s, Litchfield grew with two new industries. The first was a large **Fingerhut** plant that employed 135 people in a 168' by 120' building on North Gorman Avenue. The payroll was estimated at \$400,000. (J) Then LaVon Grotto had an idea for a cab enclosure for his John Deere tractor and as they say, "the rest is history." **Cozy Cab** was born after some cardboard samples and a few changes. Reinke Sheet Metal had six men working to produce 200 cabs. They planned to increase by 18 additional men and make 1000 units in 1967. In 1974, the company

changed the name to Custom Products. Also, that year they began making Roll Over Protective Structures, or roll bars. (HH)



No. 25 Cozy Cab, LaVon Grotto, 1966

The **Litchfield Woolen Mills** made 4000 to 5000 blankets a week for wholesale, catalogue houses, and the U.S. Army. (AA) In 1985, they made 275 blue wool blankets for TV's "Hill Street Blues" staff for Christmas gifts. (J)

About 1970, the demand for coal decreased and Cargill filled its returning rail cars with fertilizer. This was unloaded and sold to farmers. During this timeframe, Cargill expanded twice.

In 1975, Cargill built the steel bins as storage units. This allowed for quicker filling of the rail cars. The Litchfield Cargill was the first elevator to use the "train unit" filling concept. This meant that a "unit" of 54 train cars was filled for shipping. The process took three 24 hour days. Then in 1984, Cargill built the concrete silos. This allowed the filling of a "train unit" in an eight hour day. (zz-2)

### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS, 1986 TO 1995**

**Litchfield Industries**, a group that promotes economic development in Litchfield, asked the Litchfield City Council to designate and develop an industrial park. This coming together of a private group and a local unit of government was very successful. The City purchased property in the southeast part of town and provided the infrastructure. Litchfield Industries worked with prospective businesses to relocate or expand in Litchfield.

## **BIG BOX RETAIL AND .COM ERA, 1996 TO PRESENT**

The term “bedroom communities” became common vernacular during this timeframe. Many Litchfield residents commuted to nearby communities for employment. On-line buying and on-line employment made “virtual offices” or “home-based” businesses an option even outside the metro area. Both of these factors affected commerce in the Litchfield community.

The 2008 DEED statistics show health care to be the biggest employer, followed by public employees, in Meeker County. (kk) The healthcare based employment is a reflection of the strong positive role of Meeker Memorial Hospital and Augustana Lutheran Homes, Inc.

As the community moved forward, businesses attracted include a new Walmart and an old business, Custom Products, expands to a 126,000 square foot facility. Sparboe Companies grew to several divisions in several states, becoming one of the top egg producers in the country. (J)

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

Cozy Cab changed agriculture by providing protection to farmers. The Litchfield Woolen Mills provided job stability to Litchfield for almost 100 years. Sparboe Companies has expanded to the fifth largest producer of eggs in the country. The original 1872 Colonel Howard elevator remains part of Cargill’s office.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Litchfield Heritage Commission has the following recommendations for the Agriculture theme.

1. The Woolen Mills brick building should be considered for local landmark status.
2. The 1872 portion of Cargill’s office should also be considered for local landmark status.

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# Transportation



No. 26 Hand Car Photo, date unknown



## TIMEFRAME

### *Settlement, 1869 to 1885*

Although the railroad made Litchfield what it is today, other forms of transportation were present. The **stage coaches** radiating from Litchfield in all directions were on regular schedules during most of the early years to furnish passage and communication by post. (U) The cost to travel to Forest City was 50 cents and, Dassel, \$1.50. (ii)

In February, 1871, talk surfaced of another railroad coming through Litchfield. The St. Paul & Pacific wanted a north-south rail from Mankato to St. Cloud. A straight line would put the rail in the “Big Woods” and a Hutchinson-to-Greenleaf-to-Litchfield-to-Forest City route would be more open and easier to construct. This was never formalized. (J)

**Albert Van Spence**, a lamplighter (J) moved to Litchfield about 1880. He was born to Negro parents who were slaves. His owner gave him away at age 7; and, by the time he was 20, he had been sold twice. When the Civil War broke out, Albert was drafted into the Confederate Army. He slipped away and made his way north until he found a Union Army outfit. Albert’s connection to Litchfield was Frank Dagget, who commanded a Negro outfit for the Union Army.

Albert’s responsibility in Litchfield was to light the eight kerosene lamps on Sibley Avenue in the evening and put them out in the morning. He never wavered from his job. Albert’s horse drawn buggy and ladder were a familiar sight in Litchfield. Albert and his wife bought a home and raised a family here. He was known for his cooking and music. Albert was a proud member of the GAR Hall and marched in the annual Memorial Day parade. (J)



No. 27 Albert Van Spence 1886 Barbeque





No. 28 Albert Van Spence,  
Civil War photo

In 1904, Albert and his family moved to Minneapolis. He died in 1910. Prior to that, at the death of two of his children, Albert purchased a 10 plot grave at Ripley Cemetery. Albert and his wife, along with three children, are buried there. The markers have deteriorated over time.

In 1968, the community came together to erect permanent markers for the Van Spence family. A fundraising campaign by Mrs. John Harmon was successful for the family's markers. Today, Albert Van Spence's marker is maintained by a member of the community.

Dr. J.H. Bacon, a dentist and photographer, composed a poem to honor Albert when he died. Part of the poem states:

We have buried him with honors  
That are due a soldier brave  
His grave is decked with flowers  
And the flag he fought to save.

## **BUILDING BOOM, 1886 TO 1919**

Litchfield had a resort on the south side of Lake Ripley called "**Brightwood Beach Resort.**" This full resort opened in 1889 and closed in 1894. The resort was well advertised and people came from the metro area and other parts of the state for a visit on the shores of Lake Ripley. The resort changed Litchfield's transportation in two ways. The "Brightwood Bus," a four-seater horse drawn buggy, with a fringe on top, took vacationers from the railroad station to the northeastern edge of Lake Ripley, near today's Anderson Gardens. The passengers got off the "bus" and boarded one of the two steam boats to take them to the resort on the southern shores of the lake. (T) One steamboat was named *LuLu* after Hirman Branham's sister and the other was *Brightwood Belle*. There was a delay in the summer of 1889 to use these boats because the state inspector had to come to Litchfield to certify them. The trips across Lake Ripley started on June 15, 1889. The *Belle* sunk and remains on the bottom of the lake at an unknown location and the *LuLu* was made into a home that is currently at 603 South Street East. (J)



No. 29 Brightwood Beach Resort bus

Litchfield did not have paved streets until late in the 1920s. **Hitching posts** were located all along the **Sibley Avenue**. In the spring, there would be a manure pile because nobody hauled it away in the winter. (dd-6 ) The streets were just dirt and Mr. Limer went up and down the street on both sides spraying water to keep the dust down (dd-7) Dorothy Desens remembers that Mr. Limer would go every morning with two big white horses pulling the sprinkling wagon. (dd-8)

Before Litchfield went dry, the **saloons** were all on the east side of the street so the “respectable” citizens walked on the west side. (EE) The sidewalks were wooden and the City decided that 8 feet was the proper width. The property owners paid for and maintained their own sidewalks. (JJ)

Some of Litchfield’s first **cars** appeared in 1905. C.M. Holm, the Register of Deeds for Meeker County, and his friend E.O. Hammer took a long trip by car in Holm’s 1905 Cadillac. They toured Stearns, Douglas, Pope, and Todd Counties and drove about 200 miles in ten days. (T) Louise Tostenrud remembers that her father’s 1914 Buick would have to stop on the way to Minneapolis to have the spark plugs cleaned. (dd-9)

Leland Olson remembered “There was a mixture of both horses and cars in 1926 to 1928. (dd-10)

“One of the most memorable lawyers in town was **Ray Dart**. He was blind because as a small child he was playing with a corset and the stays injured his eyes and blinded him. He was able to drive a car. He would do the brakes and acceleration and his wife would steer. He was a great trial lawyer. He chewed tobacco and he could spit and hit the spittoon in the courthouse even though he could not see.” (dd-11).

Florence Sexton Casey remembers that the streets were bumpy, dirty and sandy. It took four hours to get to Minneapolis on dirt roads. The **trains** to go to the cities came at 5 and 8:15 AM and returned at 8 PM and midnight. (dd-12)

### **AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVES, 1920 TO 1932**

Driving horse and buggy was still common and Ray Nelson remembered,

“I lived south of Litchfield as a kid and we used to take the cream to the creamery by horse and buggy. When the cars came we had a **Model T pick up truck**. I would drive to the neighbors and get their cream and haul it all in. I was 14 at the time, driving into Litchfield and everything (this would have been in 1924).” (dd-3)

Litchfield **paved Highway 10** ( now 12) in 1927 with only horse and buggies and hand tools. There were many memories of the hand mixers and teams of horses. (dd-4, dd-13)

By 1930 came a “transition” to some power units. Abe Johnson of **Johnson Brothers Corporation** told of the work during that time frame.

“Our horse units were pulling blades that smoothed down the road and the horses would be able to operate. Power units in the 30s were not so mobile as they are today. But with the horse units filling in, it was a pretty effective operation.” (dd-14)



His father, Walter D, Johnson, started a construction company here in 1930. His sons were involved and managed the company after his death in a car accident. The brothers included George, Jim, JR, Paul, Roy, Abe, Ray, and Robert.

No. 30 Johnson Brothers road grader, horse-drawn.



No. 30A Johnson Brothers WPA project, 1932; Hwy 4, Grove City

### **DEPRESSION AND RATIONING, 1933 TO 1946**

Litchfield's **parking on Sibley Avenue** was angle parking. Since Sibley Avenue was part of the state highway system and traffic had increased, the State decided that unless the Village adopted parallel parking ordinance on Sibley, they would reroute Highway 12 around the Village. On March 15, 1938 the Village Council adopted the ordinance and made it effective. (T)

The **Armistice Day Blizzard** on November 11, 1940 saw a rather unique form of transportation. Litchfield, by then selling some of its power to Meeker County, enlisted pilot Chester Anderson to take lineman Perry Reibe to Cedar Mills and Corvuso to make repairs. On the way back to Litchfield they were able to spot other lines that needed to be repaired. (T, V)

**Rationing** started in 1942. The first item rationed was tires. This was followed by sugar, fuel, kerosene, and other food items. The rationing affected transportation due to no replacement items or fuel. The Rationing Board decided who got what. (EE)

During World War II, the **Johnson Brothers** who were in the service, Jim, George, Paul, and JR, were learning heavy equipment and road construction building the Alkan (Alaskan) Highway for the government. This highway was on the west coast of Canada and Alaska. It was needed to connect Alaska with the lower 48.

After the war, Abe Johnson was "all over the country" buying up government surplus equipment and shipping it home. At times he paid 10 cents on the dollar for heavy



equipment. The Johnson Brothers spent 1945 and 1946 getting ready with people, supplies, and equipment. Abe stated “We had the desire, we had the people, we had the GIs that came back who were ready and willing and able to work, and we had the machines.” (dd-14)

## **BABY BOOMERS, 1947 TO 1965**

Litchfield’s **Johnson Brothers Corporation** started bidding road projects in 1947. “We got our first highway job in our own name in 1947. It was between Glencoe and Hutchinson. They did not have a paved road going in and out of town but when Minnesota Mining moved to town in 1947, they had to have a hard surface.” (dd-14) Their first million dollar contract was in 1955. The company grew with state, national, and even international projects with the headquarters in Litchfield. The company had offices in Minneapolis, Florida, New Orleans, Texas, and Saudi Arabia in the mid-1970s. In 2009, the corporate office is in Orlando, Florida. (dd-14)

In 1947, after much debate, the City of Litchfield voted to install **parking meters** on Sibley Avenue at a cost of \$12,554.67. The profits from the first day, October 13, 1947 were \$73.48. (T) The meters showed an income of \$93, 443 from 1947 to 1964. The police issued tickets until 1964 when a meter maid was hired. (IR) The discontentment about parking meters was far more than just the City Council table. Andy Quinn remembers,

“I helped start the AAA baseball in Litchfield. You see right after World War II they put up the parking meters. Every farmer in the community was provoked with Litchfield and they would drive to Darwin for groceries and to sell their eggs. But when we got baseball organized and off to a good start, the parking meters were long forgotten and they came to Litchfield.” (dd-6)

Litchfield’s **first stop and go light** was at the intersection of North Sibley Avenue (Highway 12) and Third Street. It was installed in the late 1953. The date is not clear because there is another date that is better remembered. At that time, lights were changed manually from the three lights used during the day to a flashing light system for the night. Somehow the key was lost and cars had to wait for the lights to change all night long. There were many complaints about waiting on an empty street. The key was finally located in November 1953. Finally, traffic could just stop at the flashing red lights and then proceed across Sibley Avenue! Highway traffic did not stop for the flashing yellow lights. (H, J)

Construction for **Litchfield’s Airport** started on August 3, 1950. Prior to that, Meeker County farmer, Carl Ulrich, had a private landing strip on his farm north of Litchfield. The city council voted to formally buy his farm as the airport site after some discussion and disagreements. (PJ) The airport opened in 1952. (H) When the Johnson Brothers Construction jet was fully loaded it had to take off on low fuel and refuel at a larger airport. It also had to land light but that was not problem because they needed to refuel for the next flight. (zz-3)

The Sibley Avenue resurfacing project, that included some infrastructure, was completed in August 1952. (J)

## **GROWTH AND GOVERNMENT SOCIALIZATION, 1966 TO 1985**

By 1967, the Litchfield Airport logged 126 plane movements in five days or up to 8000 a year. The runway was 2899 feet long. An additional 200 feet were needed. By July 1980, state and federal support was obtained. (J)

Also, in 1967, the Independent Review printed a summary of Litchfield's **truck transportation**. In 1966, five businesses operating out of Litchfield logged 6,300,000 miles or 11 round trips to the moon, FDA (25 trucks, milk); Anderson Chemical (9 trucks, chemical); Deb Thomas & Sons (10 trucks, farm machinery); Anderson-Dahl (3 trucks, fruit and vegetables); H & S transfers (22 trucks, leased to other companies). (J) Litchfield's Chamber report from 1973 listed 19 different trucking firms. (AA-3) The 1973 Chamber Report also reported that there were three buses east bound and three buses west bound daily. (AA-3)



No. 31 Deb Thomas Trucking 1974, Gene Thomas Collection

## **EMPLOYMENT TRANSITIONS, 1986 TO 1995**

In July of 1988, Litchfield City Council formed a committee to study the issue of a **truck bypass** around the community. The committee reported in November and no action was taken. (J) At present, this issue is still undecided.

Also that summer, the City sought bids for the second phase of Litchfield's **new airport**. The location of the airport, southeast of Litchfield, drew some environmental concerns. The plans and first phase were approved. The project totaled \$2.08 million and completion date was sometime in 1989. (J)

## **BIG BOX RETAIL AND .COM ERA, 1996 TO PRESENT**

The effect of **train traffic** on Litchfield's citizens was still important in 1999. The Litchfield Public Library Board of Trustees included "The effect of train traffic when accessing the library" as one of the criteria when selecting a new library site. (zz-4)

As truck traffic increased and Litchfield's major employers expanded the **congestion on Sibley Avenue** increased. A "redo" of the Highway 12 and 22 intersection was discussed. This right angle turn was difficult for large trucks, particularly ones going west through the community. The solution was to move the stop for the east bound traffic back far enough for the trucks to complete the turn. (J)

In 2008, Litchfield, Meeker County, and MN DOT completed a **transportation plan** for the city. A traffic study included in the plan found that 10,000 vehicles per day traveling through Litchfield with a growth rate of 1.65% to 1.83%. The busiest area was identified as the Subarea 1, or Highway 12, in downtown Litchfield. The plan recommended a further study be done with a long range vision. This would include the Commercial Historic District. (KK)

Today, the **Litchfield Airport** is still the only airport in Meeker County. The current runway is 100 feet by 4000 feet. There are about 12 jets landing a year and 2000 flights a year. (zz-3)

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

The most significant event related to transportation in Litchfield is undoubtedly the coming of the railroad. Truly the railroad made Litchfield and it continues to influence decisions made today.

Carl Ulrich, the local farmer who allowed planes to land on his property before Litchfield had an airport, is a person of local significance. He essentially “jump started” the airport process as a private citizen.

Litchfield’s two steamboats, on Lake Ripley in the early 1890s, were of state wide significance and deserve recognition for transportation. These private investors worked with the community to promote Litchfield.

Litchfield’s agriculture-related trucking in the 1960s and 1970s deserve mention for local significance. Along with Johnson Brothers Corporation, they created jobs for Litchfield’s citizens and provided a strong economic base.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Litchfield Heritage Preservation Commission has the following recommendations regarding transportation.

1. The City work with MN DOT’s Cultural Resources Unit to best preserve and promote the Commercial Historic District related to the 2012 Sibley Avenue project...Planning should start early in this process.
2. Any street work that includes infrastructure in the original village plat should be sensitive to archeological issues.



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# Agriculture



No. 32 Waiting at elevator, 1893

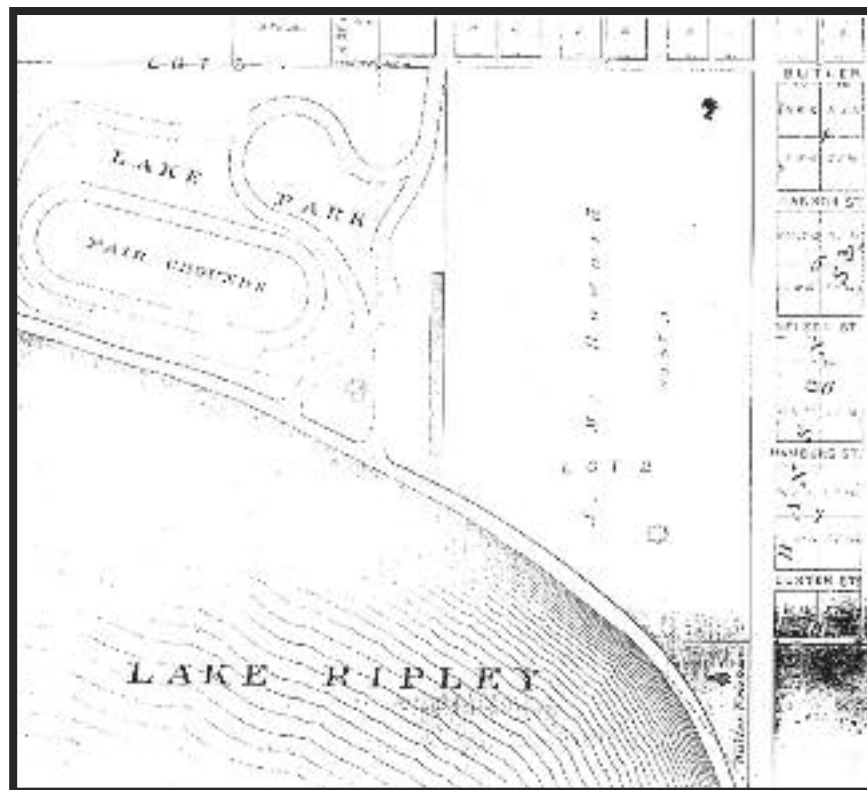
“Litchfield – The Hub of Rural Progress.”  
billboard at the north end of Litchfield, 1950s

## TIMEFRAME

### *Settlement, 1869 to 1885*

In December 1875 the **Meeker County Agricultural Society** had an organization with minutes and members. (T) The Quinn family has had an Andrew Quinn on the family farm north of Litchfield since 1865. One generation is Andy and the next is A.C., or Ace. The current residents are a father Ace and his son Andy. Ace's grandfather, A.C. Quinn, won a medal for the "Best Wheat in the World" at the Chicago Columbian Exposition, World's Fair, in 1893. (dd-6)

Meeker County organized a **Fair Board** and leased property. The property was on the north side of Lake Ripley, currently the Litchfield Golf Course, and the 40 acres included a race track, fences, and some buildings. (pp)



No. 33 Meeker County Fairground map, 1897

## BUILDING BOOM, 1886 TO 1919

On January 23, 1908, the organizational meeting of the **Farmer's Club of Meeker County** was held at the Litchfield Opera House. Dues were set at 25 cents. The constitution states the members "do hereby associate ourselves for the purpose of advancing our mutual welfare through the medium of cooperation in county and district organizations to improve on the market facilities and disseminating

useful knowledge on agricultural subjects and to that end do hereby adopt the following...”

One of the group’s first actions was to form the **Farmers Shipping Association**. The first year, 1908, 14 rail cars of cattle were shipped. In 1912, just four short years later, a total of 146 rail cars of cattle were shipped. This group turned a profit of \$171,190.57 in the first four years. The annual meetings were held at the Litchfield Opera House for the first ten years. Henry Turck shipped some cattle but mostly hogs to St. Paul. He got a better price on the shipping when shipping together. (mm,zz-5) “M.L. Halverson was the actual starter of the shipping association. That is when they shipped by rail. And that was one of the first shipping associations in Minnesota, I am sure.” stated Bill Olson in his oral history. (dd-15)

James J. Hill spoke about the expansion of his rail lines. In 1879 he transported 2,000,000 bushels of wheat by rail. By 1895 he shipped 67,000,000 bushels, a significant increase. (BBB)



No. 34 Litchfield Shipping Yards, 1910

**Nimrod Barrick**, a Greenleaf Township farmer, kept meticulous diaries. In May 1910, he noted “went to town to sell hogs and feed and stopped at the Litchfield Recital House.” Farmers came “to town” to buy and sell and attend social functions. (ll)

**Meeker County Farm Bureau** was organized at the Meeker County Courthouse on May 4, 1918. Patrick Flynn, Meeker County Commissioner from Kingston, chaired the meeting. The federal government gave money and the county matched it in part for the organization to start. The group employed a county agent and eventually a homemaker. Every farmer was encouraged to join because this was part of the “war program and a patriotic duty.” The Meeker County Farm Bureau was one of the first organized in the State of Minnesota and became the umbrella organization for future legislation, education, and promotion of agriculture. The

Bureau also assisted with the organization of other Meeker County groups. (oo, J, nn)

One of the first issues the Farm Bureau dealt with was the lack of men available for farm work due to the World War I draft. In July and August, Meeker County Sheriff Mike Konshok visited all the pool rooms and soft drink parlors in the county to “locate any able-bodied men not working.” He had orders to make everyone “**fight or work!**” The Farm Bureau “placed” a total of 684 men from towns on Meeker County farms in the fall harvest crisis of 1918. The Farm Bureau meetings were cancelled the late months of 1918 and early months of 1919 due to influenza. (bb) “The extension service would have help during the harvest. They would go to the extension service and there would be a whole row of man sitting there. You would just go down there and pick out two or three and take them home” remembered Kenneth Evenson. (dd-16)

During this timeframe the **Meeker County Fair** moved about 12 times to various locations within Meeker County. The different locations also highlighted different activities like local bands, boxing, mind readers and aerial shows. (pp)

## **AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVES, 1920 TO 1932**

Meeker County Farm Bureau and County Agent T.G. Stitts assisted Meeker County dairy farmers to become Meeker County Creamery Association, the **first creamery organization** in Minnesota. They organized on November 23, 1920. The Farm Bureau helped this movement by signing up creameries as early as March of that year. Farmers organized to counteract the effect of foreign-produced butter. Many of these early creamery associations organized along railroad routes.

Then on March 31, 1921, the Minnesota Cooperative Creamery Association was organized with Litchfield established as Unit No. 1. The initial objective of Litchfield’s Unit No.1, the first Land ‘O Lakes plant ( today First District Association), was to standardize the output of butter and to facilitate car lot shipments to the right market. John Brandt, a Litchfield farmer, was the first president.

In 1921, Meeker County farmers began making two grades of butter. The creamery association reported at the 1921 Farm Bureau meeting that they had shipped over 60 carloads of butter and saved \$6000 on freight. They also reported that shipping to specific markets it took 7 to 8 days to get to the buyer rather than the usual 3 to 4 weeks. In February 1924, after a contest with \$500 worth of prizes, the name Land ‘O Lakes was chosen for the first grade butter. Later in 1924, Meeker County butter was sold in Boston, Cleveland, Baltimore and even gained a Navy contract in Washington D.C. John Brandt had gone on an eastern tour to sell Land ‘O Lakes butter and was very successful. At one time, Land ‘O lakes had a New York office to handle the eastern sales. The Minnesota Cooperative Creamery Association was renamed Land ‘O Lakes in March 1926. (bb, ee)



No. 35 Land 'O Lakes Advertisement

The Litchfield Opera House was the site of the “**Big County Alfalfa Meeting**” sponsored by the bankers of Meeker County on March 26, 1924. Chas. R. Hutcheson, an expert on alfalfa from N.W. Farmstead spoke. Farmers were reminded that one ton of alfalfa equaled one ton of bran in feeding value. Years earlier, the introduction of the cold-tolerant Grimm alfalfa by a Carver County farmer gave Meeker County farmers the opportunity to grow this “Queen of Forages” to support their growing dairy industry. By 1938, Meeker County was 61st in the state for size but 10th for alfalfa acreage. (cc, bb)

In 1930, another county wide meeting was held at the Litchfield Opera House. This meeting was to discuss the state of butter sales and to discontinue the sale and purchase of oleomargarine. Meeker County farmers took a stand on this issue and educated everyone in the importance of maintaining butter sales. (J) Also, the Litchfield Shipping Association celebrated 22 years of shipping. Their gross receipts totaled \$6,439,115.43 and they shipped 3,768 carloads of animals in their 22 years (J).

### **DEPRESSION AND RATIONING, 1933 TO 1946**

The 1933 annual **Farm Bureau** meeting in December was held at the Community Building (Opera House) with 200 members attending. This meeting was during the Great Depression. The County Homemaker, Mrs. C.H. Stenberg, reported on the home projects for the year. She stated that 10,175 garments were made with patterns supplied by the Farm Bureau and this resulted in a savings of \$8,020.88 for Meeker County farm families. It also was reported that for every 100 pounds of butter consumed in Minnesota, only 13 pounds of oleomargarine were consumed. This was the less than any other state. (bb)



The annual Meeker County Farm Bureau meetings allowed farmers to address issues like requesting that radio stations carry livestock and grain markets daily in 1934. In 1935, they requested the state subsidize busing for rural student attending high school. In 1940, they passed a resolution that driver's licenses be issued only to "people who were physically and mentally capable of driving safely" and that "anyone caught driving while using alcohol should have a more severe punishment." (bb)

The Depression prompted actions that were not always deemed sane or appropriate. In the mid-1930s there was a meeting at the old opera house. It had just been remodeled to the community building. Investors were coming to the federal land bank and buying up farm land. All the farmers in Meeker County came. They could not fit in the building. About 100 people were standing outside.

"Farmers came to the meeting with baseball bats and if a businessman bid on property a man with a bat came next to him and demanded the bid be withdrawn. I suppose I was about 27 and they elected me chair of the committee to write letters to Washington. I was hardly dry behind the ears at that time but I was president of the **Farmer's Holiday Association**. A Senator Fraizer from North Dakota helped sponsor the bill." remembered Andy Quinn. (dd-6)

Another such event, the **National Dairyman's Holiday**, occurred in Litchfield in November 1933. Mayor Al Anderson, identified in the photo below by his daughter Bonnie Anderson Dille, went to smooth over the crowd. He also owned two dairies in Meeker County.

"The Dairyman's Holiday" movement was an effort to shut down all the creameries in the mid-1930s. I was president. There was another big meeting with over 500 farmers and they wanted to talk to Mayor Alfred Anderson, who owned two creameries. My brother, one of the Bolin brothers, and I went over to Alfred and sort of stood around him to protect him from the crowd." (dd-6)



No. 36 National Dairyman's Holiday, Litchfield's East Second Street

On September 13, 1935, Meeker County farmers, with the assistance of County Agent Ralph W. Wayne and support of the Meeker County Farm Bureau, met at the Litchfield Community Building to form the **Meeker County Co-operative Power and Light Association**. This was BIG news in the state and appeared in the St. Paul Pioneer Press.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had created the Rural Electrification Administration on May 11, 1935. The Meeker County Farm Bureau Board of Directors, assisted by Senator Arvid Ruotsinoja, filed a preliminary application in July 1935 with the federal agency. Morris L. Cooke, Head of the Federal REA, found the application to be “one of the best examples of a community working together to provide power to the rural area.”

On January 15, 1936, word came from Washington, D.C., that Meeker County Co-operative Power and Light Association had been loaned \$450,000 for 420 miles of power lines in the county (the first under this program). That year, the federal government had authorized \$410 million over 10 years for rural electrification. The formula figured three farms per mile at a cost of \$500 to \$800 per mile; this included the “high lines,” transformers, and meters.

Meeker County may justly claim the credit of being among the **leaders in the United States in the development of rural electrification** and as the first county in the Northwest to contract and energize its lines and extend services to the patrons. (J, bb, B, cc 1935).

By March 5, 1936, the Litchfield City Council entered into a contract with the Meeker County Co-operative Power and Light Association. for the sale of wholesale power for the rural area. (JJ, J) And on May 15, 1936 a telegram to the Independent Review confirmed that Morris E. Cooke gave final approval to the project. (J) Litchfield sold its first power to the REA in November of that year. (JJ)



No. 37 Meeker County Co-operative Power and Light Meeting, 1936

The people of the United States were encouraged to have “**Victory Gardens**” and preserve food to assist the economy and war effort. In June of 1943, First District Association set aside a part of the plant and installed canning equipment. For the next three years the men and women of the community could bring their produce, use the equipment, and take the canned food home. There was a steady stream of people and produce from the time the spring peas started until meat was canned in the fall. (T)

Agriculture businesses in Litchfield earned government contracts. Land ‘O Lakes had the first milk drying plant in the country. **Powdered milk** was in demand during the war. An addition to the plant was started in January 1942 as part of the Lend Lease Agreement.

The *Country Gentleman*, a nationally known farm magazine, featured **Litchfield’s Land ‘O Lakes** in the June 1946 issue. The magazine called Land ‘O Lakes the largest dairy marketing co-operative in the world. Blue cheese was aged in St. Paul caves and butter boxes were made in Duluth. Land ‘O Lakes dried whole milk became a war commodity. At one time, one-twelfth of the dried whole milk in the United States was made in Land ‘O Lakes’ plants. (ee)

## **BABY BOOMERS, 1947 TO 1965**

In the late 1940s, the **Meeker County Fair** cattle exhibits were tied to a snow fence in Central Park. Years earlier, the Litchfield City Council designated the north half of Central Park for 4-H livestock exhibits. The other exhibits were at the Litchfield Community Building. In 1955 the Fair Board purchased 26 acres from the Carl Ulrich farm on the northeastern boundary of Litchfield. The first fair was held there in August 1956. (ee, T) Meeker County 4-Hers came to town for a variety of events including the bread bake-off, demonstration day, dress review, and the annual fall organizational meeting. (zz-7, J) Litchfield was a magnet for rural events.

The annual Land 'O Lakes meetings were held in Litchfield for many years and drew a large crowd. The KSTP Barn Dance came in 1947 and 1948. **Cal Karnsted and the Main Street Barn Dancers** broadcast live from a remote location, Litchfield's Community Building. (ee)

About this same time Land 'O Lakes, the First District Plant, became active in the Artificial Breeders Association. The MN Valley Breeders Association was also in Meeker County. Both of these groups would have meetings in Litchfield to promote safety, improve quality, and streamline dairy production for area dairy farmers. Artificial insemination was so popular that young boys were even given sperm for their 4-H animals as Christmas gifts. (ee, zz-6)

The prosperous years turned organizations to a positive focus. The National Dairyman's Holiday, rather than dumping milk, sponsored the state meeting in Litchfield on June 18 & 19 1955. A large parade and many events and displays promoted a very positive image for the group. (J)

Another event, **Meeker County's REA Day**, attracted 9000 people in 1951. People came for the meetings, displays, and a free meal. (J) This annual event also had good entertainment and speakers.

## **GROWTH AND GOVERNMENT SOCIALIZATION, 1966 TO 1985**

Litchfield attorney, Wendell Nelson, played a key role in the post high school education of many Litchfield students. He helped establish the **Louie Roberg Scholarship Fund**. Due to Wendell's investments and proper management, this money still assists Litchfield students.

“Louis Roberg was a Meeker County farmer. He owned a lot of land; he was a very successful dairy farmer. When he died his estate was \$1 million. He worked with Wendell to set up a program with eight participating schools for scholarships for students. He died in 1978 and in the first ten year period \$700,000 has been given to students. We still have \$1,250,000 for students.”  
(dd-11)

The **Meeker County Home Extension Leaders** met regularly at the Litchfield Community Building. Each township had a club and sent a leader to the training meetings. In 1968, the year Anna Mae Wigen was president, it was decided to allow more clubs and include any women in town who wanted to form a club. Many additional clubs were formed that year. The Christmas parties also were held in the

basement of the Community Building and were well attended. Anna Mae stated, “I climbed those stairs many times.” (zz-8)

One of the town clubs was the “Litchfield Leftovers.” In 1973, they published a cookbook with the help of Dee Bolin, Meeker County Extension Economist. The cookbook contained information about basic cooking techniques and old family recipes. It was called “Back Then.” The decision to allow town clubs in 1968 was a solid decision. In 1973, there were 660 women in 41 clubs throughout Meeker County. (CCC,zz-27)

Minnesota required **rural school consolidation** by 1971. By reports, Litchfield’s consolidation went quite well. (dd-11) The following are figures from a Meeker County Economic Development Plan from 1966.

YEAR	RURAL STUDENTS	RURAL SCHOOLS
1940	1,954	85
1950	1,681	74
1960	1,126	55
1964	879	47

Many times rural residents reflected on the closing of the school. “And I have to say this, I think something was lost when the country school was closed. That was the nucleus of the area. That was the hub of the community.” remembered Stan Ross. (dd-17)

### **EMPLOYMENT TRANSITIONS, 1986 TO 1995**

In the 1980s, Southwest State University housed an American Farm Project, a program of the National Farmer’s Union funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The purpose was to mesh humanities concepts with agriculture issues. This program was in 26 states. Litchfield residents Joe and Nancy Paddock developed the land theme. That evolved into the Land Stewardship Project. Joe and Nancy were founding members of the Project and they published Soil and Survival with Carol Bly. This book contains the humanities context of land stewardship. The focus today is on organic foods, sustainability of the land, local production of foods, and preserving the family farm. (zz-9)

In 1983, the Litchfield Shipping Association closed the books after 75 years. The balance of \$31,000 was given to Meeker County 4-H and nine other local charities. (J)

### **BIG BOX RETAIL AND .COM ERA, 1996 TO PRESENT**

By the late 1990s, there was increased awareness about two aspects of agriculture. The first was soil conservation and tillage efforts to conserve topsoil. The second was



animal waste issues related to the larger farming operations for dairy and hogs. Both issues surfaced in the Litchfield area. (AAA)

The 1998 Transportation Equity Act helped increase highway funding. Also at this time, railroads were consolidating rail lines resulting in reduced transportation options for farmers. (AAA)

In 2000, the USDA announced standards for organic farming and an official seal. Some Meeker County farmers were active in organic farming techniques. The computer era for agriculture included satellite technology for weather, ag research available in the home, and extension resources accessible to everyone. (AAA)

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

Mayor Alfred Anderson's leadership during the Depression makes him a local person of significance. His leadership during National Farmers Holiday and National Dairyman's Holiday helped avert violence. John Brandt, after achieving national significance in agriculture, never forgot his roots. He still had a handshake and smile for an old neighbor when returning to Litchfield.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Litchfield Heritage preservation Commission recommends the following concerning the Agriculture theme.

1. No agriculture structures remain, there is much written history on these individuals and the contributions they made.
2. Additional information may be uncovered and needs to be documented and saved.
3. Century farms are not part of the City of Litchfield but we would like to support their contribution to our extended community's culture.
4. Litchfield has some barns scattered in residential areas. A city-wide survey would assist in the identification of these barns.



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# Residential



No. 38 Litchfield Aerial Photo, 1901

“Because I feel that living in a town like Litchfield is a real...it is a real privilege. Litchfield has been good to me.”

Wendell Nelson, Oral History

## TIMEFRAME

### *Settlement, 1869 to 1885*

The Litchfield town site was platted in 1869. The plat showed 1,109 lots, with many buildings occupying more than one lot. The source A states that George B. Waller, Sr. built the first home on Second Street and Marshall Avenue, currently 206 North Marshall. This was built with lumber coming in by rail.



No. 39 206 North Marshall

The second home was built by **B. F. Pixley** at an unknown location in 1869. There are three original town site homes remaining. Waller's 206 North Marshall Avenue, 325 North Miller Avenue, and part of 212 North Marshall, which was part of Litchfield's first railroad depot. (A)

In the fall of 1869, after the county seat was moved to Litchfield, several buildings were placed on skids and moved to Litchfield from Forest City. Of these **Forest City buildings**, five are still in use as homes today. The 815 North Sibley home was originally the Stanton Store in Forest City. The house at 811 North Holcombe was a log cabin home built in 1857 and it survived the 1862 Indian Uprising. The 519 North Ramsey home was the first Meeker County Courthouse when it was moved to Litchfield. The house at 326 East Fourth Street was originally a granary and later a boarding house before it was relocated. The home at 206 South Sibley was built in 1865 and moved to Litchfield in 1869. (B, I)

The first **U.S. Land Office** was in Greenleaf and W.H. Greenleaf was the Receiver. It was moved to Litchfield in 1870 to the west side of Armstrong Avenue where it was used as a school, a furniture store, and a cigar factory. It was moved again to 508 Armstrong Avenue North and owned by the Wandok sisters. (I)

The home at 425 East First Street was built by **Dr. Bacon** in 1870. Dr. Bacon was a Civil War artist with General Custer; he was a dentist, and photographer. Dr. Bacon was also Litchfield's Justice of the Peace and a founder of the GAR Hall. (J, H, I)

Litchfield had an "**Emmigrant House**" built in August of 1869. This house was the largest structure in town, 25 by 60 feet. It was located just south of the railroad tracks. It provided a cooking stove, washing convenience, and a bed to immigrants arriving on the trains. (D, A) Clothing and food were available for cost while they searched for land and shelter. (H) By 1875, the Village of Litchfield had grown to 1,155 residents. (M)

A Litchfield home at 523 South Holcombe Avenue became the site for the 1883 production of **Mrs. Stewart's Bluing**, a whitening agent for laundry. This was founded by Al Stewart and was manufactured initially in the basement of the home. The photo on the bottle was of his mother-in-law, Mrs. Taylor. An 1895 ad stated "Ladies...Buy Mrs. Stewart's Bluing and you will get the best. It is never put up in second hand beer bottles." The bluing was first sold at Luther Ford's Store in Minneapolis and eventually the formula and production were sold to him. (H)

## **BUILDING BOOM, 1886 TO 1919**

By 1887, the city had to annex property beyond the original railroad plat. (D)

This is the era of the **grand home building**. A quote from Litchfield's Municipal Progress Book in 1899 sums up the housing.

"Litchfield may well be called a city of homes. It is a fact that the ratio of home owners to its population is very high. There are but few tenement houses in the city. There may be more dashing and pretentious towns and cities than Litchfield. But are there more delightful or safely prosperous vicinities than Litchfield. (W)

The **large mansions of Litchfield's prominent citizens** were constructed in the late 1880s to early 1900s. Litchfield reflected the "Golden Age of Victorians" found in other communities. Most of the representative styles of this era are found in the original plat of the city. (I) Early in 1889, a building boom was projected for Litchfield. Mr. G. B. Phelps, an architect, already had plans for \$20,000 worth of buildings in February. (J)

The **Hawkinson brothers**, Henry, Andrew J., and Nels J. were the leading builders and contractors in Litchfield in the 1880 and 1890s. They formed the Litchfield Wood Working Factory in 1898. They made many of the doors, screens, gables, moldings, staircases, and spindles used in the city during the building boom. (E)

In 1881, the **Henry Ames** farm, northeast of Litchfield, started making bricks. By 1882, Ames was turning out 25,000 bricks a day and was unable to keep up with the supply even at that rate (T). In 1892, Ames showed his product at the Chicago Exposition. The bricks were found to meet or exceed all others. At the height of their production, the Ames Brickyard made 40,000 bricks a day. (D)

The **Senator Peter E. Hanson** (1895 to 1898) home on Fourth Street and Armstrong was built in 1904. Senator Hanson went on to become Secretary of State 1901 to 1907. The home was built of quadruple red brick in a fortress style. In 1905, Senator Hanson built another home, adjacent to his property on the north side, as a wedding gift to his daughter Nellie who married Litchfield businessman Nelson D. March. This home also was constructed of red brick with a third floor ballroom. (I)



No. 40 Senator Hanson's home, North Marshall Avenue

Another Litchfield home, built in 1893, was home to two honored citizens. This wooden painted lady is located at 326 South Donnelly. It was the home of **Gale Sondergaard, Litchfield's Academy Award winning actress**. It was also home to William Beirman, a Litchfield businessman. His son, **Bernie Bierman** played for Litchfield's winning football team and graduated from LHS in 1913. Bernie went on to coach the "**Golden Gophers**" **from 1932 to 1950 with a 93-35-6 record overall**. Bernie and teammate, Jim McCusker, developed the forward pass at Litchfield High School. Andy Quinn, a cousin of Jim McCusker, rememberd watching them play.

"I went to see him and Bernie Bierman play. Jim was the quarterback and Bierman was the end and between the two of them, they developed the forward pass. That was the early years of the pass. I think the success of those teams was due to Dr. Robertson; he played at the University of Minnesota and he was the coach. The football was different too. It was rounded and you couldn't get your hand around it." (dd-6)

In the 1880s, the Kopplin home on 724 South Sibley was built. The home was gifted as a residence for nursing students when Dorothea Kopplin, widow of E.O. Kopplin, died in 1970. It is called the "**Rosemary Home**" in honor of her daughter Rosemary who died of leukemia in 1934. An addition was added to the west part of the home and today, young women who are furthering their education can stay at the home for free during internships, student teaching, and the like. (EE)





No. 41 Rosemary Home, Sibley Avenue South

### **AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVES, 1920 TO 1932**

In the 1920s Litchfield's middle class homes were built from plan books and builders. This included the **Sears –Roebuck catalog homes**. The actual Sears homes have not been identified, although, it is thought that there are up to 20 such homes in Litchfield.

The Craftsman style was popular and the home at 700 South Sibley is an example of this type of home. (source I) Another popular style in this timeframe was Art Deco. An example of this style of home is at 425 North Marshall. (I)

During the depression, limited building occurred. On the west edge of town, Residence Park Addition, was an exception. The area was the far southwest part of town and was known as “**shanty town**.” These homes were “small, made of salvaged materials, and were little more than shacks in some cases.” (I) Very few of these home exist today. Many were replaced by new homes; others have been added on to or repaired so they can no longer be called shanties.

Sometime in the late 1930s a new type of housing was introduced to Litchfield. The “Trailer Coach” was the name for **trailer homes**. They were parked in Litchfield's Trailer Court on South Davis Avenue. This was regulated by City Ordinance in 1939; although, the exact date of the trailer park could not be verified. (LL) This park is still in operation.

The US Census records show that 30.1 percent of Litchfield's housing stock pre-dates 1939. The greatest expansion of the city occurred in the first 60 years with 824 homes



built. (M) This fact would show the need for a comprehensive building survey of the whole city.

### **DEPRESSION AND RATIONING, 1933 TO 1946**

The **Post-World War II** housing saw the second largest expansion of the city with 637 homes built. (M) A severe housing shortage occurred after the war because of the unprecedented number of marriages and children born and a shortage of building materials. The Litchfield Independent Review ran a story in October 1947 about an apartment advertised for rent. There were 22 people standing in line before the advertised open house time of 6 PM. There were no tenement houses in the city at that time. (J) The paper stated that cement was scarce, lumber was in low supply, and trim was impossible to find. (J)

Bert Thulin, a Litchfield contractor for many years, built many homes during this time. One time after the war, on his first government job, he needed lumber. The local lumber yard could not guarantee getting enough lumber. Bert went to St. Paul's Great Northern Office and explained the dilemma. The man in charge told Bert he would get his lumber in time to do the job. Later, the Litchfield Depot staff called Bert and told him to come down to the station to pick up his fruit. The Great Northern man put the order of lumber in as perishables so it would come directly to Litchfield without making all the whistle stops along the way. (zz-12)

### **BABY BOOMERS, 1947 TO 1965**

The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 established a loan guarantee program for homes up to \$2000 or 50 percent of the loan. (O) The City's response to this was to plat their property on the eastern edge of the city, Auditor's Plat 1. There were 38 lots sold to the highest bidder when the street work was completed. Most of the lots were purchased by George Nelson. He built two basic designs, one home with dormers and one without. The dormer option cost \$500 of the homeowner's money and was not included in the loan. Today, there are about 30 original **George O. Nelson homes** on East Third Street alone. This is an intact development and homeowners have maintained the buildings. (I, N)



No. 42 East Third Street, 2009

One such home was purchased in 1948 by Mr. and Mrs. Hardy Silverberg. It cost \$5000 and a family member had to sign to secure the loan because it was in excess of the \$4000. This home is located at 418 South Litchfield Avenue. Mrs. Silverberg remembers that the lot here cost more than the lots in Auditor's Plat 1. (zz-11)

This chart depicts Litchfield's GI Housing for a four year period. The US Census data lists homes from 1950 to 1970 as 637 or 23.3 percent of Litchfield's building stock. (M)

YEAR	NUMBER OF HOMES
1949	59
1950	Unknown
1951	27
1952	34

### GROWTH AND GOVERNMENT SOCIALIZATION, 1966 TO 1985

In March of 1967, the City formed a **Housing Redevelopment Authority** to study the needs of senior housing and determine a possible site. In September, the Council passed the feasibility study. The City selected the site of the old Lincoln School on West Fourth because it was within one-half mile of downtown as required. Residents moved in to the structure in August of 1971. There were 61 units of low income housing, Social Security recipients only. This four story apartment complex serves Litchfield residents today. (J)

The **Gloria Dei Apartments** were started by Augustana Lutheran Homes in 1967. These eighty units were subsidized senior housing and remain open today. Subsidized family housing started in Litchfield in 1978 when a 30 unit complex, **Groveland Estates**, was built on the east edge of the city. This complex is now called Edgewood Town Homes and remains open today. (zz-12)



No. 43 Gloria Dei Apartments

Mobile homes became popular again in the 1960s and 1970s. **Park Village Trailer Park** was developed in the early 1970s on the northwest edge of town on George B. Waller's apple orchard. The park contained 119 lots in the original park. In 2005, 32 double lots were added. (zz-13)

In the late 1970s and through to the late 1980s, Litchfield began building **apartment complexes**. These were generally low-density apartments and two stories, with one three-story complex. The majority of these apartments are located on East Second Street.

Residential housing also saw some changes. Litchfield's **Crescent Park** was developed in response to the new high school in the northeast part of town. This 81-lot development was a neighborhood of curving streets and asymmetrical lots and contained rambler and split-level home styles. (N, M) This development was followed by **Morningside, Sunrise Terrace, Pleasant View and North Ridge Estates**. This set a pattern for residential areas to move either east or west. This set a pace for the current future land use plans in Litchfield's Comprehensive Plan (2009) Also, the developments were given names as opposed to just being additions. (N)

### **EMPLOYMENT TRANSITIONS, 1981 TO 1995**

The biggest change in residential housing during this timeframe was **townhouses**. The "**Town and County Estates**" are on East Third Street. This no-maintenance concept was attractive to Litchfield's aging population. Also, townhouses, in the southeast part of town and on Sibley Avenue at the site of Longfellow School, were constructed during this period. (JJ)

### **BIG BOX RETAIN AND .COM ERA, 1996 TO PRESENT**

Litchfield's **new developments** for homes included the Capwood development, several additions on the northeast boundary; the Turnberry Lane development, on the southwest boundary; and Cedar Meadows and Harmon Meadows, the east annexation of the John Harmon farm.

The Meeker County Economic Development Authority (EDA) has constructed duplexes on the north part of Capwood. These patio duplexes are rented and maintained by the Authority. The EDA has similar rentals in other parts of Meeker County.

In 1996, the City partnered with Augustana Lutheran Homes to construct apartments for the elderly. These units, called Emmaus Place, were market value housing apartments.

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

Three individual homes have significance related to who lived there. Mrs. Stewart's Bluing home has national significance as does the home Bernie Bierman and Gale Sondergaard lived in. The Senator Peter E. Hanson home has state significance

since Senator Hanson went on to become Secretary of State. Another home, the “Rosemary Home,” preserved by the Dorothea Kopplin estate as a residence for young women completing their professional careers, has a unique significance. The original town site homes and the buildings moved in from Forest City and Greenleaf have local cultural significance.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Litchfield Heritage Preservation Commission recommends the following for the Residential theme.

1. A comprehensive survey of the city to identify possible future districts and locally designated homes. This could include the original town site, the buildings moved in from Forest City and Greenleaf, and the post WWII homes on East Second, Third, and Fourth Streets, and the painted ladies and Victorians on Sibley, Marshall, Armstrong, and Holcombe Avenues.
2. An attempt to identify Sears-Roebuck homes in Litchfield
3. Incidental findings like the home of Carole Peterson. This home on East First Street was known to be a log cabin through family history. During some remodeling, hand hewn beams were found in the basement. (personal memories and data, Carole Peterson Wendt)

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# Healthcare



No. 44 Robertson Hospital

“You wondered how they could do it. Out all night on house calls and then work the next day but they always seemed to do that.

They were very dedicated, your old doctors.”

Gen Lenhardt, Oral History



## TIMEFRAME

### *Settlement, 1869 to 1885*

The first physician in the area was **Dr. V.P. Kennedy**. He filed a claim on Cedar Lake in 1856. Dr. Kennedy was elected to the MN Legislature in 1861 and joined the Union Army as a surgeon. In 1869, he opened an office in Litchfield and practiced there for eleven years. He was a member of the Crow River Medical Society organized in September 1874. His daughter, Julia, married Nimrod Barrick and they settled on Dr. Kennedy's original claim. Dr. Kennedy died in 1903 from Bright's Disease and is buried, with honors, in Ripley Cemetery. (H, T)

Litchfield had a "**pest house**" that appeared to be rotated to whoever wanted it. The going fee was \$20 a month per person. These "pest houses" were a system of quarantine or hospice for people who had no where to go when they were sick. In June of 1877, an outbreak of small pox occurred in Litchfield. The family was quarantined and the Village Council established a Health Board for Litchfield with Dr. Bissell as the health officer. (U)

In December of 1882, the Village of Litchfield was required by the State Board of Health to report contagious diseases in the newspaper. The State Board also required doctors, heads of families, and hotel owners to make such reports locally in newspapers. (U) Scarlet fever was virulent in those days as was diphtheria. Litchfield's News Ledger reported in 1880 that there were 349 births and 131 deaths with diphtheria and consumptions as the leading causes of death. A contagious residence, or "pest house," was destroyed by a storm in 1881. (U) Physician fees also were published in the paper; and, in 1882, town visits were \$1.50 and country visits added 50 cents a mile to the fee. Night calls were an extra 50 cents. (U)

## BUILDING BOOM, 1886 TO 1919

**Dr. S.W. Robertson** dealt with an outbreak of scarlet fever in 1895. The "pest house" was under the direction of Mrs. Bahr and the City paid her for her services. At times, with residents outside of the village, the bill was sent to Meeker County Commissioners. (JJ)

Most health care was preformed in the home. **Florence Sexton Casey** remembers that about 1909, her 14 year old sister had an appendectomy on the kitchen table by Dr. Chapman and Dr. Karl Danielson. Her sister later died of an infection. (dd-12)

The "**Borden House**" was considered the hospital in the late 1890s and early 1900s. It was a white wooden structure in the area of 426 North Sibley Avenue. Dr. Cassel was in charge. Generally infectious disease were not allowed in a hospital. People were quarantined at home or in the infectious house. (zz-14)

In June 1900, there was an outbreak of small pox on the eastern side of the Village. A health expert, Dr. Bracken, from the Minnesota Board of Health arrived on the evening train and examined the woman. He confirmed **small pox** and the home was quarantined, roped off, and a guard posted. The *Litchfield Independent Review* "warned the public against all stories and rumors that may be afloat. This statement contains all the facts in the case." The Village Council asked the June term of Meeker

County Court to be postponed because there were “cases on trial in which the witnesses and interested parties live in the infected district.” Smallpox surveillance was established by the Village Health Board. No circuses were allowed to perform in Litchfield in 1900 by Council action. (J, JJ)

The Village Council met in a special session on November 28, 1900 and established that a guard be posted at the Litchfield House Hotel around the clock, seven days a week, to check people coming to and from the village by train. A 6-by-6 foot watchman’s house was constructed. (JJ) They also voted to “insist that health officers enforce that all children be vaccinated or expelled from school.” The Council purchased the old Bacon Gallery and moved it to the northwest corner of the old fairgrounds (current golf course) by Lake Ripley, “where it will be used as a detention hospital for all contagious diseases.” (J)

Litchfield’s first building, designated as a **hospital** was completed in January 1909 by Dr. Robertson at 301 North Sibley Avenue.

“The hospital building erected by Dr. James W. Robertson is so near completion that it will be ready for patients on Monday next, and several persons who have been on the waiting list will enter the building for operations. The entire upper floor is devoted to the hospital and the arrangement of the various rooms is ideal in every way, both in the private and ward apartments. The corridor and rooms present a handsome appearance in a finish of birch casings and hardwood floors. Each bed is supplied with an electric bell attachment for the use of the patients. The large operating room is no doubt one of the most up-to-date in arrangement and equipment of any in the northwest. In the basement are to be found the laundry, kitchen, and dining rooms, etc, which, however are not ready for use.” (J)

Patients came from far away Cedar Mills for surgery by the next month.

“Mary Langerfelt, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Langerfelt, was operated on Wednesday morning at the Robertson Hospital for appendicitis and is doing nicely. Irvin Johnson was able to return to his home in Cedar Mills Wednesday after having almost a full recovery from an appendical operation two weeks ago. Jos. Walls, who had a similar operation is expected to return to his home in Greenleaf this week. (J) Dr. Robertson’s hospital closed in 1915. This building is currently a Chinese restaurant on the main floor with apartments upstairs.

In 1910, the **Litchfield Hospital Association** organized and built a 20-room hospital on North Holcombe Avenue. The building was 34 by 70 feet and two stories. This was seen as “modern throughout, electric lights, steam heat, private rooms and an exceptionally equipped operating room.” There were wards or private rooms for \$12 to \$22 per week. Skilled nurses were always in attendance. (J)



No. 45 Litchfield Hospital, 1910

**Miss Bellingham** came to the hospital on October 13, 1917. She was a “regular nurse,” trained at Ashbury Methodist Hospital in Minneapolis. She was not in Litchfield a full year when the 1918 flu epidemic struck. Miss Bellingham worked from 8 a.m. to 2 a.m. for almost six months. She recalls assisting with a serious operation on a night call to a local farm, The farmer held an oil lamp, someone else a type of flashlight, and she assisted the physician with surgery in the parlor of the home. The lady is healthy and walking around today. “Miss Bellingham was a great lady. She gave her life to that hospital. And everybody had nothing, I don’t think, but the highest praise for that lady” remembered Marcela Weber Kelly. (dd-18)

When the “new” Meeker County Memorial Hospital was built in 1952, Miss Bellingham was asked to be head of surgery. She declined and did not work in that building. Her reputation for professionalism lived long after she retired from health care and even after her death. In the mid 1970s, new nurses were still taught patient care and nursing tasks “because that’s the way Miss Bellingham did it.” (xx-15)

During the **1918 flu epidemic**, Drs. Cutts and Danielson divided their time equally between the north and south side Litchfield residents. They changed territories daily so patients were seen every other day. They employed extra drivers and teams of horses to pull their sleighs so they could sleep in the sleighs between visits. (U)

In 1919, a bad epidemic of **black diphtheria** struck. Ray Nelson, a long time Litchfield barber, was born August 1 and his two-year-old brother died in September. A lot of babies died that year. Ray’s mother nursed him and the doctor said “Just keep nursing him or you will have a dead baby.” (dd-3)

## **AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVES, 1920 TO 1932**

It was in this timeframe that two teams of physicians were practicing in Litchfield. **Dr. Karl Danielson** and his son, **Dr. Lennox Danielson**, were one team. **Dr. Cecil Wilmot** and his brother, **Dr. Harold Wilmot**, were the other.

Dr. Karl was born in Sweden in 1875. He graduated from Rush Medical College in 1900. Dr. Karl came to Litchfield in 1906 and was instrumental in starting the Litchfield Hospital Association. His career spanned the horse and buggy home visits to the 1950 hospital. He swam in Lake Ripley every day as soon as the weather was warm enough. He was still swimming daily in Lake Ripley even on his 95th birthday in 1960. (EE)

His son, Lennox, returned to practice with his father in 1932 after graduating from medical school. Dr. Lennox served on the Litchfield School Board from 1936 to 1968. He was Board Chair from 1949 to 1968 when three schools, Wagner, Ripley Elementary, and the High School, were built. On his retirement, in 1988, Dr. Lennox had this to say. "No one went without care for fear the physician could not be paid. You drew on your experience to decide what was needed for the patient and you drew on your skills to do it without any regulations or restrictions. You hoped to get paid of course, but if you didn't, well that was the way things went." (J, EE)

Dr. Harold Wilmot began his 56 year career in medicine in Litchfield in 1924. He considered Winona and St. James before settling here. Dr. Wilmot was impressed with the Land 'O Lakes organization, the Litchfield Produce, and the Carnegie Library. Just six weeks after getting here, a small pox epidemic broke out at the Litchfield Produce Co. His partner, Dr. Cutts, was gone. Dr. Harold examined all and found ten active cases. Vaccine was ordered and Dr. Harold completed the vaccinations for 300 people by working all day Saturday and Sunday. In 1940, Dr. Harold was honored by being invited to join the American College of Surgeons by submitting 100 documented approved cases for review. Dr. Harold Wilmot retired in 1980 after practicing in Litchfield for 56 years. His parting comments were "God bless you all and thanks for all the past favors and kind words." (J, EE)

Dr. Cecil Wilmot came to Litchfield to join Dr. Harold in 1937. He practiced in the Litchfield Clinic. In 1942 he joined the Army Air corps as a physician. He was in charge of a hospital in the Aleutian Islands, Alaska. After the war, Dr. Cecil returned to Litchfield to his wife, Isabelle, and son, Tom. Dr. Cecil died in 1972. (EE)

A comment in Abe Johnson's oral history summed up the communities' thoughts about the two teams of physicians. "I think the Wilmots and Danielsons and the people who were instrumental in handling the medical profession in Litchfield during those days did a tremendous job and I really thought a lot of them."

In 1920, a medical society was reorganized that included Meeker, Swift, and Kandiyohi counties. Papers were written and techniques discussed. These meetings were about education and resources for rural doctors. (U)

Even with the fine new hospital, not all healthcare was preformed there. **Dewitt Albright** remembers the birth of his third child, about 1926.

"Dr. Wilmot went only as far as my brother-in-laws and then he was brought here by bob sled. He examined her and told me he had been out all day. He

went to sleep and then I woke him when the pains were bad. Doc Wilmot said the baby was coming bottom first and that he would try to turn her. He apologized because he didn't have any ether. He said to her, "What we do, we do. You will just have to bear it because it is life and death for both of you." So Doc Harold reached in with one hand and got a foot and pulled her out. She had a strangulated cord and was a blue baby. Of course she is 65 now and still going strong. Then Doc Harold made a big breakfast for the whole family and stayed all day and night to make sure everything was ok. When we were making breakfast, Doc says what are you calling her and I said Virginia. Doc says my wife's name is Dorothy and I would be pleased if you name her after my wife. So Virginia Dorothy it was." (dd-19)

Not all medicine was physician ordered. Home remedies were often the first choice.

"Every spring we were given turpentine and sugar to get rid of the worms in case you had them. And then we ate dandelion greens every spring to purify your blood. (dd-18)

## **DEPRESSION AND RATIONING, 1933 TO 1946**

Infectious diseases also showed up in this time frame. Stan Ross had tuberculosis and could not do anything for about six years, from 1932 to about 1938. He did go to a sanitarium for about six months to learn how to care for himself. He went to a private one in White Bear Lake. Returning home, he was confined to bed for a long time. Stan told that one day, he was doing too much and started hemorrhaging. He hemorrhaged every day for about a week. "Dr. Karl Danielson had my dad go out and get some sand and my mother made two bags, 5 1/2 pounds each, and they put them on my chest. They put the sandbags on the upper chest so I would breathe with my lower chest. Obviously it worked! I was 27 at the time." (dd-17)

Litchfield dentist, **Dr. Robert Farrish**, arrived in Litchfield about this time. His office was on North Sibley Avenue.

"I had my office in the old bank building on the corner of Sibley and Second Street. The building was at an angle and my chair was right there on the second floor. I had about the best office of any of them. I could look up and down main street. I charged \$1.00 or maybe \$1.50 for two surface fillings. Cleaning the teeth was \$1.00 and extractions were \$1.00 (dd-20)

In 1914, the Litchfield Creamery mandated testing for **bovine (cow) tuberculosis**. It was thought that this would help eradicate the spread of tuberculosis from cows to humans. This was the number one spot in the United States and Meeker County's superior dairy industry assisted in getting this test site chosen (J, U)

## **BABY BOOMERS, 1947 TO 1965**

Meeker County residents approved a \$400,000 bond at 1.65 percent interest to build a **new hospital** in 1949. The Litchfield Hospital Association purchased the site for the new hospital without a referendum or a "north-south" war. They then disbanded and gave the remaining \$125,000 to the new county hospital. The total cost of the



new hospital was about \$950,000. The 70 bed facility opened its doors in May 1952. In 1959 a licensed practical nurse program opened. (J)



No. 46 Meeker County Memorial Hospital, 1952

Litchfield's old hospital had a new role, too. The building was purchased by **Augustana Lutheran Homes, Inc.** for a nursing home for \$25,000. Litchfield attorney, Wendell Nelson, served on the Board for 35 years and saw the corporation progress from one home to a multi-site, full service senior care organization.

“The old hospital was purchased for \$25,000 by the First Lutheran Church. Augustana Homes was founded and I served on the Board for 35 years. From one building we have seen the senior apartments, then the Bethany Home, then the Emmanuel Home, and hospice and home care all come into being. The Board of Social Ministries has taken over the Augustana Lutheran Homes but it started right here.” (dd-11)

Dr. Harold Wilmot's long awaited dream became a reality in 1950. He organized and built the **Litchfield Clinic** near the northeast corner of Central Park. This facility served the community well until a new facility, across from the hospital opened in 1993. (J) He was joined by a long list of very qualified and dedicated doctors over the years. Litchfield had quality health care for many years.

In 1953, Meeker County physicians participated in “**Operation Lollipop.**” This was a county-wide trial for the polio vaccine and one of 16 sites in the nation. Polio gamma globulin inoculations were given to 5,130 Meeker County children. As part of this program, Dr. Lennox Danielson taught kindergarten children the proper way to sneeze. (J)

Litchfield made the national spotlight in 1954 when ten year old **Mickey Shaw** had “controlled cross-circulation” for open heart surgery at the University of Minnesota by Dr. Lillehei, the “Father of Open Heart Surgery.” Mickey had been diagnosed with a heart condition years earlier. His mother had searched for help and was



finally contacted by Dr. Lillihei. There were no guarantees with the surgery. Without it, Mickey's condition would become life-threatening. A problem surfaced when Mickey had a rare blood type, AB negative. No family members were a match. A search began with Litchfield's VFW, Legion, Knights of Columbus, and even the Red Cross, statewide. Two matches were found in Litchfield and Howard Holtz volunteered.

Mickey had the five-hour surgery with Howard Holtz "hooked up" to Mickey and giving him oxygenated blood. Mickey became a state and a national poster child for open heart surgery. In November 1986, the British Broadcasting Corporation visited Litchfield for a program about the advances in medicine after World War II. (H)

### **GROWTH AND GOVERNMENT SOCIALIZATION, 1966 TO 1985**

In August of 1967, the two funeral directors in Meeker County planned to discontinue providing ambulance service. The County Commissioners, physicians, and hospital staff were concerned. The ambulance did 350 runs a year with about 85 percent of those in Litchfield.

In November, **Earl Klitzke** took over ambulance services for Meeker County. Earl became an EMT and his wife, Arlene, became a paramedic. They were on-call twenty-four hours a day for many years. After selling their service to Mike Mergen, Earl and Arlene retired to Willmar. Gold Cross Ambulance now provides Advanced Life Support Service for Meeker County. (J)

In 1970, Litchfield surgeon, **Dr. William Nolen**, wrote *A Surgeon's World*, a book that became a national best seller. Dr. Nolen joined the Litchfield clinic in 1960. He trained at Bellvue Hospital in New York. Dr. Nolen described Litchfield, both the community and the health care, from a Mayberry viewpoint. Litchfield was on the map. News broadcasters filmed him at the hospital from time to time. Dr. Nolen appeared on Johnny Carson, Merv Griffin, and David Frost to promote subsequent books. He wrote a column in *McCall's magazine*. Dr. Nolen was a larger-than-life person whose personality could fill a room. He died in 1986 in his late 50s while still practicing and writing. (EE)

The Meeker County Memorial Hospital added a 16-bed addition on the north side which opened in 1965 and an eastern addition that included, more rooms, a Coronary Care Unit, and office space in 1971. The hospital had 92 beds. (J)

### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS, 1986 TO 1995**

Litchfield's Augustana Homes started **Litchfield Area Hospice in November 1988**. Hospice services are provided in Meeker County. Augustana Homes also opened up at assisted living complex, Emmaus Place, and provided home care in the area. (J)

**Affiliated Community Medical Centers** of Willmar opened a clinic in Litchfield in 1988. They provided outreach specialty services. Shortly before the Litchfield Clinic opened its new facility on South Sibley in 1993, that clinic was purchased by Allina and became the Allina Medical Clinic.

In 1989, the hospital closed the second floor to patients and converted it to office and outpatient areas. In 1992, improvements to the first floor of the hospital were completed. (J)

### **BIG BOX RETAIL AND .COM ERA, 1996 TO PRESENT**

The **Meeker County Memorial Hospital** remodeled the basement in 1992. In 2000, a Senior Behavior Health unit was added. The continued need for space surfaced in 2007 and a substantial addition was planned. This addition contained all new patient rooms, the emergency room, and surgery. Patients moved into the new facility in July 2009. (J)



No. 47 Meeker Memorial Hospital, 2009

Also in July 2009, the Allina Clinic Litchfield and Affiliated Community Medical Center merged to one entity, the Affiliated Community Medical Center. (J) At present, there are two locations under one management with plans for a significant addition to the ACMC Clinic in the near future. The ACMC Clinic had just completed an addition in 2005. With the two clinics merging, additional space will be needed; a substantial addition and second story is planned in 2010.

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

When recognizing people who have made significant contributions to Litchfield's healthcare, the Doctors Danielson and Wilmot cannot be overlooked. They were the backbone of health care in the community for 70 years. They also found time to be involved in civic affairs and use their leadership in positive ways outside of the practice of medicine. Their careers started with moonlit buggy rides to Meeker County farms and ended in a modern Critical Care Unit or operating room at the "new" hospital.

The other person in this theme whose reputation outlived her practice is Miss Bellingham. Her duties as nursing supervisor of the Litchfield Hospital were always done with the utmost professionalism and kindness. She was a tribute to her profession and a role model for all. She truly dedicated her life to the hospital.

On a national level, Dr. William Nolen's career as a writer gave the nation a snapshot of small-town Minnesota. His subsequent books took on a more serious note. His *Making of a Surgeon* which describes an internship at New York's Bellvue Hospital, was a candid look at what it takes to complete medical school.

Also on a national level, Mickey Shaw's open heart surgery and his neighbor, Howard Holtz's controlled cross-circulation substitute for a heart-lung machine were truly pioneer efforts in open heart surgery by Dr. Lillihei.

Finally, a cultural pattern in our community is the advent and development of Augustana Community Homes, Inc., from an old hospital to a major player in the Board of Social Ministry of the ELCA. The organization now provides seamless care from hospital discharge to home.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Litchfield Heritage Preservation Commission recommends the following in regards to the theme of Healthcare.

1. The original Robertson Hospital building should have a form of recognition to educate members of the community about its role in Litchfield's history.
2. Dr. Harold Wilmot's 1950 Litchfield Medical Clinic is being used as offices and should be maintained.
3. The original Meeker County Memorial Hospital has been added on to on all four sides. The original building is still there and needs to be recognized through photos and/or displays.
4. The Meeker County Historical Society has worked to maintain a collection that is sensitive to this part of our history. With increased space, hopefully in the future, additional items can be collected.

# Education



No. 48 Litchfield Junior Class, 1909

“And I think we have a very good school system. Even as a kid I thought we had a good school system. But once again, I am assuming that because my parents thought so.”

Ed O. Kopplin, Oral History

## TIMEFRAME

### *Settlement, 1869 to 1885*

The history of education in Litchfield during the early settlement years varies with the source. There are resources that state **the first school** was a parochial school at the Trinity Episcopal Church in 1871. (H) It also is documented that a school started in March of 1870. The building was 17 by 19 feet and had no windows or doors. This structure also was used as a church. (T)

Several homes also had classrooms, usually upstairs or in the attics. The Dr. Bacon home at 425 East First Street had an attic classroom as did the house at 225 East Fifth Street. (zz-16)

In February 1871, the county school board discussed bonding to construct a school. A new Minnesota law allowed schools to bond for this. At the next meeting, it was decided to construct a school on the northeast corner of block 51. The lot was purchased from the railroad for \$300. The building was two stories and 24 by 45 feet. The cost was “under \$3000 with interest at 12 percent for four years. (J)

The January 1872 issue of the Litchfield Republican stated that Mary Bergquist taught primary school; Miss A.F. Simons taught the intermediate grades; and Mr. Bailey taught grammar school (H) at an unknown location. P.J. Casey’s research stated that the first meeting of the Litchfield School Board was in March 1872. It was decided to have a term of school for the Village and Miss Cora Mitchell was hired to teach in a small structure on Block 41 of the original Village. There were 46 pupils and the cost was \$148.78 for the three month term. With so many students, it was decided to erect a school but that took some time. There was a problem about the location: should the school be on the north or south side of the railroad tracks? A “local civil war” was fought with words, not deeds. It not only raised tempers but delayed the construction of the school for several years. (T)

By 1879, the **Litchfield Washington High School** was built on the northeast corner of the intersection of North Armstrong Avenue and Highway 12. An extensive addition was added later. The first class to graduate was in 1880 (Y). In 1883, the class size was 171 students.



No. 49  
Washington School





No. 49 A Litchfield High School Faculty, 1882

### **BUILDING BOOM, 1886 TO 1919**

In 1886, Litchfield again needed more classroom space. **The Garfield Elementary School** was constructed on the corner of Marshall and Pacific Avenues in the southeast part of Litchfield. It was a two-room structure and served as a school until Longfellow School opened in 1909. (Y) When Litchfield voted to go dry in April of 1914, three saloon owners leased the old school to store their bars and bar fixtures. One night in 1915, the Garfield School burned down. It was speculated that the local temperance group was involved but nothing was ever proved. (H)



No. 50 Garfield School



The **Lincoln School** was built on North Miller Avenue and 5th Street in 1891. (Y) The building was brick and had eight classrooms. It was used as a school until 1930. The site selection of this building led to another “local civil war” when deciding whether the location should be north or south side of the tracks. It was decided to build the school in the northwest part of town. (T)



No. 51 Lincoln School

In 1909, the **Longfellow School** opened on the 400 block of South Sibley Avenue. This building cost \$22,041 to build and served as Litchfield’s Elementary School for over 60 years. (Y) The building was heated with coal; former students remember watching men shoveling coal into the basement after it was brought to the school by horse drawn conveyance. The school purchased coal from Cargill for many years. (X, dd-21) The building was used as an alternative school and vocational education in the 1970s. It was demolished in January 1985. (J)



No. 52 Longfellow School

The Litchfield Municipal Progress book of 1899 states “Tell me of your schools and I will tell you of your city.” Litchfield schools “have an excellent reputation throughout the length and breath of the state. Litchfield has four school buildings supplied with every facility for health and educational convenience. There is an enrollment of 785, with 88 in the high school.” ( W)

In 1911, the Litchfield School Board purchased property on the northeast edge of the village under the Putnam Act. The State of Minnesota passed the **Putnam Act** in 1909 that encouraged schools to teach modern aspects of farming and then selected ten schools to get the first state aid to start these programs. Litchfield applied in 1911 to be one of the second ten schools. They were selected and in May 1911 they purchased 8.5 acres northeast of town from W.W. Schelp for \$2500. Within months, nine rural schools wanted to join the Association of Litchfield Schools No. 9. The classes started in the fall of 1911 and went from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. to allow students to get home in time for chores. Subjects taught included farm crops, animal husbandry, blacksmithing, farm arithmetic, and carpentry. (J)

## **AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVES, 1920 TO 1932**

In many ways, the years between World War I and World War II were focused on agricultural issues in Meeker County. Rural students, who wished to attend high school, “went to town” for school. They would stay Sunday night until Friday afternoon at the home of a relative or pay for boarding. (dd-7) Some students were ‘bused” to town in the late 1920s in homemade buses. (dd-3)

The Litchfield Community placed a high value on education. The March 11, 1929 burning of the **Washington High School** and its aftermath was one of the most significant events in the history of Litchfield. Students saw the flames and smoke that Monday morning at 7:30 as they walked to school. Some cried and others were happy thinking there would be no more school or that their late shop project was no longer an issue. (dd-18, zz-17) The cause of the fire was never determined and led to much speculation. (J)



No. 53 Washington High School burning

“Well, the whole town was there, really. We all just watched the building burn because the fire was so out of control our fire department could not do anything. Many people cried. Then we went home and waited for someone to tell us what to do.” told Louise Tostenrud.

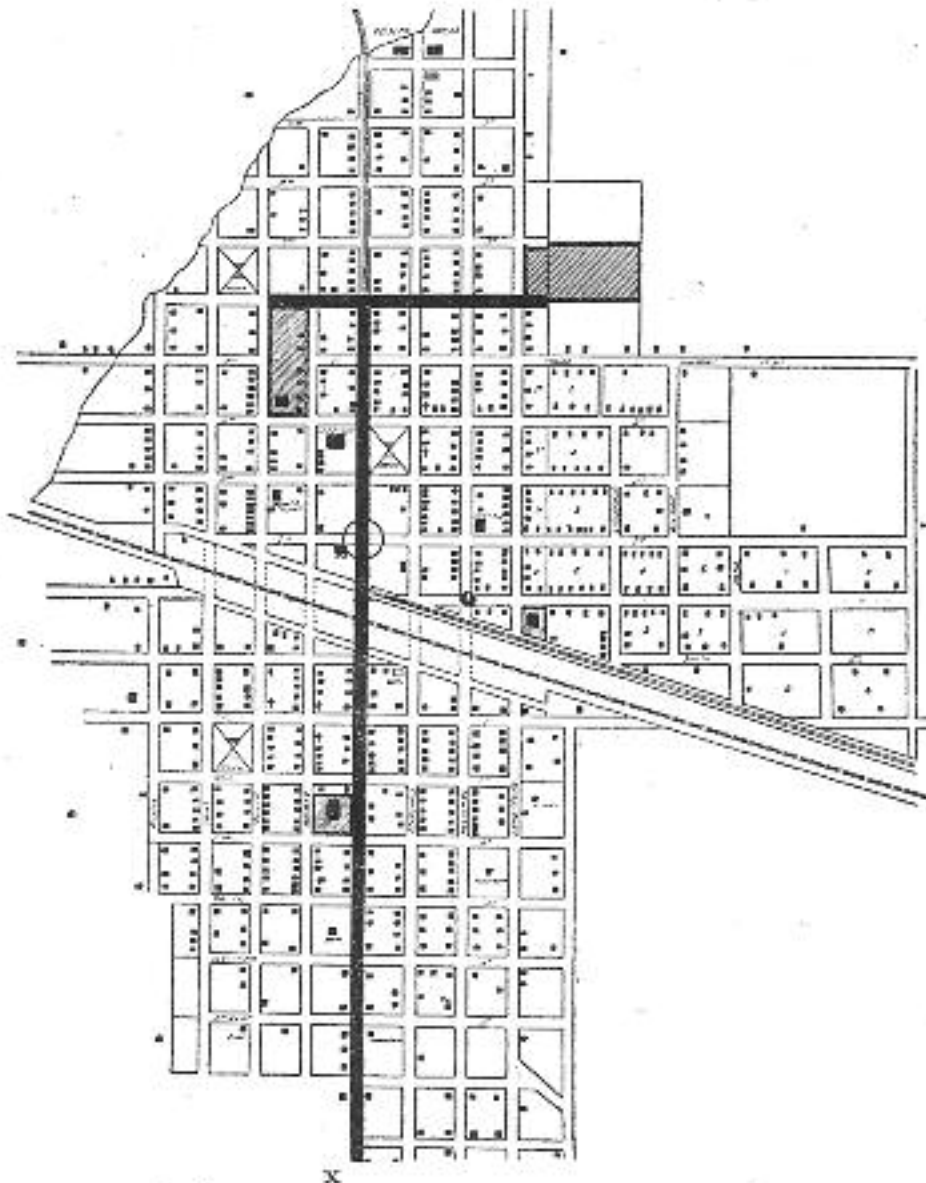
By Tuesday, March 12, 1929, an inventory of items was completed and instructions were prepared for classes to resume. On Wednesday, March 13, 1929, students and parents met in assembly at the Litchfield Opera House for instructions.

Thursday morning found students spread out “all over town”. (J) Some classes were held at the Opera House; other sites included the courthouse, basement of the bakery, the bank, Trinity Church, Methodist Church, and upstairs at the Masonic Hall. Violet Ness, a 10th grader, and her cousin Lucille Ness, a 9th grader, often talked about going to school “all over town.” Gen Lenhard remembers being in 9th grade and going to the basement of 241 North Sibley for home economics. She learned to make a white sauce and sew pajamas with a flat felt seam after the school rented sewing machines for \$10. She states that the “seniors got the courthouse and opera house and the underclassmen got what ever was left.”

Esther Ross remembered having a perpetual sore throat from running “all over town” and Karna Agren “never did learn to type or take shorthand in the basement of that bakery” but she liked eating the warm donuts from upstairs. Elaine Lindell remembers getting a D- in conduct after trading places to sit close to her best friend in the upstairs of 223 North Sibley. (H, T, X, zz-18, zz-14, dd-7, dd-22, dd-23, dd-24)

To say that “Litchfield.... a community that comes together to protect, provide for, and enrich itself” took a several month sabbatical as the voters decided how and where to locate the school is a gross understatement. Previous school sites were rotated north side, then south side, than back to north side. Conflict, over site selection of public buildings, is referred to locally as the “**north south war**” and affected the placement of the Litchfield Public Library, Litchfield Opera House, schools, and even who was in what photo at a 40th LHS class reunion. (J, MM, JJ, dd-25)

In 1929, the **new school site** was a major issue. The school board had eight referendums in ten months until a site in the center of town was chosen. (X J) The School Board hired two architectural firms, one had school building experience and the other were two “home town” LHS graduates. (X, J) The first referendum was for \$275,000 and it failed. The second referendum also failed. It had two questions, one for cost and one for site. The third referendum for \$225,000, with no site passed. The remaining referendums focused on a north site, a south site, and a middle site.



### Plat of Litchfield and Various School Sites

The plat above is a map of Litchfield drawn to scale. It was prepared under the direction of John T. Mullen and first used by him in explaining the advantages of the school farm plot as a school site, to the board of education and members of the citizens committee and later at the mass meeting held at the opera house.

The map shows the location of the old high school building, the Lincoln school site together with the block of ground next north of it and also the school farm plot in the northeast part of town. The site suggested by a group of southside residents and offered by it as a donation to the dis-

trict is located at the foot of the map on the west side of Sibley avenue and south of the lone residence appearing on the map, about five blocks south of the Longfellow school location.

The plat is very complete in that it shows the location of every block, every residence, the railroad right of way, highways 10, 22 and 24, the creek, the several parks, post office, municipal plant, the court house, hospital and other prominent buildings. It is self explanatory and deserves a careful perusal on the part of every voter before he casts his ballot Monday night, May 27.



When the community decided on the middle site, a contingent of north voters appealed for another vote citing the uprooting of so many beautiful homes. (X, dd-24, J) During this process one school board member resigned, one died, the superintendent resigned, the school board was investigated by the State Department of Education, and an opinion was obtained from the MN Attorney General. (X, J)

Bids were sought in the spring of 1930 and the school opened that October. The architectural firm of Jacobson & Jacobson was familiar with designing schools. Two architects with local ties also were hired. G. R. Horton (LHS 1908) and John M. Miller (LHS 1909) were employed as architects to design the school. Juul Construction was the contractor.

The building cost 17 cents a square foot, compared to 20 to 22 cents a square foot on similar buildings bid the previous year. (J) The building was fireproof and did not have any fire escapes due to the interior fire walls. The junior high school was to the left of the lobby and some grade school rooms were to the right. The second floor was mainly high school rooms. There was a basement cafeteria so students could eat their lunches from home, but no “assembly rooms,” since that was “now taboo in school design.” The large auditorium also was “new” and replaced assembly rooms. The state of the art building had terrazzo floors and a telephone in each room. (J)

The construction workers worked ten hour days, six days a week. They went on strike in July, not because of Mr. Juul, but because of the heat. Bricklayers started early, worked until 10 a.m. and came back to finish under the light of the moon and city municipal lights. (J) A novel part of the project was the addition of curbs, requiring a special School Board meeting. The opening of the school prompted much attention. Dates of the opening were published weekly and then postponed. (J) The school finally opened in October 1930 and the community rallied. Esther Ross, a member of the first class to graduate from the building, remembered it was “awesome.”



No. 55 Washington High School, 1931

“I remember the day we opened the new school-it was October-and we had a teacher, Miss Hare. She had us pick up all our little books and pencils and everything and we marched out of there and right up to the new school, the whole class. Our room was in the southwest corner of the new school and that is where we settled. That was quite a day,” Iva Scarp Pearson recalled. (dd-4)

The initial effects of the Depression were somewhat delayed locally. In January 1930, Frank March spoke to the School Board about the local, state, and national economic conditions. The Board authorized a budget of \$58,000 that year. By 1932, the effects of the Depression were starting to affect Litchfield and the school budget had to be decreased to \$47,000. (X)

### **DEPRESSION AND RATIONING, 1933 TO 1946**

As Litchfield continued feeling the effects of the Depression, the Board set the budget at \$32,000 for 1933 and 1934. By 1935 the School Board voted to “**sell all old books**” and set the levy at 30 mils. (X) In 1936 the Board appealed to the federal government for assistance. They stated that the district was a burden upon its supporters and additional assistance was requested. Letters to the State of MN to decrease the Washington School interest rate to 3 percent went unanswered. (X) Early in 1938 they requested an agreement to offset the loss in property tax after the federal government started obtaining property. Then in late 1938 they just unilaterally reduced their loan payment to the State of MN from \$15,000 to \$7500 annually. The School District did not make a full payment until 1941. (X)

The Annual Meeting of the Meeker County Farm Bureau was held at the Litchfield Community Building on December 18, 1935. Senator Ruotsinoja spoke about his bill (Senate File 39) and the similar bill in the House (House File 75) that proposed state aid for **transportation of rural pupils** to high school to ensure equal educational opportunity for all students in Minnesota. The Farm Bureau passed a resolution supporting the two bills. (bb,NN) Prior to state subsidy, rural parents paid for transporting the students to high school.

The Depression years hit everyone hard. Litchfield students remember the hardships. Boys remember wearing shoes with holes on the bottom covered by cardboard. (dd-13). Girls remember the clothing in their limited wardrobes.( dd-7, dd-18) Some students remember mother sewing tablets on the home sewing machine. The grocery ads came printed on just one side of the newspaper and “mother would cut them into 6 or 8 rectangles” and line them up. Then she would “sew a seam at the top and that was our tablet for school.” (zz-19)

The empty Lincoln School was put to use during the Depression. The government rented the building for relief labor offices. (J) In 1942, the school was used as headquarters for rationing, including both labor and provisions. (T)

At this time, Litchfield had one **athletic field** for all sports. It was located south of the railroad tracks, east of Armstrong Avenue. There were no bleachers and no lights. Football players had to be careful where they were tackled, for they could end up pulling burrs out of their uniform. (dd-6) A WPA project in 1935 added bleachers and improved the field. Another relief labor project was the 1936 heating and



plumbing improvements for Longfellow School. In 1940, the school desks were refinished with relief labor. (J,X)

A school lunch program started in 1943. Type B lunch was 2 cents; and, Type C was 4 cents. In the absence of a kitchen, both were cold lunches and eaten in the basement lunchroom. (J,X)

### **BABY BOOMERS, 1947 TO 1965**

The Lincoln School, which had served the district since 1891, found yet another use as the offices of the newly created **Farmers Home Administration**. A Meeker County farmer was the first person to receive a loan under the FHA loan program. (J)

After the war years, the economy improved. The School Board approved purchases of a dual- controlled car for drivers training in 1947, three sets of bleachers for the athletic field in 1948 and a hot lunch, "Type A" program in 1950. The Board also set aside \$80,000 and 8 mils for a future building fund in October of 1950. (X) By 1951, the School Board was alarmed at the number of incoming students from the post World War II baby boom. (T) The School Board knew another building project was looming. The community remembered the vicious voting over the 1930 school.

In August 1951, as a first order of business, before deciding about an architect or contractor, the School Board secured the services of a lawyer for the project. (X) By February 1952, **the referendum** proposed had a request for an addition to Longfellow School and another elementary school at a site to be determined. The voters rejected this referendum. The School Board's response was to discontinue kindergarten for the 1952 school year.

The next vote, later in 1952, was to decide if the property in the northeast part of town, owned by the school since 1911 and known as the "farm site," was suitable as a school. (T) Much speculation had occurred over this site. (dd-26)

The referendum for the "farm site" was approved in May 1952 by only four votes. The final vote, at the end of May had three questions. The first was to buy additional land from the City for the athletic field. The second was for a summer recreation program, and the third was for the school and the Longfellow addition. All three passed. (J) In August of 1952 the School Board voted to hold **kindergarten classes in the Masonic Hall** on Sibley Avenue. It was there students were given "sneezing classes" by Dr. Lennox Danielson in light of the polio epidemic. (J)

The year 1953 had several major events for Litchfield schools. **Wagner School**, at the "farm site," opened as did the new **St. Philip's School** next to the Catholic Church on Holcombe Avenue. And that year also saw the demise of the Lincoln School. The School Board voted to accept Johnson Brothers Corporation \$650 bid to demolish it. (J)



No. 56 Wagner School

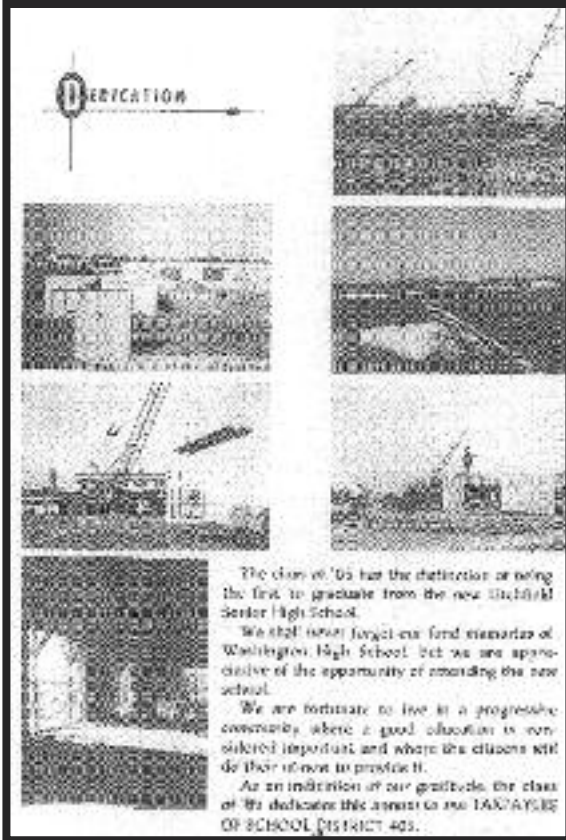


No. 57 St. Philip's School

By 1962, the school system was over crowded at the secondary level. The Board decided to rent the east third of the Litchfield Opera House, now known as the Community Building. It was used for classes until the new high school opened in the fall of 1964. (H)

The site selection for a new high school and the subsequent vote in May 1963 was not an issue for the voters. A citizen's committee was formed, the Independent Review ran a four part series "How Important is a School?" and the ISD 465 voters passed this \$1.37 million referendum on the first vote by a 2:1 margin. (J)

This time the **Attorney General's opinion** was needed on an issue with the City of Litchfield. The location of the new high school was the northern part of the 1911 "farm site." There were only gravel roads to the location. A new road, curbs, and gutters were needed and the City did not want to take the financial burden. The Minnesota Attorney General ruled that school tax dollars could not be used for



roads, curbs, and gutters, but that the City could assess the school system like any other property owner. (J)

The school opened in the fall of 1964. The first class to graduate was the Class of 1965. They dedicated their school annual to the taxpayers of ISD 465. (OO)

No.58 1965 Litchfield High School Annual

### Growth and Government Socialization, 1966 to 1985

By the late 1960s, more elementary space was needed. Longfellow School was 60 years old and had served the district well. Since the high school was on the north side of the railroad tracks, it was a foregone conclusion that the new elementary school would be on the south side. The School Board also determined that additions were needed to both Washington and Wagner School: the referendum included a new 12 unit elementary school on the south side of town, with no specific site, and additions to Washington and Wagner Schools. This passed in May of 1966, (J) and work began on the additions. The **Lake Ripley School** site was purchased from Johnson Brothers Corporation and the Methodist Church in September of that year. By the end of the 1967 school year, another referendum asked for an additional \$600,000 for a 24-unit school rather than the 12-unit originally planned. This passed in April 1968 with a 2:1 margin. (J) The snag this time was again the City of Litchfield and the need to extend the storm sewers to the south part of town. Earlier, a battle occurred with the need to extend sanitary sewers, and the School Board did not approve or reject that issue. The issue was finally settled by a joint committee and the necessary infrastructure was completed. Lake Ripley Elementary opened in 1969 and was designed with an “open school” concept with minimal permanent wall in the interior spaces.



No. 59 Ripley Elementary School

By the late 1960s, Minnesota School Districts were beginning dialogue with rural schools about the mandatory consolidation due by 1971. Both Kingston and Darwin requested keeping their elementary schools open. ( J) Wendell Nelson, Litchfield attorney, was on the school board and helped facilitate the consolidation efforts. (dd-11)

The Litchfield school system explored **vocational school education** about 1972. Jim Swanson was in charge, and the Longfellow School was used for both alternative education and vocational. The vocational school closed in 1982. (J)

By 1981, the economy was in a recession, and the school needed more money for operating expenses. The vibrant and quality ISD 465 **extracurricular program** came under fire and was the focus of a \$575,000 referendum. The School Board made it clear there would be no activities if the referendum failed. The community had other ideas for cuts. The referendum failed in September 1981 and the school board voted to cut all extracurriculars for the 1982 to 1983 school year. The community was astounded. They held a rally in Central Park and decided to raise the \$125,000 required by the school board to reinstate programs. (J)

To make matters worse, the Board also was involved in a heavy dispute with the Litchfield Education Association over salary. They voted to cut 23 teaching positions in December of 1981. A counter proposal by a School Board member threw in cutting a principal also. It failed. Another cost saving measure considered was closing Wagner School. All-in-all the school faced these trials, no building closed, and sports and other activities continued. (J,X)

Litchfield's decisions drew state media coverage. The School Board and administration were under public scrutiny with any decision. By the following fall, things settled down. At half time at a September 1982 football game, the committee working to save sports, band, drama, and all the activities that enrich a school, presented the School Board with a check for \$85,000. The balance of the money was made up in higher fees for these activities. The issue was not pleasant for any School Board member at the time. They did what they said, the community reacted, and everyone



came together to save extracurriculars for Litchfield students. (J)

### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS, 1986 TO 1995**

The need for additional classroom space surfaced again. No referendum was passed and **portable units** were put at Wagner in 1987. These were designed as temporary but were used for several years. An additional two classrooms were added two years later. This temporary space accommodated the “bubble” of 3 to 4 classes that were larger than Litchfield’s usual class size. In the early 1990s, the School Board was facing an issue with the Washington School. Much work was needed to improve the structure and bring it up to code. Talk surfaced about a new high school at the “old airport site” just northeast of the high school. Two referendums failed in 1993. The School Board held open meetings and basically said to the community, “What do you want?” About 40 to 50 people of all ages showed up and met for several months.

The Minnesota Commissioner of Education would not allow a referendum for improvements at the Middle School because of the land shortage and minimum acreage needed for schools and/or additions. As a side note, recent work by the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota has allowed for consideration of our historic schools and limits the ability to deny improvements on old schools just related to acreage. (J)

A recommendation was made to the School Board to add a **middle school addition** onto the Litchfield High School rather than build a new school. This referendum for 7.7 million passed in April 1993 with 1911 voting yes and 1313 voting no. The new addition cost \$62 a square foot. It opened in January 1994. (J)



No. 60 Middle School Addition

In the mid 1990s, Minnesota passed the “post secondary option” for students planning to attend college. High school students could attend college at high school prices. This has continued. It is popular with some students while others do not want to miss their high school years.

## **BIG BOX RETAIL AND .COM ERA, 1996 TO PRESENT**

In 2004, community input was sought on an addition and improvements for the high school. The pool area, windows, wiring, and heating systems needed work. A remodeling of the office area to bring it to the front door was a key safety issue for the building. The committee also recommended an indoor track addition to the south of the building. This referendum failed. The Board came back with a counter offer that included just “life, safety” needs like heating, lobby area, and windows. The board has the authority to make life safety improvements without a referendum. Either way, the building needed maintenance. The vote passed and improvements were made over two summers without the need to relocate students. (J)

In 2003 and 2004, talks began about a **sober high school** in Litchfield. Several entities were involved including parents, social services, county commissioners, counselors, and School Board members. A relationship was established with Sobriety High Foundation in Minneapolis. Libre Academy opened in September 2005 at the former Sparboe Offices on North Sibley Avenue. The school was open for two years at that location. The final year of operation was on North Gorman Avenue. It closed in the spring of 2008. (J)

Governor Jesse Ventura approved property tax changes to assist schools in 2001. At a later date this money was allocated to the general fund. Schools faced cuts in local government aid and per-pupil-unit. Litchfield voters passed a referendum for general operating expenses in the spring of 2008. The education about this referendum clearly stated what had been done to make cuts prior to the vote. The voters recognized that education would change as they know it. With the cuts in Minnesota aid prevalent in other areas, the “if you want it, you’ll have to pay for it” approach worked. (J)

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

The burning of Litchfield’s school in 1929 and the effort to decide its replacement is by far the most important event in school history. The community response is also significant for extracurricular fund drive and the positive energy it generated for the community. Both of these events were of local significance but had state media coverage.

The school has had a series of strong, positive leadership positions but Dr. Lennox Danielson’s term on the school board can not be overlooked. He was elected in 1936 and served until 1968. He served as chair from 1949 to 1968. During this timeframe he championed the building of three schools.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Litchfield Heritage Preservation Commission has the following recommendations regarding the Education theme.

1. Currently, the Washington School is owned by Meeker County and used as a Family Services Building. This structure remains intact and has been remodeled extensively in 1995. The auditorium was remodeled by the school, city, and county



in 2008 for \$1.5 million. The recommendation of this commission is to maintain this structure and give it local landmark status.

2. Wagner School was built in 1953 and can be considered a local landmark.

# Churches



No. 61 Trinity Church

“The Litchfield Methodist Church is more than a group of people.  
It is Christ in the community.”

Reverend Richard Reynolds, New Zealand

## TIMEFRAME

### *Settlement, 1869 to 1885*

The Methodist Church started with worship services in 1856 in people's homes. In 1860, the Board of Trustees held property in what was to become Litchfield. No church was built due to the Civil War and Sioux Uprising. The congregation erected a church in 1874 on the corner of Central Park on two lots donated by S.D. King. During the construction of the building, the church met upstairs in one of the downtown buildings that was a saloon. (PP)

The Swedish Church held services in the log cabins of Swedish pioneers in 1861 in the territory of Meeker County. Later, the Swedish minister from Kandiyohi County held services here in homes every sixth Sunday. (PP)

Litchfield's first church building was the First Presbyterian Church. Property for the church was donated by the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad. The building was erected in 1870 and cost \$4000. It is on the corner of North Holcombe and East Third Street. In 1877, a manse was built just south of the church for \$1,400. The church added an education wing in 1964. In 2008, the entrance and landscaping was redone. The church is the oldest congregation in Litchfield to worship in the same building. (EE)



No. 62 Presbyterian Church

In 1872, Trinity Episcopal church was built with gifts from the Litchfield family and a Mrs. Auchmutz from New York. A parish hall was added the next year with a bell and bell tower in 1879. In 1892, services were held in Swedish to attract the Swedish immigrants. The 300 members celebrated their centennial in 1971. The current congregation is small but very dedicated. The building is on the National Historic Register of Places with architectural significance. (PP)

On March 17, 1871, the first meeting of the Litchfield Ministerial Association was held in Litchfield. At this time, five congregations meeting in the village. The Catholic Church, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Methodist, and Christian all met in various locations. (PP)

### **BUILDING BOOM, 1886 TO 1919**

In 1884, The Swedish Lutheran Church built a new church. Then in 1889, St. Paul's Lutheran (German) Church organized. They rented the Swedish Lutheran Church, for seven years, on Sunday afternoons. (PP)

### **AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVES, 1920 TO 1932**

The Zion Lutheran congregation was organized in 1922 as the Norwegian Lutheran Church. Members met in rented space, at one time the Adventist Church on the site of the Family Services Building. Prior to 1922, people of the Norwegian Lutheran faith attended services at the Ness Church, rural Litchfield. (PP)

The Church of the Nazarene built on its current site in 1927. (PP)

In 1930, the Seventh Day Adventist Church built on North Miller after meeting in homes from 1891. The church built a structure near the current Family Services Building. When the school burned in 1929, this property was necessary for the new school. The church relocated and the city built a basement for the congregation. The upstairs was added later. (QQ)

### **DEPRESSION AND RATIONING, 1933 TO 1946**

During this timeframe no construction was uncovered. Arlyce Quinn Dedrickson and August Anderson shared personal memories of their childhood. Each church in Litchfield had a different sounding bell. When someone died from that church, the church bell would ring the number of times of the person's age. The community would know that a 52 year old member of the Swedish Lutheran Church died by the sound of the bell and the number of rings!

### **BABY BOOMERS, 1947 TO 1965**

The Church of the Nazarene was built in 1948. The contractor was Mr. E.V. Jacobitz from Buffalo Lake. During the Depression the church was in debt. Everyone helped and the minister took a job as the time keeper for Works Progress Administration, in addition to his ministry. He and his wife were excellent instrumental and vocal musicians in the community. (PP)

The First Baptist congregation was formed in 1951. They built the First Baptist Church in 1952 on East Third Street. A new sanctuary and basement was added in 1968. (SS)

The year 1953 saw St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church building a new church. It was dedicated in August 1953. (PP) An Education Wing was added in 1976 and a Fellowship Hall in 2003.

First Lutheran Church was built in 1958 in its current location. In 1953, the church was instrumental in purchasing the old hospital to begin a home for the aged. This was incorporated into Augustana Lutheran Homes, Inc., and today provides seamless elderly care. (PP)

In 1962, the Methodist Church built on South Sibley Avenue after its church burned on December 24, 1961. (PP)

Immanuel Lutheran Church was built in 1963 after meeting at the Litchfield Armory for two years. The congregation formed in 1961; and, by the time the church was built, it had a choir, Ladies Aid, and junior choir. (RR)

Zion Lutheran Church was built in 1963. The church dedicated a new addition in 1984. An education and day care addition was added in 1994, and a new and expanded fellowship hall was completed in 2005. (EE)

### **GROWTH AND GOVERNMENT SOCIALIZATION, 1966 TO 1985**

The Jehovah Witness Church was built in 1967. This was constructed with all-volunteer labor and materials. The church was established in 1950 and met in a home at 623 North Sibley until building the church. (QQ)

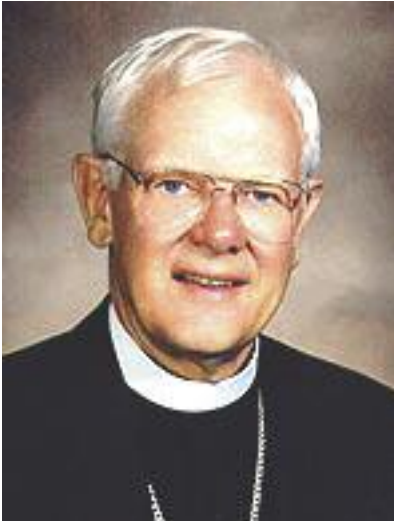
The Church of God started as the Bethany Mission Covenant Church in Greenleaf in 1912. The congregation's first church in Litchfield was at 417 North Gilman Avenue. This building is currently the Knights of Columbus Hall. The church closed in 1975. (QQ)

The churches of Litchfield held an ecumenical meeting in 1966. The meeting had eight churches represented. Several meetings were held and ecumenical services for special services for many years (IR)

### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS, 1986 TO 1995**

In 1987, the Swedish and Norwegian churches decided to combine into the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Herbert Chilstrom, a Litchfield native from the First Lutheran Church, was elected the first Bishop of the newly formed synod. He served the synod for eight years. (ELCA Website)





No. 63 Bishop Herbert Chilstrom

The Assembly of God Church was built in 1993. On Christmas Eve a wind storm blew down the structure and the congregation started rebuilding immediately. The new church is located outside of the city limits on Highway 22 North. (QQ)

### **BIG BOX RETAIL AND .COM ERA, 1996 TO PRESENT**

The Cornerstone Church (formerly First Baptist) was built in 2006 on Meeker County Highway 34. The church started a relationship with a sister congregation in Talnoya, Ukraine. The congregation continued to grow and the new facility already has had an addition. (SS)

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

Litchfield's significance about churches is the consistent number and importance in the community. The Litchfield Centennial Book states that the city boasted six church steeples in 1874.

The Presbyterian Church has local significance as the oldest church with the longest congregation worshipping in one place.

Bishop Herbert Chilstrom has national significance as the first bishop of the five million ELCA Synod.

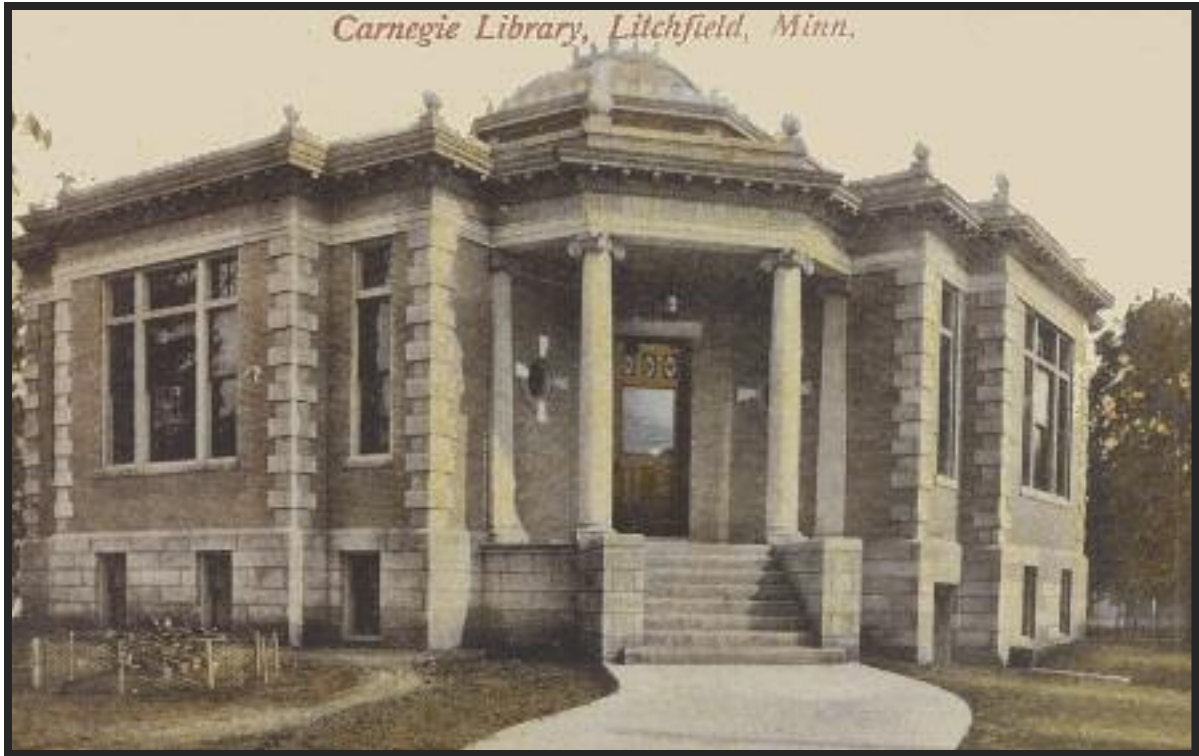
### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Litchfield Heritage Preservation Commission has the following recommendations related to the Churches theme.

1. The Presbyterian Church is not on the National Register of Historic Places. It should be designated as a local land mark and if the congregation wishes, Register status should be pursued.
2. The churches in Litchfield have been maintained, replaced due to fire, or sold to another church. Some have seen reuse, while others were torn down when a new building was needed. As churches reach to fifty year mark, they should be considered for local landmark status.

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# Library



No. 64 Carnegie Library, 1904

“I think our new library is one heck of an asset to our community.”

Pete Kormanik, Litchfield City Council, 2007

## **TIMEFRAME**

### *Settlement, 1869 to 1885*

The community of Litchfield, rebounding in prosperity after the Civil War and Sioux Uprising, formed a Library Association in 1876. Shareholders paid dues of \$3 to use the books purchased. As membership grew, dues were used to purchase more books. In 1884, when the GAR Hall was built, it was decided to use part of the meeting area as a library. The deed to the city in 1885 stated that “forever it must remain a free library.” The original books, still numbered are found in today’s GAR Hall. (Meeker County Historical Society and original deed)

## **BUILDING BOOM, 1886 TO 1919**

By 1903, the news of Andrew Carnegie’s offer of financial donations to build libraries reached Litchfield and was validated by a local lawyer’s letter. A public meeting was called on March 3, 1903 at the Litchfield Opera House to discuss the \$10,000 grant. Comments were favorable. Because members of the Village Council desired to know whether the project to build a library was endorsed by the citizens, a rising vote was taken (those in favor of a library stood up to be counted). The response was favorable indeed; however, the Council, conservative even then, decided to do a canvass vote. Two people from each of the Village’s three wards solicited votes for and against. These people reported at the next Council meeting. The vote was legal as defined by standards of the day and passed 243 to 28.

The location of the building started a keen rivalry between the north and south residents. The Council held a special meeting. The six Council members, three from each side of the tracks, held aloof during the discussion. They then went into closed session until well after 10 p.m. A unanimous decision was announced for the Larson corner on Sibley Avenue just south of the tracks. During that day, a fund had been started to partake of an oyster supper after the decision was made. The losing side would furnish the meal for all. The supper took place at the Lenhardt Hotel and was attended by 40 people.

In July of that year, a rumor came to town that the Great Northern Railroad was planning to construct a large lumberyard just north of the new library. The proposed building would “obstruct the library from the only open view point to be had.” Andrew Nelson and O.H. Campbell went to St. Paul to meet with railroad officials and came back with good news. The wishes of the people would be respected. An alternate site was selected for the lumber yard.

The new library opened May 12, 1904. It contained 900 books on opening day. The first librarian was Mrs. Agnes (Angell) Lamb. Her father, Clark Angell, was the owner of Litchfield’s photography studio. Agnes was valedictorian of the LHS Class of 1882. She attended St. Cloud Teacher’s College and graduated with honors. She married C.F. Lamb, who was a law partner with Charles Lindberg, Sr. She held the position of head librarian for 34 years and was respected by all who knew her in the community.

In 1905 the Village of Litchfield levied \$5000 for taxes. The general fund got \$2000, and the poor, the library, and roads each got \$1000. In 1907, the Library Board

voted to allow rural students to use the library. This decision allowed rural teachers to come to town and bring books out to their students.

### **AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVES, 1920 TO 1932**

In the 1920s, the prosperity that followed World War I allowed for the purchase of books. Large sums of money from “donors wishing to remain nameless” helped develop the collection. The 25th Anniversary in 1929 stated that the collection was the “largest ever.”

### **DEPRESSION AND RATIONING, 1933 TO 1946**

The Depression hit libraries hard. The free use of books became very valued in society. The Andrew Carnegie Foundation stepped in again. In 1931, they gave money for books in the interest of peace to make people “internationally minded.” These Carnegie books were placed in an “International Alcove” and were selected by the Foundation.

In 1932, the Library Board had dealings with the Meeker County Commissioners. The County had decreased its appropriation to the library. Rural teachers were limited to six books for two weeks like everyone else. Then, in March 1935, the Library Board stopped all rural use because the Village taxes could not meet the expense of supplying the rural areas. By fall the county had increased its funding and rural teachers could again take out up to ten books a month.

During World War II, the only library purchases were new books. No maintenance or redecorating was done to the building for the duration of the war. The only new item was a new American flag and flag pole that had been donated by the American Legion and Auxiliary.

### **BABY BOOMERS, 1947 TO 1965**

In the early 1950s, the Andrew Carnegie Foundation made its final gift to United States libraries. The Foundation gave a substantial gift to the federal government to study public libraries and develop a program to fund their support through federal tax dollars. This study was instrumental to the formation of the Library Service Act of 1956 and remains the only comprehensive study done on public libraries by the federal government.

Litchfield Public Library statistics showed a steady increase in the 1950s. The highest percentage of increase was the children’s area, due to the children of the baby boomers starting to read. In 1954, children read 8,781 books; in 1955, the number was 12,003; and, by 1956, the number rose to 13,964. The use of children’s books by the rural students also increased from 3,442 in 1954; 4,398 in 1955; and 5,954 in 1956.

In 1960, the energies of the Library Board and staff were funneled into a project that would have long-term benefits for the community. The Board decided to hire a children’s librarian and decorated the basement for a children’s department. Mrs.



Foster Butterwick, wife of a Litchfield pharmacist, was hired to oversee the children's department. She had extensive experience as a children's librarian. The children's department opened on October 1, 1960. Since that time, children's services have been a high priority in the community. Statistics show consistently that children's per-capita usage in Litchfield is higher than the state average.

Also during the 1950s, the Library Board made the decision to fix the roof. This was the first repair necessary on the 53 year old building. The interior had some redecorating but this was the first structural repair necessary. The structure proved sound for the community. The \$540 roof repair bid was accepted by the City Council in June of 1956. By 1961, the roof problems resurfaced. The City moved to repair the roof, which would necessitate replacing the dome. But public outcry and a "Save the Dome" campaign prompted a more complete study of the problem. Ultimately, in 1964, the City recommended replacing the dome for a cost of \$2000. This \$2000 project altered the building and now keeps it off the National Register of Historic Places- a fact that citizens who strongly favored keeping the original structure intact are quick to point out.

In the early 1960s, the Library Board approached Meeker County to ask for an increase in the funding. The County contributed about 25 percent of the budget but statistics showed rural use to be 40%. The Library Board also discussed forming a joint county library system with Kandyohi County. Multi-county library boards were a new concept, encouraged by the Federal government; but Litchfield did not act on the request.

### **GROWTH AND GOVERNMENT SOCIALIZATION, 1966 TO 1985**

By 1971, after years of debate, Meeker and Kandyohi Counties and the cities in the counties agreed to form the Crow River Library System. By forming a multi-county system, the entity became eligible for Federal funds to assist the financial burden on the local level. County Commissioner Tom O'Keefe was a strong supporter and Litchfield optometrist, Dr. Gary Gross, was the first president of the multi-county system.

Also, at this time, Litchfield needed to relocate its library. Several sites were looked at, the former First State Bank on North Sibley Avenue was selected. The move occurred in 1978; the two level building, on Main Street, was well-liked by the community.



No. 65 Litchfield Public Library, Sibley Avenue

In April 1979, the ladies of the Library Board met on the same night as the Litchfield City Council. The Library Board dissatisfied with the proposed larger multi-county system went to the Council Chambers in the Community Building and “stormed” the Council meeting at 10:15 PM. The Independent Review stated that the “ladies talked and talked and talked, with nary a councilman uttering so much as a grunt for the first hour, as the affair took on the aspects of an old-fashioned coffee-klatch.” The Library Board members had been attending meetings and asking questions about the formation of a larger multi-county system. What they found out had convinced them that a larger multi-county library system for this area at this time “is simply not feasible or sensible to do.” The meeting lasted well after midnight.

### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS, 1986 TO 1995**

In the early 1980s, discussions about a nine county library system took place. In 1982, the Crow River Library System and the Great Plains Library System merged into the Pioneerland Library System that encompasses Meeker County. In the next few years, Meeker County Commissioners became entrenched in a tug-of-war over budgets, services, and levy limits. In December 1984, the Meeker County Board of Commissioners suspended funding to Pioneerland Library System based on the Pioneerland’s budget practices that in effect told the county how much money to levy. This meant that library patrons were asked their address when checking out books. Rural patrons were refused or asked to pay since the City of Litchfield did not suspend funding. After citizen input, the County reinstated funding; but, the Pioneerland Board became very careful about not acting in a way that appeared to be setting levy limits.

In 1986, the issue was revisited. Meeker County did not increase its funding a required \$6,000. A private donation campaign ensued and E.O. Kopplin contributed \$1000 to get the fund started. Through donations and a cookbook, the money was raised and services to rural patrons continued.

An addition to the building, including an elevator, was discussed in 1987 but did not come to pass. By 1990, the overcrowding and accessibility issues were significant. A consultant was hired in 1991 to assess the community's needs. What followed was a nine year search for a new library. The Library Board looked at many buildings and properties. No site seemed the "right fit" for the community.

Years earlier, the Library Board received a trust fund from Harriett Wagner after her death in 1978. Harriet was the only child of C.W. Wagner, Litchfield's former newspaper editor. Miss Wagner's will stated that the money was to be used for "library expansion purposes." Minnesota Statute 134, which addresses public libraries, states that local units of government are bound "by perpetual compliance with the terms of the gift". This trust was ultimately applied to the total cost of property acquisition and building the new library.

### **BIG BOX RETAIL AND .COM ERA, 1996 TO PRESENT**

Technology and the internet came to the Litchfield Public Library in May of 1997. Litchfield had four computers for public use. This was the most allowed by Pioneerland and more than any other library in the system. Computer use was high in Litchfield, and the City's commitment to make computers available for all carried over into the next building.

By February 1999, the Library Board again tackled the building issue. Criteria were developed by the Board and staff, then sites selected, and evaluated against the criteria. It looked like the old Jennie 'O property on West Second Street would be chosen but the plan was not finalized.

In April the Board met and explored the former Cottingham Grocery Store property adjacent to Central Park. The Library Board voted to use the Harriett Wagner Trust to purchase the building and the small wood building on the corner of the block.

In March of 2000, the Library moved into the new building and planning started for an addition. A Joint Library Management Committee was formed with representation from both the Library Board and City Council. The committee began meeting in June of 2000 to plan the 10,000 square foot library.

The Library moved to a temporary space in the spring of 2001. Some items were stored in the basement of City Hall, some were used in the temporary location, and the majority of the books were shrink wrapped on pallets and stored in an 18 wheeler for the summer. The move back into the building occurred in December of 2001 with many of the same groups helping.

The new library opened in December 2002 and was very well received by the community. It had four computers in the children's department and a special children's bathroom. The adult area had eight computers for public use. After the first six months, the City purchased four more to accommodate the heavy use. A study room was named after Harriett Wagner and the community room was named the Carnegie Room in honor of Litchfield's first library.

The community use of the facility has not waned; in fact, it has increased. Patrons average 280 a day. Children's events draw over 3000 children annually. The role of the library is a vital, strong, and positive influence on people of all ages in our community.



No. 66 Litchfield Public Library, Library Collection

Information for this theme was taken from a series of newspaper articles done in July 2000 for the Independent Review. The authors were Everett Reilly and Darlene Kotelnicki, both representing the Library Board and currently on the HPC, Donna Brown representing the Meeker County Historical Society, and Litchfield Head Librarian Jeanette Stottrup. The group researched City Council and Library Board minutes, the Independent Review, information at the Meeker County Historical Society and the Carnegie Foundation for the articles.

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

The Litchfield Public Library history is rich with people who have risen to the occasion when needs surfaced. Elected officials, donors, and volunteer board members have all played a role in making quality library services a priority for Litchfield. However, two women have made significant contributions, one with money and one with professionalism.

Agnes Lamb, the first librarian, was a resource to all. Newspaper articles state people would come from Willmar and Hutchinson by horse and buggy to seek her advice or ask her to research a topic. Her professionalism set a standard for future staff and also defined the role of the library in the community.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Litchfield Heritage Preservation Commission has the following recommendations regarding the Library theme.

1. The Carnegie Library is not eligible for National Register status due to the dome alteration. It is the recommendation of this report to keep the structure viable and maintained. It is suggested that local designation be considered for the Carnegie Library on South Sibley Avenue.
2. The North Sibley Avenue site should be documented as a significant contribution to the history of library services in Litchfield.





# Parks



No. 67 Central Park at Christmas

“I was very much impressed with the trees and the cleanliness of the town.” Abe Johnson, Oral History



## TIMEFRAME

*Settlement, 1869 to 1885*

Litchfield's Central Park was deeded to the village by the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad in August 1869 for public use. In 1872, the land was tilled and trees planted on the 2.5 acres. The first bandstand was a platform designed by Jesse V. Branham, the Village Council President. The second bandstand was built in 1913; and, in 2002 it was rebuilt and refinished with the original tile roof. On May 12, 1894, the 10 foot high water fountain arrived. This fountain weighs 2500 pounds. In the early 1990s, it was refinished. A local Boy Scout Troop restored the fence. Margi Gilbertson and Anna Mae Wigen painted the fountain. The top of the fountain has been missing "for years" but resembles the fountain in the backdrops of the Litchfield Opera House. (JJ, H, J, zz-14, zz-8,zz-20)



No. 68 Central Park and gazebo

In August 1869, the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad also deeded Block 33 on North Miller Avenue to the Village of Litchfield. For many years this was known as Miller Park. It has playground equipment and a volleyball court. In 2008, in honor of Meeker County's 150th Anniversary, the name was changed to Ness Park to honor pioneer Ole Ness who had a farm site there. (ww, J, TT)

In October 1869, an area south of the railroad tracks became a plat for the Village of Litchfield from the railroad. This plat, Block 87, was for "public purposes." It was part of Weisel's Addition to the village. It contains tennis and volleyball courts and playground equipment. (ww, TT)

Legion Memorial Park is 5.5 acres on the east side of Lake Ripley with a bike and walking path around the lake. The park was previously known as Lake Park. The Legion worked with the City to improve the lakeshore and plant trees in 1930. (J) In the summer of 2007, volunteers from the Lake Ripley Improvement Association constructed a new seating area and improvements to the shoreline at the park. The Legion has an army tank and memorial display in the park. (TT)

### **BUILDING BOOM, 1886 TO 1919**

Research did not identify any areas of historical significance during this timeframe. Further research may uncover areas of information and may be added upon further revisions.

### **AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVES, 1920 TO 1932**

Research did not identify any areas of historical significance during this timeframe. Further research may uncover areas of information and may be added upon further revisions.

### **DEPRESSION AND RATIONING, 1933 TO 1946**

The Post WWII housing shortage did not lend itself to parks. The City did put playground equipment in the water filtration substations in the various neighborhoods. (V)

### **BABY BOOMERS, 1947 TO 1965**

### **GROWTH AND GOVERNMENT SOCIALIZATION, 1966 TO 1985**

### **COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS, 1986 TO 1995**

### **BIG BOX RETAIL AND .COM ERA, 1996 TO PRESENT**

The following chart shows the development of “neighborhood” parks in the various subdivisions from the mid-1950s to the mid-2000s. Information for this chart was obtained from the City of Litchfield’s Comprehensive Plan and the Chamber of Commerce website.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>CONTENTS</b>
Mid ‘50s	Chandler Ave. S.	Thompson Park	Donated by Rachel Thompson in exchange for her care
Mid ‘60s	Crescent Lane	Crescent Park	Playground equipment
	Davis Ave. N.	South Street Park	Playground equipment
Mid ‘70s	Chandler Ave. S.	Becker Park	Playground equipment sledding hill, ice rink
	Miller Ave. N.	North Casey Park	Playground equipment, volleyball court, sledding hill
Mid ‘80s	Willmar Ave. N.	Pleasant View Park	New playground equipment selected and paid for by a neighborhood group
Mid ‘90s	Sunrise Dr. E.	Sunrise Park	Playground equipment, sledding hill
Mid 2000’s	Butler Ave. S.	Prairie Park	Donated by Hugh Wegner, 40 acre park with walking and cross country ski trails
	SE of Lake Ripley	Dog Park	Dogs may roam free in this 8 acre park

Also during these timeframes, the City formed “partnerships” with various civic organizations to develop and/or maintain parks. The Jaycee Park on the east side of Lake Ripley has a picnic shelter, swing set, and jungle gym. The park is adjacent to walking and biking trails around the lake and the public boat landing. The Lion’s Park on the north shore of Lake Ripley has a picnic shelter with electric hook-up, playground equipment, and a wooden play structure. It is also connected with the walking and biking paths around Lake Ripley.

In 1990, the City of Litchfield received a donation of land. Litchfield’s Andrew J. Anderson once had a home on the east side of Lake Ripley. He was a Civil War Veteran who moved to Litchfield in 1876. He was a hardware and implement dealer. After his death the property went to various owners until a cousin, Natalie Talbot, donated the property to the City of Litchfield. The city council voted to use

the property for a park with an arboretum atmosphere. Volunteers, the Women’s Study Club, and city staff have maintained the gardens, which are managed by a non-profit board. In 1994, the garden received the MN Green Award from the MN Horticulture Society. In 1995, the gazebo was added; and, in 2001, a giving tree program was implemented. The park can be used for weddings, family photos, or memorials. The mission is to provide an alternative park experience with a mini-arboretum theme. (TT)



No. 69 Anderson Gardens

The Litchfield Sports Park is located east of the Litchfield High School on North Gilman Avenue. It contains the Civic Arena and a variety of softball fields, tennis courts, horseshoe courts, outdoor skating rinks, basketball court, soccer area, skateboard park, and little league fields. The Litchfield Blues, the amateur baseball team, plays at Optimist Park. This complex has been developed since the high school was built in 1965.

In the mid 1990’s the city began the process of upgrading Central Park to it’s historic origins. Sidewalks, benches and lighting were added. In 2002, the bandstand was demolished and reconstructed as an exact replica. The water fountain and perimeter fence were also restored.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

The City of Litchfield has 19 percent of its property, or 372.1 acres, designated for parks and public use. The City has demonstrated a long term commitment to recreational space. (kk)The long term use of Central Park for many social functions in Litchfield gives it a locally significant pattern of use. There have been weddings, memorials, benefits, church services, bingo, and “Save Our Extracurriculars” rallies in Central Park.(IR) Attendance at these events is a good judge of community commitment to a project. The pattern of use since 1869 seems to have changed little. The August 1869 deed to the Village of Litchfield defines “public use.” The other two original parks, Ness Park and South Park, have similar uses defined in 1869.

Natalie Talbot's donation of the Anderson Garden site has made a very fine addition to Litchfield' Parks. As a person, she made a significant donation.

Memorial Park at Lake Ripley also has had a local pattern of entertainment. The play equipment, beach, fishing, and walking paths make it a popular spot year round.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Litchfield Heritage Preservation Commission has the following recommendations concerning the Parks theme.

1. Central Park in its original state should be maintained with no additional structures or changes.
2. The two blocks, deeded to the Village from the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad, Ness Park and South Park, should stay in the realm of public use as was originally intended.
3. The Legion Memorial Park should be maintained for community recreation.



# Entertainment



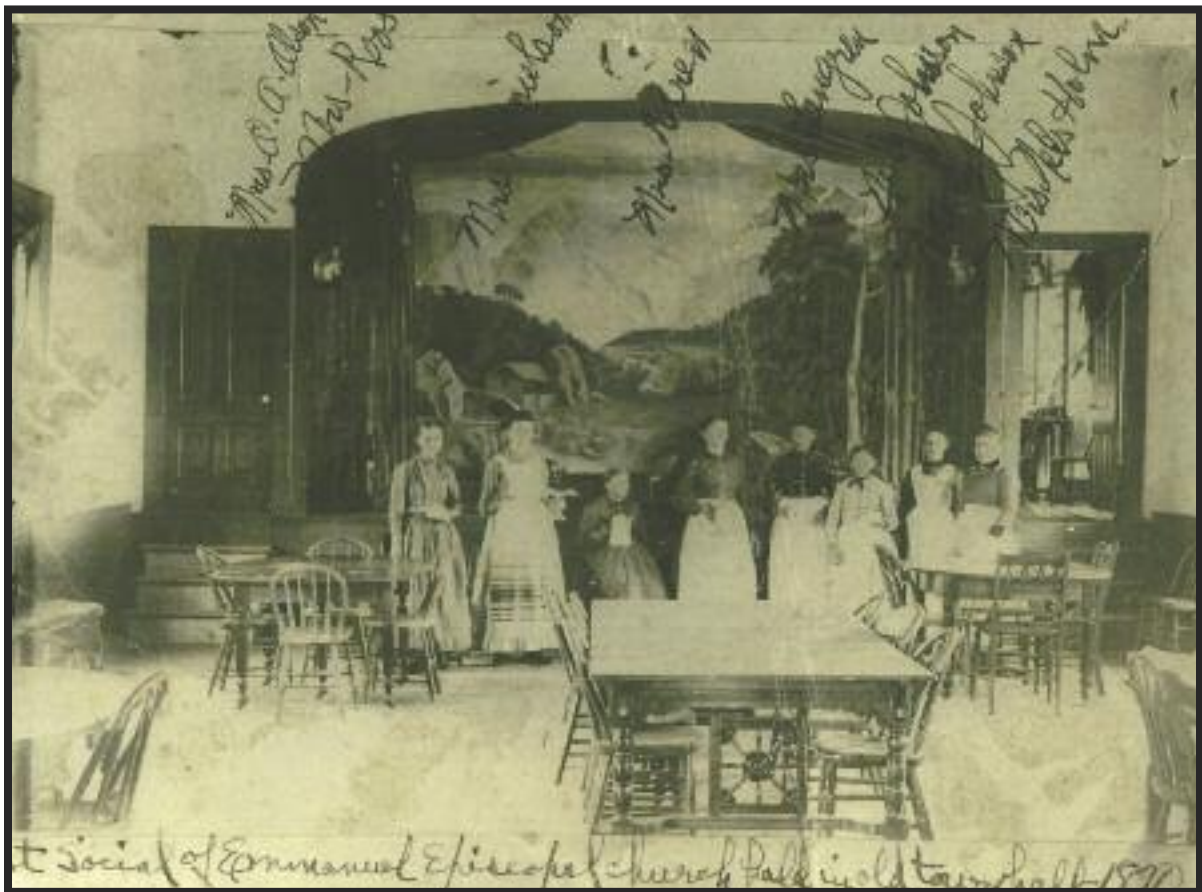
No. 70 Litchfield Opera House, 1908

“The Litchfield Opera House was the biggest building  
I had ever seen and at night it was all lit up!”  
Marietta Umberghocker Rosenow, age 10 in 1919

## TIMEFRAME

*Settlement, 1869 to 1885*

The summer months found traveling shows and circuses frequenting the community via the railroad. The Litchfield Township Board erected a meeting hall at the site of the current Litchfield Opera House in 1871. It was a two story wooden structure with the top floor rented by the Masons. The bottom floor was used for community events and entertainment. (FF, MM)



No. 71 Litchfield Township Hall, interior 1890

The Litchfield newspaper was established in May 1876 by E.P. Peterson. It was called the *Litchfield Independent*. In 1884, the *Litchfield Saturday Review* was founded by Rev. Lewis Pier and his brother, Fred. The two papers merged in September 1939 and John M. Harmon and Charles W. Wagner were co-publishers. The *Independent Review* has been at its 217 North Sibley Avenue location since May 1909. (H)

Litchfield High School opened in 1880, and each spring the senior class put on a play. This play was a testimony to artistic training and was well attended. Due to the school fire of 1929, very little information is available.

A Litchfield Band was discussed and organized in August of 1872. The newspaper had a notice “all who have subscribed for the purpose of procuring instruments for the Litchfield Band are requested to meet at Lyon’s Hall for the purpose of organizing and taking such other steps as may be necessary for the success of the band.” Instruments were ordered from Chicago and came on the train. The group performed its first concert in November 1872. This early beginning was soon to be jump started. (J)

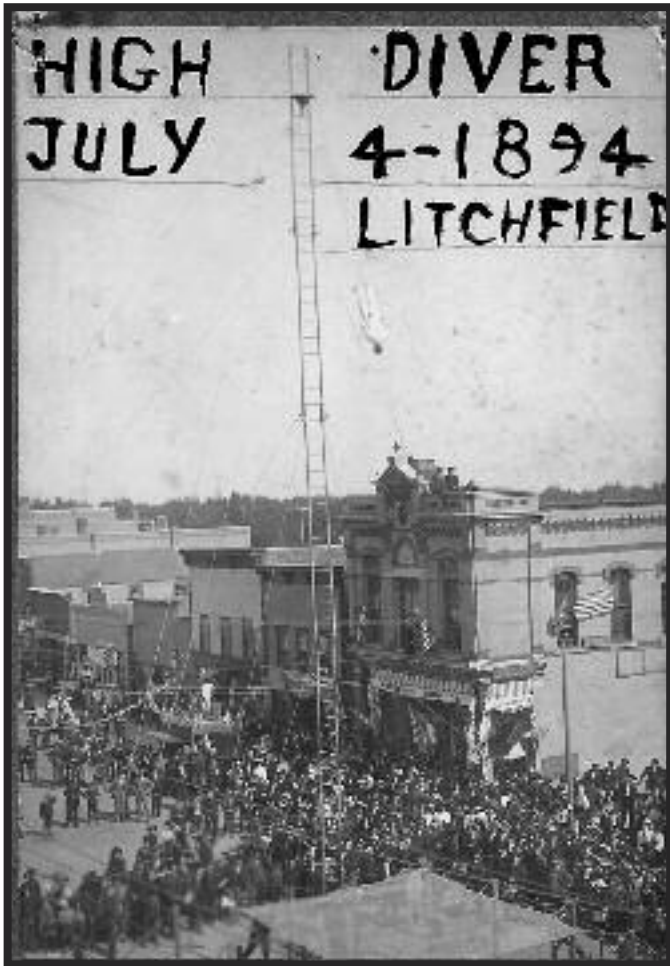
In 1880, O.A. Olson moved to Litchfield with his family. He opened a music store on the 300 block of North Sibley just across from Central Park. Mr. Olson became known as “Music Olson” to all. He started the Litchfield band in 1886 and directed it until 1930. The band members dressed in colorful uniforms and plumed hats. They not only performed in the Central Park bandstand on Saturday evenings but appeared in celebrations in Minnesota communities and at the State Fair in 1914. (D)



“Music” Olson’s love of music helped Litchfield develop a foundation for enrichment. He also led the Cornet Band and played at Litchfield’s Brightwood Beach Resort. (H) Depending on the resources and what band researched, Music Olson led different bands from 34 to 41 to 50 years. He made a significant contribution to Litchfield’s entertainment history.

No. 72 Professor O. A. “Music” Olson

## BUILDING BOOM, 1886 TO 1919



Litchfield's Central Park was a natural location for community entertainment. Events also were held in open fields, such as a 1901 hot air balloon; and, on the streets, like the 1894 high diver. (FF )

No. 73 1894 High Diver

Another form of entertainment, ever popular for all ages, was a **parade**. Litchfield loves its parades. The annual Memorial Day Parade has been a feature of the community since the mid-1880s. Litchfield also has had a 4th of July parade, parades to see men off to war and when they returned, parades to honor farmers and dairymen, and parades for promotional activities. Many photos of these parades show expanses of storefronts, decade by decade. These photos are valuable when looking at Litchfield's historic downtown. (FF)

Litchfield has also had **music in the park** since the early 1900s. In the early years, music was Saturday nights. People would park around Central Park and toot the horns of their Model Ts when the music was done. (dd-24) Often, people would enjoy popcorn from the Gustafson pop corn wagon. Many Litchfield stores stayed open until after the concert in the park or the movie on Saturday nights. After 1900, the Litchfield Opera House was used for band concerts in the winter.





No. 74 Litchfield City Band, 1906

Thursday, November 8, 1900 was opening night for Litchfield's new **Opera House**. It was built by Litchfield Township and furnished by the Litchfield Commercial Club. The play performed was "The Marble Heart," by Charles Selby. The audience was "the largest and most brilliant audience ever gathered in Litchfield." The building was 52 feet wide and 107 feet long and fitted with 600 opera chairs with 400 on the main floor and 200 in the balcony. Additional chairs were an option for a seating capacity of 1000. The seating area was 50 x 60 with a stage area and orchestra pit of 50 x 36. There were 200 incandescent electric lights controlled by 13 switches. The stage opening was 24 feet wide and 18 feet high. The scenery and drop curtain, work of A. R. Hurt of Minneapolis, were pronounced excellent! The front of the building, besides a spacious lobby, had a ticket office on one side and a cloak room on the other. The Litchfield Independent Review stated in the November 17, 1900, edition that the "Citizens of this city have kept their agreement with the town of Litchfield. The bargain was, not in terms but in effect, that if the latter would furnish the building the former would the fittings. The building is complete in every detail and the furnishings are even soon paid for - \$2100 worth." This amount was the proceeds from the first two performances; a tidy sum for 1900. (J, FF)

This building saw weekly use for theatrical events, plays from the high school, children's operettas, and traveling Redpath-Vauter Chautauquas . It served the community well for social and cultural events including "My Hawaiian Aloha," "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and "Oriental Entertainment." These were hugely popular productions and exposed small town midwesterners to other people and cultures. (J)

Litchfield's only **Academy Award winner**, Gale Sondergaard, was born in 1900 to Mr. and Mrs. M.T. Sondergaard. Her father was a well known butter maker and her mother a piano teacher. She put on plays, starting at the age of ten, in the attic of her parents' garage. The family moved to Minneapolis just at the close of World War I. Gale studied at the University of Minnesota and Minneapolis School of Dramatic Art.



No. 75 Gale Sondergaard

She had a Broadway stage career starting in 1920 and in the early 1930s, she moved to Hollywood with her husband Herbert Biberman.

Gale played a scheming and vicious housekeeper in her first film, *Anthony Adverse* for Columbia Pictures. She was awarded an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress in 1936. This was the first year of the Oscars.

Gale went on to play in *Maid of Salem* with Claudette Colbert, with Bette Davis in *The Letter* and Bob Hope in *The Cat and the Canary*. In 1946 Ms. Sondergaard was again nominated for an Academy Award for her supporting role in *Anna and the King of Siam*.

During the Hollywood era, Gale and her husband Herbert Biberman stood firm against accusations of Un-American

activities. Her husband was jailed as one of the "Hollywood 10." The 2000-film *One of the Hollywood Ten* chronicled Gale Sondergaard's relationship with Biberman and her role in the making of *Salt of the Earth*. Its artistic and cultural merit was recognized when the National Film Preservation Board selected the film for preservation in the National Film Registry. (FF)

Gale returned to Minnesota to play for several weeks at the Guthrie Theater in 1967 and returned to visit Litchfield. She visited friends and spoke to the Litchfield High School thespian group that bears her name, The Gale Sondergaard Thespian Society. She died in 1985 in California. (J,FF)

Another famous thespian from Litchfield was Mary Angell Lamb Tacot. Her stage name was **Mary Angell** and she was the grand daughter of Clark Angell, the Litchfield photographer, and the niece of Agnes Lamb, Litchfield's first librarian. Mary went to Broadway and traveled with a theater company in 1924. When she and her husband, a French soldier G.A. Tacot, visited Litchfield, they would walk down the streets arm in arm. He in his uniform and she in New York finery. Mary returned to Litchfield and lived with her aunt until her death in 1990. (H, FF)





No. 76 Mary Angell

A new era, that of **moving pictures**, started in Litchfield on August 1, 1908 when crowds of people came to the Litchfield Opera House to see the “Edison one reeler.” Soon the Unique Theater would have Litchfield audiences thrilled show after show. Sometimes the line was a block and one half long. (oral history (27)

The **Unique Theater** was located just north of the Wells Bros. store in the 100 block of South Sibley. It opened in February 1911 and at the start, Litchfield residents wanted to form a censorship board, demanding to preview the movies. This never gained enough support to be implemented. In 1914, the Noreen brothers purchased the theater. They were musicians and wanted music to accompany the silent movies. (H) Hardy Bronson played the piano until sound equipment came to the theater in 1929. (H)

Hardy’s playing was legendary with a whole generation of Litchfield residents. Oral histories mention his ability to make “that piano talk.” ( dd-18) Hardy would play slowly at sad parts and during the chase he was “all over that piano.” (dd-21) Children were directed to the first six rows of the theater to seats that were 10 cents. Young men were just “mortified” when they brought a date and were still directed to the first six rows. The back seats for adults were 50 cents. (dd-21) Young girls remember “Jeannie of the Lilac Time” and “I Dream of You” as silent movies. (dd-8) For many children, “scraping up the 10 cents was difficult.” One child would pay and then open the back door for his friends to sneak in. Many times there were breaks in the film, usually three or four to a movie, and everyone would make noise until it was taped back together again. It seemed to always break right in the good part. (dd-13)

### **AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVES, 1920 TO 1932**

A lawsuit was filed on August 7, 1920, by the owner of the Unique Theater, **Mr. C.F. Schnee**, against the City, stating the City has no right to conduct movies in the Opera House. The City countered that the building was used Thursday, Friday, and Saturday for movies. The building was used by the public the rest of the time. An injunction was served on the mayor, but movies continued until November 20, 1920. (J)

Then in 1929, Mr. Schnee appeared before the Village Council with a petition, signed by 151 citizens, requesting that the Council put before the voters a decision to conduct moving picture shows on Sundays. He requested this be put to a vote at the Village on election April 1, 1929. The voters approved this 611 to 392. Mr. Schnee then requested a permit to conduct moving picture shows on Sundays in June of 1929. But the saga was not over! (J, JJ)

Mr. Schnee again appeared before the Village council, in October 1929, with his attorney. He outlined a proposition whereby he would take over the opera house for

a show house and the Village would remodel the building for \$10,000. The Council rejected this idea because of the cost and the fact that this would “also deprive the village of a place for gathering.” It was moved to deny the request and the “opera house remains as it is.” (J, JJ)

**Talkies** came in 1929 to the Unique Theater. The first one featured Al Jolson and cost 50 cents. The whole town was excited; everyone had to go. (dd-4) Of course the technology was not perfected yet and many times the horse would be talking when it was the man who should be talking. (dd-13)

**Home entertainment** was part of growing up. “Pump, Pump Pull Away” and “Tic Tac Toe” were popular. Neighborhood groups were common, one had nine members but was called the Dirty 8. They claimed a shack by Jewitts Creek as their clubhouse. (dd-13)

### **DEPRESSION AND RATIONING, 1933 TO 1946**

The Depression brought to a forefront the need for **cheap entertainment**. Home dances were popular and free. Marcella Kelly remembered the family dances on Saturday nights were the “biggy.” There was never any drinking. “I suppose you would call it a pot luck but I can remember A to F would bring sandwiches and G to T would bring something sweet and if you had the house you would furnish coffee. No one had carpets in those days, maybe hardwood floors or linoleum. This was on Saturday night and the whole family went. It was such fun. You always thought your dad was the best looking guy there and the best dancer. When the kids got tired you just slept wherever and the parents quit dancing about midnight.” (dd-18)

**Home plays** also were popular and many times the whole neighborhood came. Bonnie Anderson Dille remembered a play, in their basement, “Murder in the Anderson Basement,” that the neighborhood kids wrote, directed, and performed. Her father was mayor at the time. Bonnie had nailed a sign advertising the play on a tree. She remembers her father telling her there was an ordinance against putting signs on trees. (dd-25)

Even with the opera house, Litchfield had **traveling tent shows**. Christy Obrecht was popular in southern and central Minnesota and came to Litchfield. David “Mickey” Shoultz remembered that his mother did the laundry for Mr. Obrecht and thereby obtained free tickets for her children. Mickey stated they would sneak in under the tent anyway. (dd-13)

**Litchfield’s Drum and Bugle Corp.** was organized in 1928 with Martin Peterzen as the drum major and director. In 1938, their 15 minute performance at St. Cloud gave them the state title. They went on to win eight district contests, state champion six times, first place in the Minneapolis Aquatennial Parade four times, and took part in over 200 parades in 44 Minnesota towns. Their favorite marching tune was “Stars and Stripes Forever.” They became known as “Litchfield’s Ambassadors of Good-will.” After 25 years of marching, the band disbanded with two of the original members, Martin Peterzen and Rueben Erickson, left. (D)

Early in 1935, Bert Thulin submitted a plan to the Litchfield City Council to remodel the Litchfield Opera House. A motion was made and passed provided Mr. Thulin

could find enough relief labor for the work with the City furnishing the materials. The Opera House basement was a wonder of its time. The building was stabilized and then the dirt was hauled out manually. The foundation was made in a “checker-board” fashion with part of one wall done, then part of another wall until the whole basement was completed. The seams are still visible today. Engineers and architects are not only impressed with this part of the project but also the fact that the concrete is still strong and not dry or crumbling. Many times in those early years, concrete was mixed and remixed until the project was done. After reviewing the building it was obvious great care had been taken to maintain the proper mixture for good concrete. (UU)

The newly remodeled Litchfield Opera House was dedicated with the new Post Office across the street on August 28, 1935. Mayor Alfred Anderson gave a short speech. He spoke about the “farmers and businessmen working together in harmony for our mutual interests.” The remodeling made the newly named **Litchfield Community Building** the “civic and social center for the entire county.” The interior remodeling included changing the south cloak room to the right of the front entrance into a recorder’s office. The main floor was leveled and the stage floor was raised slightly for better vision. The seats for the auditorium were ganged and could be stored under the stage when the floor space was needed for dancing or athletics. The basement also has a cement floor and other improvements. (ff, B) This building was used for almost every social and political event possible. The rural population came to town frequently for events here. In just a few years, Mayor Anderson’s words were true as the building truly was the civic and social center for the entire county.



No. 77 Litchfield City Band

**The Litchfield City Band** was ever popular for many years. Generations of men played, uncles, sons, nephews, and brothers. They played all over town and for many special occasions, like the dedication of the newly remodeled opera house in 1935. Litchfield's City Band, under the guidance of Oscar Anderson, played at the St. Paul National Bank & Trust on June 24, 1936. This was considered Litchfield Day at the bank with several lively tunes played in the lobby. (J)

Litchfield's new **Hollywood Theater** opened on November 24, 1936. Adult tickets were 35 cents and children tickets were a dime. It had "mirrophonic sound." The opening night souvenir program told patrons to leave their names with the usher or usherette if they were doctors, nurses, or professional people (FF). Generally, these people would call the telephone office and tell the operator they were attending the movies at the Hollywood Theater. Then if someone called the operator needing a doctor, the operator would call the movie theater and the usherette would be directed to get the physician and give him the message. (zz-21)



The new building included a sound proof cry room for parents with young children. As with the Unique Theater, also run by the Schnee family, children under 12 had to sit in the first six rows. The water fountain with an electric eye was activated by bending down. (dd-10)

You were "in" if you were an usher or usherette. My aunt was an usherette at the Hollywood. She had a navy blue skirt, a red jacket with gold braid trim and a pill box hat. Her job was to seat patrons and find health and emergency personnel if needed. (zz-22) The Schness had quite a reputation for cleanliness. They did not allow pop corn until later years. (dd-10)

No. 78 Hollywood Theater,  
Meeker County Historical Society.



In 1937 the Litchfield School Board hired **Floyd Warta** as speech, English and drama teacher for \$135 a month. (X) He was well loved by students. He stated:

“I made a vow to God before I opened the door to the school that fall. I still remember standing there at the door. I will give Litchfield two years.”

Floyd taught here 34 years and retired in 1971. He loved students, “ I wouldn’t do anything but teach. I have liked kids very much. The hardest thing I had to do when I retired was to associate with people my own age.” (dd-28)

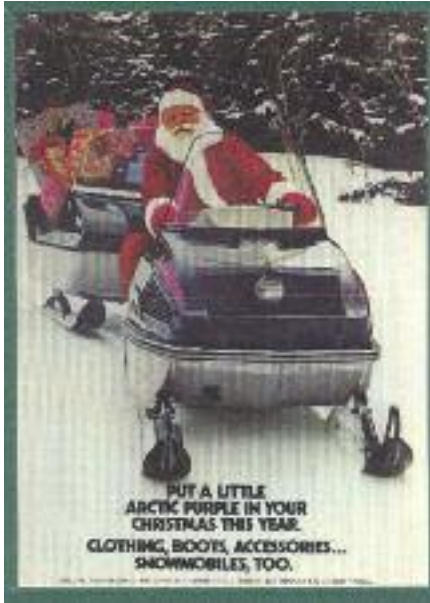
Floyd had a signature raccoon coat that he would wear around town. Dr. Lennox Danielson gave him the coat for a play and Floyd just took to wearing it. (H) He was a familiar figure walking to his home across the street, North of Central Park. His students remember that the props for his plays were mostly stored in his classroom. That included a costumes and make up in the rear of the room and a coffin from “Arsenic and Old Lace” in the front of the classroom. (zz-23)

Floyd never did a play twice, except *Our Town*. (dd-28) The first time he did the play was in the Washington Auditorium. The play has minimal set design but relies on lighting for many effects. The Washington Auditorium did not have dimmer lights. Floyd had students standing in the balcony with lights. The students would add and remove filters to get the effect of dimming. Later, money was found for dimming lights and a friend from Litchfield’s Public Utilities installed them. At the first play with the new dimmer lights, when the lights dimmed, that person was out of his seat and heading to the door, thinking that there was a power failure starting, before he realized that it was just the dimmers he had installed. At least that's the way Floyd told the story.

Lee Hollaar was the stage manager for three or four years with Floyd. Whenever something technical went wrong during a rehearsal, instead of calling him by name, he'd just yell "Boy!" (zz-23) Terry Shaw started with small roles in ninth grade. He played the male lead in his senior year in *The Vagabond*. (H) Floyd was a stickler for accuracy and realism. In *The Vagabond*, Terry was supposed to slap Cathy Osdoba’s character on the face. During rehearsal, Terry gave Cathy a light tap. Floyd yelled, “Stop!” He proceeded to come up on the stage and show Terry a “stage slap”, cupping his hand to make a loud “crack” but not really hurting Cathy. Then he had Terry stand and slap Cathy about 6 times until he got the right sound. Never mind that Cathy’s face was turning red and bruised. (H)

Floyd’s house was amazing. He collected mugs and made model ships. He did that while watching TV, saying that then it wasn't a total waste of time. And he was an excellent woodworker, building shelves and even speaker cabinets from a design that seen in Popular Electronics. Floyd’s other hobby was attending every movie at Litchfield’s Hollywood Theater. He would go alone, twice a week (zz-23, H) Sometimes after the movie, he’d walk down to Johnson’s Recreation pool hall by the Unique Theater, order a glass of beer, slam it down and walk out to the shock of any of his students who might have been in the back playing pool. (H)





Floyd also had another calling. He looked just like Santa Claus. Floyd grew a beard for Litchfield's Centennial in 1969 and just never shaved it off. His roly poly appearance and glasses completed the Santa look. He played Santa in Litchfield for many years. He also had state and national photos for companies plus TV ads. (FF) Floyd's contribution to high school plays, his respect from students, and fond memories make him a special person in Litchfield's entertainment history.

No. 79 Floyd Warta as Santa

The Golden Years of Radio have been defined as 1930 to 1960. In 1939, the Litchfield Livestock and Shipping Association served 600 members a free lunch at the Litchfield Community Building. **David Stone and the Main Streeters** performed and the event was "carried over the air." (J) Live remote broadcasts were fairly new; and, KSTP had pioneered them about 1930. (VV) This was big news to broadcast from Litchfield to St. Paul.

The "Government for Solidarity" felt that we should recognize our fellow Americans in South America. A series of so called fiestas were put on in the midwest. Litchfield's celebration, which included a large parade, was held on July 16, 1942 and was an outstanding success. It was estimated that 8,000 people watched the parade with 1,000 participants and 150 horses. (T)



No. 80 & 80A Pan American Celebration, 1942

## BABY BOOMERS, 1947 TO 1965

When it comes to entertainment, one local event comes to the minds of most everyone in Litchfield-**events at the community building**. The dances went on from just after World War II until the mid-1960s when “sock hops” were moved to the new high school. Memories include the crowds, the dance floor, meeting boys there, and a few fights. There were also wedding receptions and anniversaries in the basement.



No. 81 Community Building Basement, Wedding Reception, 1949

Arlyce Quinn Dedrickson remembers visiting her grandparents at Quinn Motors across from the Community Building. They had an apartment on the second floor of the building (gone now). She would spend the night on Saturday night and would hear some men drinking beer in the cars parked outside the dances. Sometimes the police would be called and her grandmother would come in and say, “Just stay in bed, don’t worry.” Other couples went over to the Black Cat Cafe for a beer in between dances.

Saturday night dances were held in the 1950s. The balcony was fully intact and “just beautiful.” The charge was 50 cents for top bands like “Whoopee John”. There was “no better dance floor in the area” when the Community building was all waxed and ready for a dance. (ZZ-7, ZZ-18, ZZ-24)

In the fall of 1960, the City started having weekly teen dances. These **sock hops** were started after a contest was held to name the event. Terry Shaw won the contest with “Hop Stop.” Only about 5 dances were held and were supervised by the parents. The ISD 465 approved the policy for these dances at the request of the Litchfield Ministerial Association. (H, X)

Two annual events also were a big draw for all of Meeker County. The annual December **Land ‘O Lakes Day** always featured quality entertainment. The program in 1947 and 1948 included KSTP radio noontime broadcast with Cal Karnsedt and the **Main Street Barn Dance** entertainers. (Source: FDA 75 year

History) In spring, the annual REA day included a free lunch and thousands attended. (J)

In 1955, Litchfield added another form of entertainment, a drive in theater. The “**Star-Lite Drive In Theater**” was built and operated north of town by Lloyd Schnee. (TT) In 1959, KLFD Radio was established in January. It has been serving the greater Litchfield Community since then. It is a 1410 AM and broadcasts 24 hours a day. The station is independently owned. (AA-3)

Bruce Christensen, a music teacher in Litchfield High School, wanted to form a male chorus. He talked to H.M. (Doc) Silverthorne and Joe Duncomb. In the fall of 1964, the idea took shape and **Litchfield Area Males Chorus** was formed. Bruce was the director and creative force; Doc was the accompanist; and Joe did the organizational work. The Chamber of Commerce sponsored the Chorus in its first year. The group gave concerts locally and throughout the state. They sang in Washington, D.C. (1973), Hawaii (1983), South Carolina (1987), Arizona (2001), Georgia (2005) and Chicago (2008). They have been guest performers at Fort Snelling for the past 25 years. In 1980 the chorus, some 25 singers and spouses, went to Europe to perform in several countries. Vila Milan was the accompanist from 1991 to 2003. She was followed by the current accompanist, Judy Zylstra. Randy Wilson is the current director. (WW)



No. 82 Litchfield Area Male Chorus

In the fall of 1964, another Music Olson reappeared on the Litchfield music scene. **Keith Johnson** was hired as a music teacher for the Litchfield Junior High School. Keith was the assistant band director for two years and became head band instructor for 34 years. Under his direction, bands toured the Midwest and East Coast winning grand champion honors over all in many, many parades. The work of organizing, planning, feeding, and then taking 150 to 200 teenagers on a several day bus trip was



mind boggling. Keith was assisted by his wife, Marian, a nurse, and assistant band director, Ken Gustafson and his wife, Lois. Scores of Litchfield parents assisted chaperoning the band trips which provided many fond memories. Litchfield's Marching Band drew crowds to parades in nearby communities. (X, J)



No. 83 LHS Band 1994 – Schaefer's Photography

Keith directed all the high school bands, jazz, concert, and pep band. He also directed a church choir for 33 years and a City Band that played in Central Park for 22 years. Keith also did the music for about 12 Litchfield Community Theater



Musicals and 10 spring cantatas. In 1995, Keith Johnson was named the Minnesota Band Director of the Year; and, in 1996 he received the honor of National Federation of High School Coaches Band Director of the Year. Keith's quality music and dedication mirrored that of Music Olson a half century earlier.

No. 84 Keith Johnson LHS Band Director



No. 85 Feeding hungry teenagers, 1994

## GROWTH AND GOVERNMENT SOCIALIZATION, 1966 TO 1985

**Shaw-Allen-Shaw**, a musical group in the Minnesota Music Hall of Fame, started in Litchfield in 1969. Mickey and Terry Shaw and Jim Allen were the trio that play all over southern and central Minnesota. They played music from the 50s, 60s, and 70s and packed dance floors until they disbanded in 1976. Mickey Shaw was given a lifetime achievement award in 2000 by the Minnesota Music Hall of Fame. (H)

In 1975, Litchfield Community Education Director, Charlie Blessner, and KLFD's **Bernie Aaker** hatched an idea for a theater and the result was one play followed by another. **Litchfield Community Theater, Inc.** has had a long period of success and is credited to Bernie Aaker's skill and dedication. Bernie directed these performances and his annual summer musical was a highlight of summer. Marcia Provencher has been the producer and her Community Education staff assists with programs, ticket sales, and costumes. (22-25)

This theater has produced a Broadway performer, Benjamin Bryant (Reckdahl). He got his start on Litchfield Community Theater's stage in the "King and I" and went to Broadway. He returned to play the lead in "Joseph's Coat of Many Colors" in 1998.

Numerous Broadway musicals have been performed, some twice. Many times, before the current play is complete, people are asking about next year's choice by Litchfield Community Theater, Inc. The bond between this group and Litchfield Community Education has remained a strong positive working relationship since 1975.

There was a new program during the Christmas season of 1992. Bernie Aaker and Litchfield Community Education produced the first **Holiday Singers Showcase**. (H) Local vocalists auditioned for a spot to perform their favorite Christmas songs. Parents with children, adults single or in groups, all had a chance to perform for the showcase. Drawings were held for prizes. The event was so popular it became a part of Litchfield's Christmas season and is still popular with the community today.



## **COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS, 1986 TO 1995**

Litchfield author, **Joe Paddock**, had a grant from COMPAS (Community Programs in the Arts and Sciences) and the Blandin Foundation in 1989. As part of this grant, Joe conducted two community education classes in writing personal memories. The members of the class requested an on-going group. This class was part of the “Litchfield Area Oral History: Recovering the Story.” This group continued to meet monthly in homes of the members and write under Joe’s direction. He assisted them in publishing their first book, a collection of stories from each member of the club. This has become an annual publication and edited by Joe, Julianne Johnson, Carole Wendt, Jorge Sosa, and Nancy Paddock over the years. A “reading” takes place in December. The writers discuss their compositions, read some of their works, and Christmas cookies and cider are enjoyed by all. These small gatherings hold immense charm for the members of the community. (zz-9)

Joe received one of the first National Endowment for the Arts “Poets-in-the-Community residency in Olivia in 1975. He completed an oral history project as part of the residency. Joe was also a poet-in-residence for the Minnesota Public Radio in Worthington and documented the history of southwest Minnesota through poetry in 1978. In 2009, Joe Paddock received the “Prairie Disciple Award” from Southwest Minnesota Arts and Humanities for his work in support of the arts in southwest Minnesota. (zz-9)

Another form of entertainment that became popular in the region was KDUZ’s (Hutchinson radio) 10:00 Litchfield news with **Norma Berke**. Norma gave recipes, obituaries, and news about Litchfield on weekdays. Her voice was known to many. Her cookbooks were popular in several counties. A new cake recipe was made for funerals in a several county area.

## **BIG BOX RETAIL AND .COM ERA, 1996 TO PRESENT**

The fate of Litchfield’s historic opera house was a topic of discussion after the City vacated the building and moved into a new City Hall in 2005. Members of the community either loved the building and wanted to preserve it or saw it as a drain on tax dollars. The City of Litchfield conducted a re-use study in 2007 after a December 2006 motion to demolish the building. As a result of the re-use study, a non-profit purchased the building. The Greater Litchfield Opera House Association, Inc. bought the building for \$100,000 in the fall of 2007. The City accepted payment of one 1900 silver dollar with the understanding that the balance of the purchase price be used to improve the building for the community. After sensitive and selective interior demolition, the building has had limited use for productions. A Litchfield Readers Theater has done readers theater and local music groups have performed. The non-profit has had over 3000 volunteers hours in the first year alone. (J, JJ)

Currently, music is on Thursday nights in the summer in Central Park. “**Pie in the Park**” is a community fundraiser that is sponsored by different organizations each week. The LHS Band plays every last Thursday in June. There is a parade down Sibley Avenue that ends with the band doing their routine in the park. It is always well attended by people of all ages.

Litchfield's Hollywood Theater now has three screens, cell phones are common, and iPods carry the latest tunes. But Litchfield residents still congregate at high school plays, the summer musical, Central Park, and the opera house "Bring-A-Chair" events. Local talent draws people together for a social event and visiting. The technological advances for entertainment abound but the traditional forms of amusement define Litchfield's pursuit of entertainment.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

The Hollywood Theater and its intact marquee, doors, and poster display cases deserves local landmark status. The cultural events at the Litchfield Opera House for two periods, from 1900 to 1930 and from 1925 to 1965, played a key role in the entertainment history of Litchfield.

Local persons of significance include Bernie Aaker, Joe Paddock, and "Music" Olson. Persons of national significance include Floyd Warta's Santa, Gail Sondergaard, Mary Angell and Keith Johnson.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Litchfield Heritage Preservation Commission has the following recommendations concerning the Entertainment theme.

1. The maintenance of the Hollywood Theater storefront and marquee along with the Litchfield Opera House is important for their status of cultural icons. A mechanism for the recognition of local and national persons of significance should be explored. This should also include educating the Litchfield community about their contributions.
2. The rehabilitation of the Litchfield Opera House should continue.
3. The documentation of Litchfield's historical and cultural events should continue.

# City Government



No. 86 Litchfield Power Plant, 1949

## CITY GOVERNMENT

The Village of Litchfield was created by the State Legislature on February 29, 1872. The first Council meeting was April 3, 1872 and the first election followed later that month. (T) The Village established an ordinance that required shielding bars from the eyes of any passerby. (LL)

In September 1892, the Village Council voted to have two wards for the upcoming election. The dividing line was, of course, the railroad tracks.

Ever concerned about the threat of disease and pestilence, the Village council established a guard at the railroad 24/7 after an **outbreak of smallpox** in November 1900. They also purchased the Bacon gallery and moved it to the northwest corner of Lake Ripley to be used as a “detention hospital” for contagious diseases. (JJ) By the 1920s Litchfield had a “pest house” on East Second Street, near the current Cheese Store. This was a four room brick structure with no water. It was used for impoverished families for quarantine. Middle income families were quarantined in their home and the well to do could rent a room on the top floor of the hotel and be served meals. (dd-9, zz-14, dd-13)

Subsequent epidemics were polio in the late 1940s and early 1950s and scarlet fever in the 1950s. A sign was posted at the door and neighbors and church members would leave food on the steps. Even a wedding would not lift the quarantine. (zz-26)

In 1936, the Village council declared a **war on rats**. A sanitary officer was hired with the task of going block by block in the downtown area, alleys, and city owned property. A red vegetable squill was used to kill the vermin. It was safe for humans and other animals but fatal for rats and mice. (J) The Village also started city garbage collection in 1939. Prior to the city’s taking this over, several companies attempted private garbage collection.

During the war years, the city maintained services and used relief labor when needed. The Litchfield City Charter was passed in 1943, and Litchfield officially became a city rather than a village. In December of 1967, several changes were approved to the charter. The mayor could now vote, there were 5 wards and one at-large council position, and the city attorney and assessor would be appointed, not elected. (JJ)

In 1984, the city declared another all out war. This time it was **mosquitoes**. The city would put briquette shaped cubes in standing water. These were toxic only to mosquitoes and not to animals or humans. (J)

After much citizen input and Council discussion, the City of Litchfield erected its first city hall in 2006. This one story building is just south of the Litchfield Opera House. Community support favored this site over others reviewed.



No. 87 2005 City Hall

## **ELECTRIC**

Litchfield citizens started discussing **electricity** in the late 1880s. A group of citizens appointed by the council, studied St. Cloud and Alexandria. These two cities already had electricity. The State of MN had no provisions for cities to levy for and regulate power in 1889. Litchfield had to apply to the State Legislature for permission to finance, tax, and regulate electricity. On August 8, 1889 there was a state law, specific to Litchfield, to finance, construct, and operate a power plant. (V)

The Council set the referendum for November 25, 1889. There was a “widespread opinion held that electricity was a luxury, pure and simple.” However, the vote passed 315 yes and 56 no.(LK) The boiler in the first light plant used wood for fuel. The city had to buy this from Isaac Miller for \$1.75 per cord. (D)

On July 4, 1890, Litchfield had an “**Illumination Ceremony**” that lasted 24 hours. The lights went on in Litchfield for the first time. But the electricity was available only for the evening hours. After several months, the council extended the hours until 11:30 p.m.. Not until 1910 was electricity available 24 hours a day. (V)

In the fall of 1905, inspectors from the National Underwriters Association came to Litchfield and found defective wiring. The insurance rates were raised. (T) By 1923, the system needed overhauling; a \$90,000 referendum was voted on in July and passed, on the first vote, 705 yes to 199 no. (V)





No. 88 Litchfield Power Plant built 1923

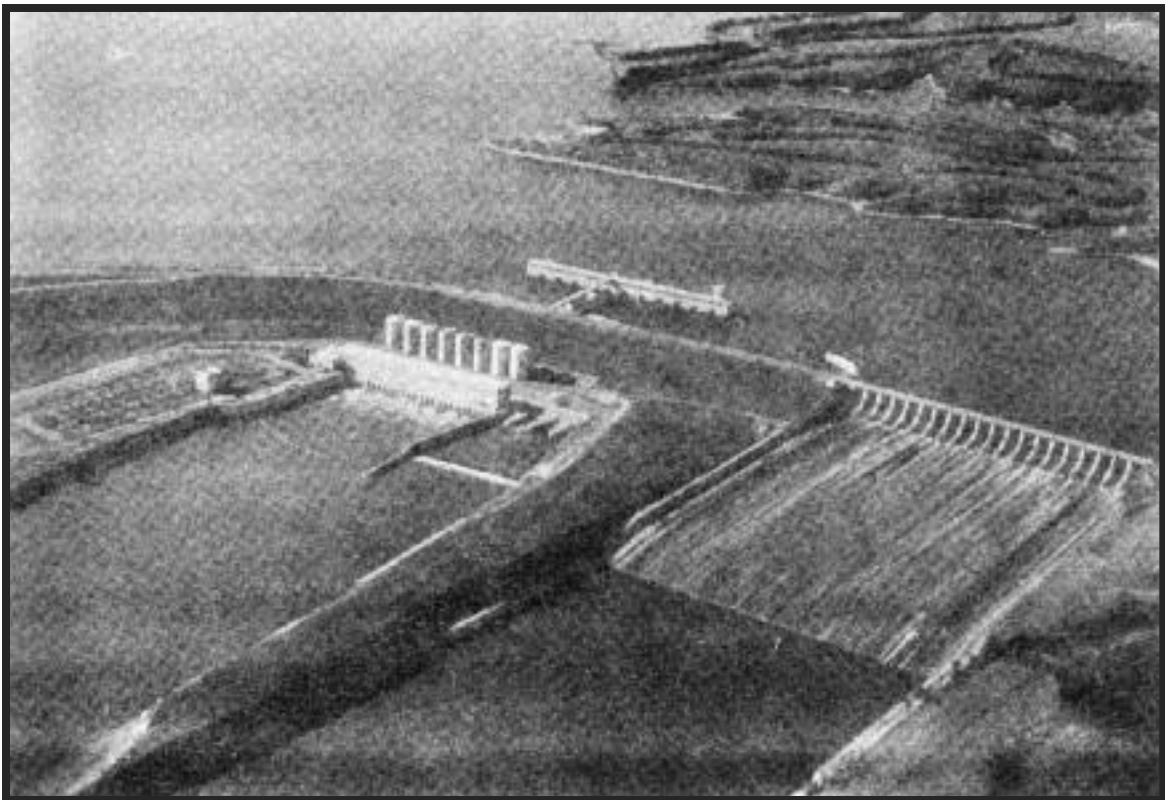
On October 18, 1934, the Litchfield City Council acted on a new **diesel electric generator** with a capacity of 600 KWH for \$57,423 with \$17,226 coming from a federal grant. Earlier the Council had rejected a second hand boiler for \$15,000. The ability to provide power would serve Litchfield and Meeker County well in the future. (JJ)

The State of Minnesota had commissioned a study of rural electrical needs. The 1934 report from the Minnesota State Planning Board Report, Committee on Electric Power, had a stated purpose to equalize operating rights of public with private interests. In 1934, 88 percent of Minnesota farms were without electricity. Moody's Industrial Investment Company estimated that the value of Minnesota power companies was \$212,142,093 in 1934. The report stated that rural electrification is of vital importance to the future welfare of Minnesota. (XX)

The Litchfield City Council entered into a **10 year contract with the Meeker County Co-operative Light and Power Association** for the sale of wholesale power for the rural area on March 5, 1936. Litchfield would sell power but not provide wires or light poles. (JJ,V, J) Just two weeks previous to Litchfield's vote, Harvey Township gave permission to Meeker County Co-operative Light and Power Association to erect and maintain light polls on township roads. This included only a right of way to property and no poles or lines for rural power. (YY) Decisions made by Meeker County Township Boards and the Village of Litchfield were under a national magnifying glass, since Meeker County Co-operative Light and Power was the first rural co-op organized under Roosevelt's Rural Electrification Act.

By 1941, Meeker County REA wanted out of its five-year contract with the Village of Litchfield. Negotiations produced a new 15 year contract and the Village bought a 2000 hp diesel unit to meet the needs. A guard was posted from 4 p.m. to 8 a.m. at the door of the plant by order of the civil defense. Right after the close of the war, the City started planning a new power plant. The \$1 million facility opened in 1949 and served over 18,000 people in a 20 mile radius. In March of that year, the first meeting of the Litchfield Public Utilities Commission was conducted. (J, V)

The U.S. Government owned and operated a series of **hydroelectric plants on the Missouri River**. Litchfield's location, just inside the east boundary of the marketing area, made an application possible in 1954. Congress was giving preference to cities and rural electric co-ops. Litchfield's 15 year contract, plus an early and long history with Meeker Co-operative Light and Power, put Litchfield in the running. But, as government projects take time, Litchfield's power needs increased before the decision was made. An agreement with Rural Co-op Power in Elk River provided the necessary power until September 9, 1959, when Litchfield signed the contract with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. (V)



No. 89 Missouri River Hydroelectric Plant

Litchfield started a several year project of installing **underground cable** in 1977. The process was completed in 1982. By that time, the purchase of power was on the table again. Litchfield was a member of the Minnesota Municipal Power Association which spearheaded legislation for “joint action agencies” between communities for power production. Litchfield joined with eight other communities and then, in 1981, joined with Northern States Power and a southern group of communities to build a plant in Becker called Sherco 3. By 1982, Litchfield and the other communities joined the southern group known as Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMMPA). There are 18 MN communities in SMMPA. (V)

In 2009 the City undertook a \$15 million project which included 10 megawatts of additional generation, a new 30 megawatt transformer in the substation, plus many power plant upgrades.

## **SEWER LINES AND WASTEWATER TREATMENT**

Litchfield needed sewer lines for many years. The newspaper documents a twelve year discussion. In 1912, after talking and studying this for several years, the Village voted to install a **sewer line down Sibley Avenue.** (J) The owner of the Lenhardt Hotel even installed his own sewer lines in 1900 to jump-start the City (zz-14). Other areas of the city were added, the Litchfield Opera House on Marshall Avenue had sewer lines installed in 1915. (ZZ)

Litchfield sewer handles up to 1,500,000 gallons of affluent sewage a day; the average is 800,000 to 1,000,000 a day. Treated sewage flows into Jewetts Creek. (AA-2)

In the fall of 1973, the Wastewater Treatment Plant completed its expansion. The plant was a physical chemical biological plant with rapid sand filtration. (AA-4)

The City still had to deal with septic systems and in 1955 decided to charge each homeowner a sewer rate even if there was a septic system on the property. (T)

The last two houses with outhouses on private property were removed in 1966. (zz-27)

In the years 1992, 2001 and 2009 the city undertook three major wastewater treatment upgrades totaling \$30 million.

## **WATER**

The year 1890 was a dry year. The Village **water tower**, an 80 foot wooden structure, could hold 67,000 gallons of water. The Village expected to use 10,000 gallons a day. By the end of August, residents had used a full tower each day. The dry weather, watering their gardens, and the daily “watering of the street” to keep the dust down emptied the tower! The citizens were asked to conserve water ( V). In 1914, the village replaced the wooden water tower with a metal one that was 130 feet high. Metal lines for the water were also installed.

August 1953 was another dry year and the **wells** could not keep up with the demand. There were new homes being built, more industry and more customers. The City

built two new wells. At this time they also fluoridated the water and added an iron filter. A few years later, in 1958, the Public Utilities Commission voted to increase water rates. This was the first rate increase since 1921. (V)

In 1983, the plant was all automated and there was no need for evening and night workers. By 1990, the city had four wells and two large storage tanks, one from 1914 and one from 1961. In 2008, the need for an additional well and/or water tower, or both surfaced with the annexation of land on the eastern boundary of the city.

**A new power plant** was built in 2009 and the 1961 water storage tank was demolished. (J, V)

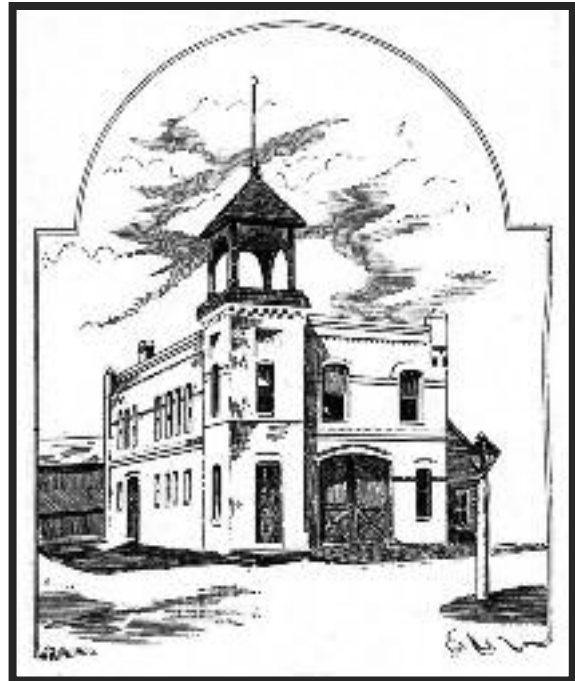
## STEAM HEAT

In 1908, several businesses wanted steam heat. The National Bank, Dr. Robertson's Hospital, Litchfield Hardware, and Jack's Store were the first on steam heat. By 1911, almost all of Sibley Avenue was using steam heat. Steam heat was the exhaust, or waste, steam from the engines that drove the electrical turbines. Many people were very happy with the heat it provided.

In 1941, the village hired an engineer who specialized in steam heat. His task was to help set rates. In 1968, the City replaced 1200 feet of lines downtown for \$95,000. By 1977, the increased energy costs put an end to steam heat. The council voted in May 1977 to discontinue steam heat by September 1, 1978. (V)

## FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Litchfield Fire Department organized in 1872 and the Articles of Incorporation were done in 1877. The July 4, 1876, parade featured the new **Babcock extinguisher** purchased by the Village. In 1882, the Village formed a bucket brigade and purchased axes, ladders, and lanterns. One of the original buckets still survives and is at the GAR Hall. Litchfield's first fire hall was built in 1886 on West Second Street. It served for many years until the "new" fire hall was built at Third and Ramsey in 1963. (Z)



No. 90 Old Fire Hall, 1889



Litchfield's Municipal Progress Report of 1899 had the following words about the Litchfield Fire Department. "Litchfield has been foremost among the cities of the state in availing itself of modern improvements in the apparatus for subduing fire. Many years ago the old "bucket brigade" was done away with and the department was supplied with two horse carts, a chemical and a hook and ladder truck. The department is a volunteer force of fifty members."

On June 13 and 14, 1906, the **State Firefighters Convention** was held in Litchfield. The organization had 293 companies and has the distinction of being the largest in the nation. The LaFrance fire truck was purchased in 1926 for \$990 with a 350 gallon pump. On occasion, this fire truck still graces Litchfield's parades today. In 1938, the Village Council passed an ordinance that all Village Council members report to fires to direct traffic. The mayor was in charge of the manpower. This ordinance was in effect until 2009. (Z, JJ)

In 1952, the Litchfield Fire Chief Herman Kruger recognized **four fire fighters for 193** years of service. Axel Johnson (49 years), Ole Mortenson (45 years), Joe Happ (52 years), and Luther Nelson (47 years) were all recognized for their service. (Z, J) Axel's daughter, Karna Agren, told the story about how her dad would leave his confectionery in the 100 block of North Sibley every time the fire bell rang. He would run through the alley to get to the fire hall and leave the store unattended. Karna and her mother had to go right to the store every time there was a fire! (dd-23)



No. 91 Chief Herm Kruger recognizing four firefighters with 193 years of service

Litchfield's **new fire hall** on the corner of Third Street and Ramsey was approved for \$50,300 in May 1952. The building was completed in 1963 and serves the department today. (Z)

In 1986, the Litchfield Fire Departemnt had one of their biggest calls. The Litchfield Precision Components complex burnt in February. Mutual aid was given by Dassel, Willmar, and Hutchinson Fire Departments. Tim Klimstra, a Litchfield fireman and employee of LPC, assisted in the rescue of key business documents. (zz-28)



By January 1989, the Litchfield Fire Department was using lock boxes for public buildings and had worked with Meeker County and area fire departments to institute a numbering system for rural areas.

Plans for a larger fire/rescue or “Emergency Management Center” were discussed in 2007 and a joint committee from both departments and the City Council began looking at sites and completing a needs study. In 2008, the City purchased the old VFW building and property just south of the current fire hall and east of the Rescue Squad building. Initial plans were completed and a federal grant submitted. A decision is pending at this time. The material was taken from *Litchfield Fire Department 125th Anniversary 1872 to 1997* written by Vern Madson, Will Massingham, and Mike Johanneck.

## **RESCUE SQUAD**

The **Litchfield Rescue Squad** evolved from the Meeker County Civil Defense organized in 1958. Initially, eight members of the Litchfield Fire Department joined the civil defense. The group formed due to the concern for nuclear defense with Ervin Radunz as chair. In 1982 the Meeker County Civil Defense evolved into Emergency Management. In 1989, the REscue Squad transitioned from a Meeker County department to a City of Litchfield department. The squad’s role varies from storm watch, to water search and rescue, to vehicular accidents and extractions, and traffic containment. The up to 30 members are on call 24 hours a day and had over 300 calls in 2008. Equipment is purchased and maintained by the City of Litchfield, Meeker County Townships, and private donations. The group includes rescue divers and an air boat also used by the Meeker County Sheriff’s staff. As with the Litchfield Fire Department, plans are pending for a new facility at this time. (zz-29)

## **POLICE DEPARTMENT**

Litchfield’s early lawlessness was again documented by Hugo Nisbeth, Sweden, who visited here in the summer of 1871.

“We left St. Paul and arrived in the tiny, two year old town of Litchfield in the afternoon. We decided to remain there a few days, partly to visit the neighboring farmers and partly to be present at the celebration of the Fourth of July. Early the following morning we were awakened by the sounds of hissing rockets, shots, and not especially attractive noise making devices. We hurried to get up at half past six. After a breakfast, we went out on the balcony for a view. What life, what movement! The town’s entire male population seemed to be up, singing or rather shouting with joy. Revolvers flashed in most hands and, I must say, they were often used! The upper atmosphere was criss-crossed with hissing rockets and the lower, where we mortals walked, by crackers, rockets, spinning wheels and the like. On the whole it was perfect chaos and not exactly of a harmless kind.” Mr. Nisbeth goes on to describe seeing a Swedish flag in the midst. He and his companion “threw themselves into the mob and forward they would go to the dear blue and gold.”

At last they came to their goal with “no other mishap than getting a bit powder stained and having the brim of my straw hat torn completely off by a descending rocket stick.” They were able to visit, in Swedish, with a local couple from Stockholm. (W)

Litchfield seemed to address this lawlessness and elected **George B. Waller the first constable** in 1872 for \$200. In January 1873, they also authorized an additional \$20 for more services. By 1876, the council hired a special police force for the 4th of July celebration. Then the night watchman position was added in December of that year for \$40 a month. The hours were from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. daily. William Meyers was the first night watchman. (JJ)

The 1873 letter, stated previously under Background, describes a lovely city. Years later, the editor of the Anoka newspaper, praised Litchfield residents after visiting Brightwood Resort in 1891. He found the citizens of Litchfield to be “liberal and wide-awake.” (J) The first police offices for the Village were on the second floor of the 1886 fire hall on West Second Street.

**George Fenner** was elected Chief in 1953. He served until his death in 1978. In April 1963, the community building had the “cop shop” in the northwest corner. Some offices remained above the 1886 fire hall until 1968. (J)

Litchfield’s first “**dispatch**” was a red light on a line between the Hotel and Greep-Trueblood. It appeared sometime shortly after World War II. The emergency calls at that time went to the Litchfield Telephone Exchange and the operator would turn on the light. The police on the beat would check for the light and call the telephone company when it was on. The operator would give the message and turn off the light. (ZZ-21)



No. 92 Red dispatch light at hotel corner

Sometime after 1955, a phone box was installed on the corner of the bank. Russ Dollerschell, working at the Meeker County Jail, took the calls and operated the red light. When officers were checking doors at night, they would look up to see if light was on. The officers would call in on the special phone for the message. This was the system until the early 1970s. The year 1968 was one of advancement for Litchfield Police Department: they got police radios in squad cars, radar to check speeding and the 911 system. One night, Gene Bahr clocked an Amtrack train at 83 miles per hour. In the 1970s, car bids did not include am/fm radios or air conditioning. This was considered a luxury for tax dollar use. The officers on duty also carried a very big key ring with keys to public buildings and street lights. Computers came in about the year 2000 and now each car has one. (zz-30, J)

Meeker County and Litchfield law enforcement offices joined space in the Meeker County Courthouse. In 1999, the new law enforcement center, including a large 72-cell, opened.

## CEMETERY

In 1869, “members of the community” purchased 20 acres east of Lake Ripley for the purposes of a cemetery and organized the “**Trustees of the Litchfield Cemetery.**” Lots were \$3 each. In June of 1877, Dr. Noah Ripley’s body was moved to its current location in the Mason’s part of the cemetery. (Meeker County Republican paper) By 1879, the lots were priced at \$10. (FF) In 1918, part of the cemetery was used for **sheep grazing** and the wool sold for an income of \$34. (FF)

The Ripley Cemetery was mentioned in a reservation to the Brightwood Beach Resort; during that “age of culture” several visitors included poems with their reservation. One verse read:

I’ll come to your community,  
And my wife I will take.  
If we can walk to your graveyard,  
And swim in the lake. (zz-31)

During the Depression, the association was almost bankrupt and the bank was about to foreclose. Shares were sold to the membership for \$1000 and the association was saved. An additional 15.75 acres were purchased during this time frame. The 1930 fees were \$15 for a lot, \$1 for annual care, and \$25 to \$30 for perpetual care. The Cemetery Association paid 30 cents an hour for maintenance and \$1 a day for horse mowing. The Association also **planted flax seed** on the south part of the cemetery that was not in use. (FF)

The Association planned well with expansions and property acquisitions. Trees were planted along future roads. In May 1985, the **Avenue of Flags** flew for the first time. This included 50 flags that lined the road to the center of the cemetery. (J)

In 1994, the Cemetery Association disbanded and the City of Litchfield took over the cemetery. Lots were now at \$300 each. In 1995 there were 171 cremations, or 11 percent, and in 2000 the number had grown to 201, or 18 percent. (II)

At this time, some graves in the original part of the cemetery are showing signs of deterioration. Others are in need of cleaning. There are safety factors to be considered. Issues will need to be identified and then taken care of in the proper manner.

In 1909 a statue to honor “all of the loyal soldiers and sailors of 1861 to 1865” was erected in the cemetery. In 2007 the Ladies of the GAR decided to renovate it. The refurbished statue was rededicated on Memorial Day 2009. Comments at the rededication were “that this statue is a visual reminder of honor due veterans of all wars” and that “100 years later we’re here and we’re part of history.”



No. 93 Wagner grave



No. 94 Albert Van Spence grave



## TREES

The 1869 Central Park site, deeded by the railroad, was plowed and trees planted in 1872. ( T) Duane McKenzie remembers a family story about planting trees in Litchfield. His ancestors, the Avery family, moved to Litchfield after the Civil War. Lloyd Jerome Avery had fought with General Scherman in Georgia before moving to the northeast shore of Lake Ripley. Duane's great-great-grandfather, Lloyd Jerome Avery, and great-grandfather, William Henry Avery, **planted the trees in Central Park and many other trees in town between 1872 and 1875.** The Averys moved from Litchfield to Idaho about 1885. The council minutes in June 1877 show a purchase of trees for \$6.

No. 94 A Advertisement, 1871 newspaper

**Meeker County**  
**NURSERIES!**  
LITCHFIELD, - - - - - MINN.  
**P. A. JEWELL,**  
AND  
**G. W. FULLER,**  
PROPRIETORS.

A beginning has already been made. One of the proprietors will be on the ground in the Spring, with about 60,000 root grafts for his grounds, and for sale a **BEST** ASSORTMENT of fruit trees, Evergreens, Shrubby and Forest trees, from Mr. Jewell's nurseries at Lake City, suitable for transplanting, at the lowest possible prices, for the kind and quality of trees.

We ask the patronage of the citizens of Meeker and neighboring counties, who desire to see a first class Nursery established in your midst.

Jan 6 Litchfield, Jan. 1, 1871.

The Minnesota Horticulture Society was founded in 1873. The 1874 membership had 37 members from 23 communities. Three men from Litchfield on the membership rolls. G.W. Fuller, who owned Litchfield's nursery, G. B. Waller, and H.S. Wadsworth were all members. The shares were \$25. The Society dealt with mostly **fruit trees**. G.W. Fuller's role was apple trees and he "would not want to give up on the idea of pear trees in Minnesota." (hh)

The Society discussed the status of the **State of Minnesota taxing owners of fruit trees on the produce** when the trees, which were not winter hardy, often died. G.W. Fuller moved to appoint a committee of three to prepare a paper on the taxing of nursery stock trees as personal property. He was appointed chair of the committee. (hh)

In 1891, after visiting Litchfield's Brightwood Resort, the editor of the Minneapolis North had comments about the trees. "At the time of its foundation some 20 years ago, what now glories in the name of Litchfield, was an open treeless prairie. With a foresight which everybody now is happy to admit, pains were taken to plant a large number of trees, and the result has been most gratifying. The establishment last year of waterworks, is another link in the chain of happy events that have made Litchfield so inviting, fine lawns greeting visitors all over the city." (J)

For decades, like many other cities, Litchfield enjoyed their stately elm trees and took them for granted. The advent of **Dutch Elm Disease** changed that. Litchfield did what it could to save these elms. Litchfield went on an aggressive tree-saving campaign and in 1979 was designated as a "Tree City USA." In September 1980 the



City of Litchfield sponsored a class for 40 state and city foresters to discuss how to fight Dutch Elm Disease and combat tree loss. (J)

Litchfield's tree loss was 193 in 1982, down from 345 in 1981. (J) The tree population remained stable until 2007 and 2008, when more were taken down. Total loss from Dutch Elm Disease is about 3000 trees. The Litchfield City council addressed this in the fall of 2009 and allocated money for trees to be planted in the spring of 2010. (JJ, staff)

## **CIVIC ARENA**

Litchfield's **Civic Arena** opened in October 1973 with space for ice skating and locker rooms. A 1979 addition was completed to house the senior dining needs of the community. Additional locker space was added in 1986, and an interior upgrade in 1998 included permanent seating and boards for the ice. In 2004, the City and school combined to add additional locker space. (JJ)

## **ALCOHOL**

After organizing as a Village in the spring of 1872, the Village council issued **three liquor licenses** for \$100 each in January 1873. (JJ) A local play was advertised in 1873 as "Ten Days in a Bar." (J) Then by January 1879, a group of citizens appeared before the council requesting that no more liquor licenses be issued. This failed to pass but the council did abolish the gaming and card playing that was going on in the saloons. (JJ) By May 1895 liquor licenses had increased to \$750 a year. (JJ)

By far, the most significant event related to Litchfield's saga with alcohol occurred in the spring of 1911. The Village Council **suspended two liquor licenses** of saloon owners for selling to minors in February. This warning was not enough, so at the next meeting in March 1911, the council **arrested another six saloon owners**. The newspaper reported that "All hell hath broken loose here!" A temperance meeting was held on April 1, 1911 and then the group appeared before the council at the April meeting. The group requested that saloon owners no longer be allowed to sell liquor in pails and there would be more "rushing the can," a local phrase for selling to minors. (J)

In 1914, Litchfield **voted to go dry**. This put saloon owners out of business. In March 1915, the MN Legislature passed an act to allow individual counties to decide about the alcohol issue. In June 1915, Meeker County also voted to go dry. (T) But on Armistice Day, November 11, 1918, there was much "flammable liquid" and dancing in the street until 2 AM. (T)

The Eighteenth Amendment, called the Nobel Experiment, went into effect January 16, 1920. This law did not stop drinking. Carl Gustafson remembers a woman bootlegger in town. "They would fine her \$100 a year and she would go before the judge and pay her fine. Then she would go right back home and sell another bottle. That was really her license. They would fine her once a year and then they wouldn't bother her again for another year." (dd-29)

The United States Government passed the 21st Amendment on March 23, 1933. This gave the states the right to decide on liquor issues. Minnesota waited until January 1934 to repeal prohibition. The state then gave the counties and cities the right to decide about liquor issues. In the early years of the 20th century, the Village of Litchfield issued 15 to 20 liquor licenses a year for a population of about 2,700 (compare this to 6,500 residents in 2000 and 7 liquor licenses). The citizens of Litchfield were anxious to sell and buy alcohol after 15 years of prohibition and bootlegging. In 1934 and 1935, the Council heard requests for liquor licenses, hours of sale, and even an ordinance to regulate where beer could be served at dances. (JJ)

In 1953 the State Attorney General ruled that counties needed to vote if they wanted legalize the sale of intoxicating beverages. Meeker County voted on April 13, 1953, and the “wets” won 3 to 1. Other towns in the county voted to open municipal liquor stores. Litchfield voted in January 1954 but the mayor vetoed it. Later, a special meeting produced a unanimous vote over the mayor’s veto and Litchfield had a municipal liquor store. (J,JJ)

The last scene of Litchfield’s long history with intoxicating beverages occurred in 1964 when the State Liquor Commissioner said Litchfield cannot sell alcohol to the golf club, VFW, and Legion. (J)

## **GOLF CLUB**

The **Litchfield Golf Club** was started in the spring of 1922, the newspaper had headlines “Golf Lovers Will Soon Be Chasing Balls.” The old fairgrounds, 39.6 acres on the north shore of Lake Ripley, was purchased. Leo L. Baumgartner, in his History of the Litchfield Golf Club, states that the old racetrack can still be seen on hole #5. By 1927, there were 70 members. The need for a clubhouse surfaced and the members put on “Aunt Lucia” in the Litchfield Opera House. The Golf Club made \$150 for their new clubhouse. The clubhouse opened in September 1929 with one small room and a fireplace, paid for by E.W. Campbell. (ss)



No. 95 Litchfield Golf Clubhouse

By the Depression, greens were needed and the answer was a WPA project. The new golf club opened in 1937 with a golf exhibition featuring Patty Berg. In 1940, the ownership was transferred to the City of Litchfield. (ss)

During World War II, there were limited men to use the course. Bea Baumgartner Thompson was asked to reorganize a Ladies' League. She was familiar with the Golf Club after golfing with her father. Bea got the Girls Golf Club started in 1940; this also included afternoon bridge in the clubhouse. (dd-5)



No. 96 Girls Golf Club bridge tally, 1944

In the 1950s, the golf clubhouse was enlarged to the south and bathrooms were added. Then a bartender was added.

“The golf course guys had to tend bar themselves and take turns. Well one night it was Stuie Nelson’s turn and he did not want to. So he hired me to. He said, ”I will give you \$15 to work for me tonight. I took in about \$150 on \$75 worth of drinks so after that they hired me. Yes, I was the first bartender there.” (dd-29)

The course was enlarged to 18 holes in 1976. The clubhouse was also enlarged and redecorated. in 1999. The original 1922 field stone fireplace, paid for by E.W. Campbell, still remains as a focus point in the dining room.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

As a community significant decisions were made that had nong-lasting effects. A sampling of a few includes:

- Litchfield City Council voted for a large diesel generator in 1943 thereby making the slae of power to Meeker County Co-operative Power and Light possible.
- The 1936 City Council that made the landmark decision to sell only pwer and no lines or poles to the country’s first rural electric pwer co-operative.
- The 1954 decision to apply for the hydroelectric power.

The Litchfield Fire Departments four members with 193 years of service saw the fire department from horse and buggy calls to a fleet of modern fire trucks. Chief Herm Kruger’s recognition of Axel Johnson (49 years), Ole Mortenson (45 years), Joe Happ (52 years), and Luther Nelson (47 years) in 1952 is a worthy contribution to the history of the fire department.

A cultural resource for Litchfield is its stately elm trees, planted so many years ago and maintained through Dutch elm disease. The tree lined streets of Litchfield are highly regarded by its citizens.

The 1869 Litchfield Cemetery is a significant historic resource for the community.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Litchfield Heritage Preservation Commission has the following recommendations concerning the City Government theme.

1. It is the recommendation of this group that the 1949 power plan, clean and well maintained today, be preserved as a tribute to those who made such solid decisions about Litchfield's utilities.
2. Litchfield's trees, a natural resource, need to be cared for and protected. A replanting program should be undertaken so that future generation of citizens will be able to enjoy them.
3. The Litchfield Cemetery, acquired by the City in 1993, will need evaluation and a plan for the appropriate cleaning and repair of stones. Additional signage may assist the public and also interpret the history of the cemetery.
4. The 1922 stone fireplace at the Litchfield Golf Club should be preserved.

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# Social Fabric



No. 96A Litchfield church ladies 1915

## POSTAL SERVICE

In 1871, the newspaper published the mail times. The building was located at the corner of Second Street and Sibley.

Mail from the east	Distributed at 3:45 PM
Mail from the west	Distributed at 11:30 AM
Mail from Greenleaf	Distributed at 11:00 AM
Mail from Forest City	Distributed at 2:30 PM

The new Post Office, on East Second Street, was approved in 1929 but was not built until 1934. It was opened at the same time as the remodeled opera house. (J) Prior to this, the bank held the post office in the rear west end. (dd-10) Before that, the post office moved with who the post master was. Litchfield also made strides in mail delivery when a motorized bike was used in 1908. (J) Home mail delivery started after Litchfield installed the required street signs and had 75 percent of the homes numbered in 1935. (J)



No. 97 Litchfield Post Office, 1908 motorized delivery bike

## CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

Litchfield has had Christmas lights since the early 1900s. The first lights were strung along the sides of the street and a tall, skinny tree was placed in the center of the street by the Lenhardt Hotel. The lights hanging over the street made their debut in the mid-1930s. Around 1935, Vic Sederstrom persuaded the Litchfield Commercial Club, a forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce, to invest in decorating Litchfield's downtown. The City Fathers somehow justified the creating and financing of the decorations. An early photo from 1938 shows decorations almost identical to today's evergreen boughs. There have been minimal changes to the original decorations. (qq) By 1947, the City used a ladder truck to put up the 25 garlands. (V)

The City had a very controversial event, and a subsequent coming together of the community, in 1959. This account is a summary of Mildred Hummel's story in *Christmas Remembered*, Litchfield Area Writer's Group, 1999. It was in the summer of 1959 that a rumor floated up and down Main Street and all around the town of Litchfield that somewhere in the city government or the Municipal Light & Power plant, funds were being misappropriated. After a community meeting, the city asked the MN State Auditors Office to review the books. Their review found no misappropriations of money. They only stated that using city funds and staff for the purchase of and installation of Litchfield's natural garlands of evergreen for Christmas was unconstitutional.

The community was dumbfounded. A community effort followed. Funds were raised but who could hang them? Walter Wogenson and Tiny Fredrickson took on the task. Others volunteered to assist. The garland was strung with lights in the Wogenson garage and the volunteers also constructed a two-wheeled vehicle with two ladders connected. This was pulled by Tiny's Allis Chalmers tractor and the volunteers started on North Sibley. Each night the café on the block where the lights were strung opened to feed the volunteers. By Thanksgiving, the lights were all up and turned on! The next summer, Litchfield had a referendum that clearly stated that a portion of Litchfield taxes be used for the purpose of purchasing natural garlands, wreaths, and lights, and allowing the city crews to use the city equipment to design and install the decorative lighting on the street of Litchfield as long as the City of Litchfield exists.



No. 98 1959 Christmas lights

The City crew spends approximately 364 man hours to put up and take down the decorations. Prior to hanging the garland, each string is tested, bulbs replaced, and wiring checked. The demand draw of the lights is about 75 KW, amounting to an energy use of 18,000 KWH for each holiday season. (V)

### **GOOD CHEER CLUB**

Litchfield did not have a welfare system, but the **Good Cheer Club**, founded in 1922 assisted families who were in need. It provided food baskets, Christmas gifts, and furniture. The baskets were assembled in the room above the old fire hall, and the furniture was stored at Olson's music store. The club folded in 1958. (H) David "Mickey" Shoultz remembered

"The welfare helped us out. One woman, Mrs. Axel Johnson, was a wonderful lady. If it wasn't for her, I think we would have gone hungry a few times. I can remember Thanksgiving the welfare, they were called the Cheer Club, would bring turkey and stuff to the house. I think we got our clothes from the Cheer Club too. And the shoes, of course, you had to have plenty of cardboard to stick in the bottom for the holes. You would almost freeze before you got to school." (dd-13)



## **GOLDEN FLEECE LODGE NO. 89**

The **Golden Fleece Lodge No. 89** was organized on March 19, 1871. In 1874, the Lodge and the village of Litchfield jointly constructed a building at the site of the opera house. It was torn down in 1900 and the Lodge rented quarters in various buildings until 1927 when it acquired the title to its current building. (D)

## **AMERICAN LEGION, NELSAN-HORTON POST #104**

Litchfield's **American Legion** was organized in 1919 with 100 men in attendance. The Post had several homes like Watson Hall, the Community Building, and then its current location in 1955. (EE)

The Legion Smelt Fry was legendary in Litchfield. It started in 1931 and Dr. Harold Wilmot was quoted as saying that the "smell of burned fish stayed in the club rooms and clothes until the next summer." The **Auxiliary** was formed in 1921 and was the first unit in Minnesota. (EE)



No. 99 World War I parade



## **VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS, ADMIRAL BENSON POST 2818**

The post organized in 1931. It formed in response to a proposed cash settlement from the Federal government for World War I veterans. The Willmar VFW Post had put an ad in the Litchfield paper, and **Litchfield veterans** wanted a voice in this issue. The name for the post was needed. The Commander of Post 159, Minneapolis, suggested the name. The group met in the Community Building initially and then moved to the GAR Hall. They purchased a building on East Depot Street, which housed the post from 1959 to 1967. The post purchased property on North Ramsey Avenue in 1965 and moved into its new post home in March 1967. In 2009, the post moved to the former Farmer's Daughter Supper Club on East Highway 12. (EE,FF) The Auxiliary unit received its charter on March 20, 1934. There were 22 charter members. The purpose of the auxiliary is to assist the post in their many programs for the veterans of all wars. (EE)

## **NATIONAL GUARD UNIT**

The unit was formed in **1947 as a combat unit**. It was placed on active duty in 1951 and ordered to Camp Rucker, Alabama, for the Korean emergency. The unit left Litchfield on January 25, 1951, with five officers and 66 enlisted men and returned in January 1953. In 1954 members moved into their current armory. In 1963 the unit was reorganized into an Engineer Battalion. (EE)

## **COMMERCIAL CLUB AND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

**The Litchfield Commercial Club** was formed early in 1900 by Litchfield businessmen. Their first and main objective was to cooperate with Litchfield Township to build the Litchfield Opera House. (J) The organization changed to the **Litchfield Chamber of Commerce** in December 1959. One of their main purposes is to promote the general prosperity of Litchfield and Meeker County.

## **WATERCADE**

The **Meeker County Centennial** was celebrated during the summer of 1956. It was so successful that a group of businessmen decided to repeat a summer event annually.

Litchfield's first **Watercade** celebration was on July 4, 1957. Bob Everts, Arvid Reinke, Glen Doering, and LeRoy Lindquist started the tradition. The first years the grand prizes included a boat and motor or a car. The parade and coronation of Miss Litchfield were highlights. Over the years, the celebration has expanded into a full week with events like softball and tennis tournaments, Art-In-The-Park, and a kiddie parade. The Saturday night parade and Sunday night coronation are still highlights.

**Litchfield's Centennial** was a several day celebration in July 1969. There was a beard contest. Floyd Warta grew one and never shaved it off, which, ultimately led to his Santa Claus fame. The townspeople dressed up in period costumes. A program was produced and the Independent Review had a special edition highlighting Litchfield's history.



No. 99 A Litchfield Centennial, 1969

## RED CROSS

Litchfield's **Red Cross** was organized in 1917 by Dr. Karl Danielson; individual memberships were \$1. Activities centered around disasters and the war effort. The ladies rolled bandages and knitted scarves above the Unique Theater at weekly meetings. In 1927, the Red Cross swimming program started. The classes were held at Lake Ripley and various lakes in Meeker County. (EE)

Agatha Casey Caylor was Meeker County's first registered medical technologist. She started the "**Walking Blood Bank**" in 1947. She signed up males to type for blood donation if needed, using the Knights of Columbus, the firemen, and all of the National Guard. There were 250 men and "we used every one of them." She drew all the blood for Rh and typing. Dr. Telfred donated all the serum and Drs. Harold Wilmot and Lennox Danielson assisted. Then the Sheriff and Mr. Hagglund, funeral director, came every night while she was drawing "in case anyone got faint."

When someone needed blood, Agatha would check the type and Rh and then Knights of Columbus volunteers, Harold Duer and Tom O'Keefe, would call them or find the individual. Agatha would draw off the blood and see that it was administered. One time she was called when a woman was hemorrhaging. The husband wanted to donate, but Agatha would not take him. Instead she got the custodian from the hallway and used him. (dd-30)

In 1947 at the National Red Cross Convention, the National Civilian Blood Donor Program was introduced. In 1948 Litchfield had its first Bloodmobile program which continues today. (J)

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

The many organizations that contribute to Litchfield's sense of community can not all be listed here. The social fabric has meshed with the various local units of government. These groups were many times formed in response to a public need, like the Good Cheer Club.

Litchfield's Christmas decorations, unchanged from a 1938 photo, should be designated a local landmark. Their appearance, every November, is part of the Litchfield Christmas tradition.

The "Walking Blood Bank" was a volunteer effort to protect members of the community. Agatha Casey Caylor's organizational skills and dedication is a locally significant contribution.

The Litchfield Chamber of Commerce has been a resource for downtown and commerce. Many times the organization has provided a "safety net" such as the 1959 Christmas decoration effort.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Litchfield Heritage Preservation Commission has the following recommendations concerning the Social Fabric theme.

1. Litchfield's Christmas decorations should be designated as a local landmark.
2. The Litchfield Chamber of Commerce should be supported as an asset to the community.
3. The "Walking Blood Bank" history should be documented.

# National Register of Historic Places



No. 100 Grand Army of the Republic Hall 1887

## GAR HALL

The building was constructed in 1885 by Civil War veterans with bricks from the local Ames Brick yard. It was deeded to the Village of Litchfield for \$1 with the conditions that the hall be kept as a memorial to Civil War Veterans. The City of Litchfield assumed ownership in 1949. An addition in 1960 contains the Meeker County Historical Society. (FF) The building had fallen into disuse and a community effort to find a reuse decided on the local historical society. (J)



No. 101 Interior of GAR Hall, 1951

In February 1964 a fire occurred in the northeast corner of the building. The cause was thought to be faulty wiring. Damage was confined there and no historical artifacts were damaged. (J)





No. 102 Fire at the GAR Hall, 1964



No. 102 A GAR Hall as it is today

### **OPERA HOUSE**

The history of the Litchfield Opera House has been covered under theme of entertainment and agriculture.

### **TRINITY CHURCH**

The history of the Trinity Church has been covered under the theme of churches.

### **COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT**

The history of the commercial historic district has been covered under the theme of downtown.

# Recommendations



No. 103 Litchfield Wood Market 1906

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations, identified in this document, will define a course of action for the HPC and community over the next several years. Some recommendations will require significant commitment, while others are less complicated. The Litchfield community will continue to protect, provide for, and enrich itself by using these recommendations as a resource.

### PROTECT

1. Evaluate the structural issues of buildings in the Commercial Historic District
2. Evaluate the 1869 Litchfield Cemetery for gravesite identification, safety, repair, and cleaning needs

### PROVIDE FOR

1. Complete an archeological survey in this area to identify pre-settlement data
2. Complete a city-wide building survey to identify structures and districts that could be historical resources for the community
3. Identify a process to revitalize the Commercial Historic District, consider a Main Street Program

### ENRICH

1. Consider a downtown walking tour with property information inside buildings, building plaques and maps and/or technological resources to educate people about Litchfield's history
2. Solicit a professional written history of Litchfield's culture related to different timeframes
3. Educate the public via local media about Litchfield's rich history, using this document, and others identified, as a basis
4. Work with MN DOT and other identified key stakeholders to begin dialogue about the 2012 Sibley Avenue work related to the streetscape design
5. Address local resources that need an alternative format for accessibility, such as converting 5" x 7" City of Litchfield negatives to digital format for a mechanism for public education and historical documentation
6. Consider a local landmark designation program to including but not limited to Central Park, Christmas decorations, Litchfield Cemetery, Hollywood Theater storefront, Rosemary Home, Carnegie Library, 1949 Power Plant, Litchfield's elm trees, Presbyterian Church, 1930 Washington School, Lake Ripley Park, and other structures or resources identified by future studies

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No. 104 Litchfield Machine Shop



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# Appendix



No. 105 Hot air balloon, 1899

## APPENDIX A, ORAL HISTORIES

### *Litchfield Oral History Project*

Joe Paddock et al

## HEALTHCARE

### PROFESSIONALS

#### *Agatha Casey Caylor (about late 1920s to early 1930s)*

- Meeker County's first registered medical technologist
- Started Meeker County's "Walking Blood Bank" by signing up males to type for blood donation if needed, used Knights of Columbus, the firemen, all of the Guard, there were 250 men and "we used every one of them" When she was drawing all the blood for Rh and typing, Dr. Telfred donated all the serum and Drs. Harold Wilmot and Lennox Danielson assisted. Then the Sheriff and Mr. Hagglund (funeral director) came every night while she was drawing "in case anyone got faint."
- When someone needed blood Agatha would check the type and Rh and then Knights of Columbus volunteers, Harold Duer and Tom O'Keefe, would call them or find them and Agatha would draw off the blood and see that it was administered
- One time she was called when a woman was hemorrhaging. The husband wanted to donate but Agatha would not take him. Instead she got the custodian from the hallway and used him
- The Emmaus Hospital had 20 beds.

#### *Florence Sexton Casey, register nurse*

- About 1909 remembers her 14-year-old sister having an appendectomy on the kitchen table by Dr. Chapman and Dr. Karl Danielson, her sister later died of an infection
- She has two years of training from Miss Bellingham. Flo graduated from high school in 1927 and started her nurses training after that. She gave anesthesia, delivered babies, and cared for patients,
- The "old" hospital was Dr. Robertson's building. He did tonsillectomies in the second floor. Prior to the brick two story building, the "Borden House" was considered the hospital.

#### *Dr. Robert Farrish, Dentist*

- Came to Litchfield in 1939. I was the sixth dentist practicing in Litchfield. I had my office in the old bank building on the corner of Sibley and Second Street. The building was at an angle and my chair was right there on the second floor. I had about the best office of any of them. I could look up and down main street.
- I charged \$1.00 or maybe \$1.50 for two surface fillings. Cleaning the teeth was \$1.00 and extractions were \$1.00

## PATIENT'S MEMORIES

### *Gen Lenhard*

- You wondered how they could do it. Out all night on house calls and then work the next day but they always seemed to do that. They were very dedicated, your old doctors.

### *Marcella Weber Kelly*

- Every spring we were given turpentine and sugar to get rid of the worms in case you had them. And then we ate dandelion greens every spring to purify your blood.
- Miss Bellingham was a great lady. She gave her life to that hospital. And everybody had nothing, I don't think, but the highest praise for that lady.

### *Kenneth Evenson*

- The doctor would come out in a car or horse and buggy. He could diagnose and it didn't take him long. Now a days they got to have cat scans and x-rays and ultrasounds and they still can't find out what's wrong with you.

### *Abe Johnson*

- I think the Wilmots and Danielsons and the people who were instrumental in handling the medical profession in Litchfield during those days did a tremendous job and I really though a lot of them.

### *Dewitt Albright*

- Dr. Wilmot went only as far as my brother-in-laws and then he was brought here by bob sled. He examined her and told me he had been out all day. He went to sleep and then I woke him when the pains were bad. Doc Wilmot said the baby was coming bottom first and that he would try to turn her. He apologized because he didn't have any ether. He said, "What we do we do. You will just have to bear it because it is life and death for both of you." So Doc Harold reached in with one hand and got a foot and pulled her out. She had a strangulated cord and was a blue baby. Of course she is 65 now and still going strong. Then Doc Harold made a big breakfast for the whole family and stayed all day and night to make sure everything was ok. When we were making breakfast, Doc says what are you calling her and I said Virginia. Doc says my wife's name is Dorothy and I would be pleased if you name her after my wife. So Virginia Dorothy it was.

## ILLNESSES AND INJURIES

### *Ray Nelson*

- In 1919 there was a bad epidemic of black diphtheria. I was born August 1 and my two year old brother died September 2. A lot of babies died that year. I was nursing from my mother and the doctor said "Just keep nursing him or you will have a dead baby."

### *Stan Ross*

- I had tuberculosis and I could not do anything for about six years. From 1932 to

about 1938. Well, I did go to a sanitarium for about six months to learn how to care for myself. I went to a private one in White Bear Lake. One day I was doing too much and I started hemorrhaging. I hemorrhaged every day for about a week. Dr. Karl Danielson had my dad go out and get some sand and my mother made two bags, 5 1/2 pounds each, and they put them on my chest. They put the sand-bags on the upper chest so I would breathe with my lower chest. Obviously it worked! I was 27 at the time.

*David Mickey Shoultz*

- We were always seeing who could get the highest in the top of the house. And so my sister climbed up on the top, as high as it goes, and she fell. She rolled down the side and rolled off the house. She broke her arm. Dr. Karl Danielson came to the house and set her arm on the kitchen table. He charged us like \$3.
- Of course in those days if you got the measles, scarlet fever, diphtheria, or whooping cough you were quarantined and they put a sign on your door. We weren't allowed to leave or have company.

1941 Meeker County was the first county in the US to do tuberculosis testing for all! Don't know how this related to LOH yet. (Independent Review)

In June 1900, there was an outbreak of small pox on the eastern side of the Village. A health expert, Dr. Bracken, from the Minnesota Board of Health arrived on the evening train and examined the woman. He confirmed small pox and the home was quarantined, roped off, and a guard posted. The Litchfield Independent Review "warned the public against all stories and rumors that may be afloat. This statement contains all the facts in the case." The Village Council asked the June term of Meeker County Court to be postponed because there were "cases on trial in which the witnesses and interested parties live in the infected district." Smallpox surveillance was established by the Village Health Board. No circuses were allowed to perform in Litchfield in 1900 by Council action. (Source: Council minutes and Litchfield Independent Review)

Two weeks after the Litchfield Opera House opened, Litchfield was in the middle of a significant outbreak of smallpox. The Village Council met in a special meeting on November 28, 1900 and established that a guard be posted at the Litchfield House Hotel 24/7. A 6 foot by 6 foot watchman's house was constructed! They also voted to "insist that health officers enforce that all children be vaccinated or expelled from school." The Council purchased the old Bacon gallery and moved it to the northwest corner of the old fairgrounds by Lake Ripley "where it will be used as a detention hospital for all contagious diseases." Despite these warnings, attendance at Opera House events flourished. (Source: Council minutes and Independent Review, guard and house were in council minutes, the detention building was in the IR)

## NURSING HOME

*Wendell Nelson*

- The old hospital was purchased for \$25,000 by the First Lutheran Church. Augustans Homes was founded and I served on the Board for 35 years. From one

building we have seen the senior apartments, then the Bethany Home, then the Emmanuel Home, and hospice and home care all come into being. The Board of Social Ministries has taken over the Augustana Lutheran Homes but it started right here.

## **LITCHFIELD ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Joe Paddock et al

### **SOCIAL FABRIC**

*Wendell Nelson*

- Yes I was a charter member of the Litchfield Kiwanis. In 1938 one of the men from Kiwanis International came out here and the Drs. Brentons who were organizing a club in Willmar came over and we organized.
- I assisted setting up the estate of the Jenks Family. They gave 1,500 feet along Clear Lake to Meeker County to develop a park. Then the balance of their estate, about \$150,000, was given to the Meeker County Historical Society. It was set up so the principal was invested and only the interest could be used.

*Leland Olson*

- The post office was located in the back, or west half, of the First State Bank building. It has boxes. You had to pick up your mail. The postmaster was Phelps. Then the post office moved over to John's Hardware, where the Legion is now, Then they got carrier mail, twice a day, to the whole town. You would get mail morning and afternoon.

*Ed Kopplin*

- I was Chair of the Meeker County Centennial in 1956. We needed a headquarters. I was driving by the GAR Hall and something clicked. I found a key had got the city to put in electricity and phones and lights. The GAR Hall became our headquarters. It has been used ever since.

*Norma Berke*

- I am on the Meeker County Fair Board and I enjoy that very much. Of course the Fair has changed so much from when I was a kid. We had our animal exhibits in Central Park and the other exhibits were at the Community Building. Of course, I think it was in the 1950s that the Fair moved out to where it is now. Each year it has improved and improved.

*David Mickey Shoultz*

- I was born in 1917 and never knew my dad. He died in 1919 from the World War I influenza. He was sick just three days. My mother was left to raise all nine of us.
- The welfare helped us out. One woman, Mrs. Axel Johnson, was a wonderful lady. If it wasn't for her, I think we would have gone hungry a few times. I can remember Thanksgiving the welfare, they were called the Cheer Club, would bring turkey and stuff to the house.



- We didn't have heat and we would wake up with frost on the wall. The first one up started the stove. It never did get warm. We had to all dress by the stove.
- I think we got our clothes from the Cheer Club too. And the shoes, of course, you had to have plenty of cardboard to stick in the bottom for the holes. You would almost freeze before you got to school.
- We always had clean underwear. Your mother always told you that were going to die if you didn't have clean underwear on when you went to school. If you got hurt and your underwear was dirty you, you would die.

*Esther Ross*

- I remember one summer I worked at the McGown's Hat Shop. They were very old ladies, sisters. Neither married. One was Sadie and the other Lizzie. I learned how to trim millinery.
- I remember going to visitations in people's homes. There was a large wreath outside on the door and that was a signal that the family was in mourning. They just reviewed the body in the living room and they put candles on the sides and lunch was served by the family with contributions of labor and food.

*Iva Scarp Pearson*

- When the war broke out my dad was listening to the radio. He said, "Girl if you want anything you better buy it right now because pretty soon there won't be anything to get." So I went to Greeps and bought 12 pair of nylon stockings. And boy I took good care of them.
- My mother baked pies and I delivered them. She got 15 cents a pie at first and at the end it was 50 cents a pie. But still, everytime they came around for a war bond, she has \$18.75 to buy one. I was real proud of her. In 10 years then you got \$25.
- In 1945 I was going to get married and I wanted that 24 hour salad for the wedding luncheon. Well, pineapple is in the recipe and it was rationed. That nice Mr. Salls who worked at Cox's Meat Market saw to it we got the pineapple.
- The McGowan Hat Shop was a real trip. I mean those two old ladies were so cute. But almost every morning you'd see one or the other downtown in the nightgown with the robe. They'd always have one of the hats from their store on with the price tag hanging down. They would go over to the hamburger joint by the park for a quart of milk. Oh they were cute.
- I was a telephone operator. During the Armistice Day blizzard in 1941 I got stranded in Milaca. It took 9 1/2 hours to get home when the storm was over. I called Helen Evenson at the phone company and she asked me to come right in. She had worked 3 days straight. I went right in and worked 12 1/2 hours.

*Louise Tostenrud*

- My grandfather was instrumental in getting the sewer built on Sibley. There was a cesspool or whatever you call it. So my grandfather took the contract himself, That was about 1912 and it was just selfish reasons. He wanted a sewer for that hotel. He also pushed to get the streets paved up and down main street.

*Karna Agren*

- My father, Axel Johnson, ran the candy store near to the Unique Theater. He was on the fire department. The minute that fire whistle blew he would take off running to the firehall. He left the candy store and ran in the alley by Butterwicks and go to the fire hall by Anderson Chemical. One day my mother and I went to the candy store in the car just after the whistle blew. We found a salesman from the hotel across the street minding the store. He said, "Axel told me to stay here until you came down."
- My dad always made oyster stew for the fire department doings. I could never stand oyster stew.

January 6, 1934 Minnesota authorized the repeal of prohibition. The United States passed the 21st Amendment on March 23, 1933. This gave the states the right to decide on liquor issues. Minnesota waited until January 1934 to repeal prohibition. The state also gave the counties and cities the right to decide about liquor issues. In the early years of the Litchfield Opera House's existence, 1900 to 1919, the Village of Litchfield issued 15 to 20 liquor licenses a year for a population of about 2,700 (compare this to 6,500 residents now and 7 liquor licenses). The citizens of Litchfield were anxious to sell and buy alcohol after 15 years of prohibition and bootlegging! The Council heard requests for liquor licenses, hours of sale and even an ordinance to regulate where beer could be served at dances! Now, as the roof was deteriorating on the Opera House, the City was dealing with two big issues. The first was the regulation of liquor and the second was POWER! The rural population recognized the importance of electricity and they were looking at Litchfield's power plant! Meeker County farmers were organized and progressive as evident in the dairy industry. (source: Litchfield Council minutes, US Census data)

MN State Planning Board Report of Committee on Electric Power 1934 Purpose was to equalize operating rights of public with private interests Currently, 88% farms with out electricity. Moody's Industrial Investment Company estimated that the value of MN power companies was \$212,142,093 in 1934. The report stated that rural electrification is of vital importance to the future welfare of MN.

October 18, 1934 Litchfield City Council acted on a new diesel electric generator with a capacity of 600 KWH for \$57,423 with \$17,226 coming from a federal grant. Earlier the Council had rejected a second hand boiler for \$15,000. The ability to provide power would serve Litchfield and Meeker County well in the future! (Source: Litchfield council minutes)

1968 The Meeker County Home Extension Leaders met regularly at the Litchfield Community Building. Each township had a club and sent a leader to the training meetings. The year Anna Mae Wigen was president the decision was made to allow more clubs and include any women in town who wanted to form a club. Many additional clubs were formed that year. The Christmas parties were also held in the basement and were well attended. Anna Mae states, "I climbed those stairs many times." (Source: Personal memories Anna Mae Wigen)

## LITCHFIELD ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Joe Paddock et al

### TRANSPORTATION

*Florence Sexton Casey*

- Remembers that the streets were bumpy, dirty, and sandy On dirt roads it took 4 hours to drive to Minneapolis. The trains to go to the cities came at 5 and 8:15 AM and then returned at 8 PM and midnight.

*Ed O. Kopplin*

- His grandfather came to town in 1898 or 1899 and purchased the Greenleaf Lumber Yard.
- Litchfield had the “only all night service station between Minneapolis and I think the South Dakota border. That was the Traveler’s Inn on the triangle where Langmo Farms is.

*Abe Johnson*

- Chair, Johnson Brothers Construction Company We got our first highway job in our own name in 1947. It was between Glencoe and Hutchinson. They did not have a paved road going in and out of town but when Minnesota Mining moved to town in 1947, they had to have a hard surface.
- Our horse units were pulling blades that smoothed down the road and the horses would be able to operate. Power units in the 30s were not so mobile as they are today. But with the horse units filling in it was a pretty effective operation.

*Gen Lenhard*

- The streets were just dirt and Mr. Limer went up and down the street on both sides spraying water to keep the dust down

*Dorothy Desens*

- Yes Mr. Limer would go every morning with two big white horses pulling the sprinkling wagon.
- They had wooden sidewalks when they sprinkled the streets and they were crooked.

*Auggie Anderson*

- Mr. Chilstrom would brush the streets with his horse drawn brush. Then his son, Herb, would follow and pick up the popsicle sticks. You could send those in for free prizes and Herb got a camera. That sparked his interest in photography.

*Bill (and Edith) Olson*

- It was about 1930 they put that highway in there (current highway 12) from Litchfield to Minneapolis. Lee Olson was about 10 when he made a bike trip to and from Darwin on that road. When they got to that lake by Howard Lake they went right through and they had an awful time getting the footings in. Some big machines just went down in there an they never did get them out.

*Leland Olson*

- There was a mixture of both horses and cars in 1926 to 1928.

*Ray Nelson*

- I lived south of Litchfield as a kid and we used to take the cream to the creamery by horse and buggy. When the cars came we had a model T pick up truck. I would drive to the neighbors and get their cream and haul it all in. I was 14 at the time, driving into Litchfield and everything (this would have been in 1924).

*Wendell Nelson*

- One of the most memorable lawyers in town was Ray Dart. He was blind because as a small child he was playing with a corset and the stays injured his eyes and blinded him. He was able to drive a car. He would do the brakes and acceleration and his wife would steer. He was a great trial lawyer. He chewed tobacco and he could spit and hit the spittoon in the courthouse even though he could not see.

*David Mickey Shoultz*

- They paved main street just before 1930 I would say. And that was very interesting. That was done by hand and mixers. They didn't have no big machines and that was quite something for us guys to watch.

*Andy Quinn*

- They didn't pave the street in Litchfield until the 1920s. There were hitching posts all along the street. In the spring there would be a manure pile about that high... nobody hauled it away.
- I helped start the AAA baseball in Litchfield. You see right after World War II they put up the parking meters. Every farmer in the community was provoked with Litchfield and they would drive to Darwin for groceries and to sell their eggs. But when we got baseball organized and off to a good start the parking meters were long forgotten.

*Iva Scarp Pearson*

- I went out with dad when they were building the road. This was the new highway 12. I suppose it was 1928 or 1929. They were using teams of horses and it was real interesting.

January 7, 1935 Bert Thulin submitted a plan to the Litchfield City Council to remodel the Litchfield Opera House. A motion was made and passed provided Mr. Thulin could find enough relief labor for the work with the City furnishing the materials.. Later that evening, the Council set light rates at 7 cents per KWH for the first 30 KWH then 2 cents after that for residential lighting.

(Source: Litchfield City Council minutes and Independent Review)

Comments about Bert's work... Bert had a gift. He loved to read and do math. He worked on things until it was right. He loved dynamite and would put 1/2 stick in the dirt to soften it up before manually removing the dirt. When doing the basement under the Litchfield Opera House, he made a ramp and hauled all the dirt out by wheel barrow. One time during the depression, on his first government job, he needed lumber. The local lumber yard could not guarantee getting in enough lumber.

Bert went to St. Paul's Great Northern Office and explained the dilemma. The man in charge told Bert he would get his lumber in time to do the job. One day, the railroad called Bert and told him to come down to the station to pick up his fruit! The Great Northern man put the order of lumber in as perishables so it would come directly to Litchfield without making all the whistle stops along the way! (Source: Leland Danielson)

Bert often said the Litchfield Opera House project was his "most dangerous."  
(Source: grandson, Tom Johnson)

The opera House basement was a wonder of it's time. The building was stabilized and then the dirt was hauled out manually. The foundation was made in a "checker-board" fashion with part of one wall done, then part of another wall until the whole basement was completed. The seams are still visible today. Today architects are not only impressed with this part of the project but also the fact that the concrete is still strong and not dry or crumbling. Many times in those early years, concrete was just mixed and remixed until the project was done. After reviewing the building it was obvious great care had been taken to maintain the proper mixture for good concrete. ( Source: Engan and Associates, Tibbets Engineering)

## **LITCHFIELD ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Joe Paddock et al

### **ENTERTAINMENT**

#### **IN THE HOMES**

*Bonnie Anderson Dille*

- At the time, early to mid 1930s, Bonnie's father was the mayor (Alfred Anderson), They wrote and produced their own plays in the basement. Bonnie's mother would make cookies and lemonade and everyone would pay two cents. They did "Murder Over At The Anderson's Basement" one time.

*Marcella Weber Kelly*

- The family dances on Saturday nights were the "biggy." There was never any drinking. I suppose you would call it a potluck, but I can remember A-F would bring sandwiches, G-T would bring something sweet and if you had the house you furnished the coffee. No one had carpets in those days, maybe hardwood floors or linoleum. This was on Saturday night and the whole family went. It was such fun. You always thought your dad was the best looking guy there and the best dancer. When the kids got tired you just slept wherever and the parents quit dancing about midnight.

*David Mickey Shoultz*

- We would play games at home at night. Like tic tac toe but mom would not allow us to play cards.
- Outside we would play pump pump pull away in empty lots.
- Christy Obrecht would come to town with his traveling tent show. Mom did his



washing and we would get some free tickets. Well, if they didn't let us in for free we would sneak in under the tent. The pop corn machine was there and we would sneak in early in the morning and eat the stale pop corn.

- I traveled with a bunch of boys then and we had a place we could play marbles in a shack by Jewetts Creek. We would catch fish, ice skate on the creek, and play cards. Someone always had a smoke too. We even took minutes at our meetings. There were nine of us but we called ourselves the Dirty 8.

## THEATERS

### *Elaine Ericson Lindell*

- I remember going to the Unique Theater on Friday nights. And Hardy Bronson would walk down the aisle and we knew the show was going to start. And when it was sad he'd play the music slowly and when the chase scene came he was all over the piano.

### *Gen Lenhard*

- She also remembers Hardy Bronson at the Unique Theater. She saw "Min and Bill"

### *Dorothy Desens*

- She remembers "Genie of the Lilac Time" and "I Dream of You" as silent movies at the Unique Theater.

### *Donald C. Larson*

- See comments in opera house history about him being in an operetta at the opera house, spring of his first grade year, in the oral history he talks about John Espe (really Esbjornson but EVERYONE calls him Espe) "he would take the old apple horse out of the barn and would come down to the Longfellow School. He would pick a bunch of us up and go to practice. Then at 6:00 he would pick us up and we would have to walk home from the Esbjornson home " (south part of Litchfield) You know it would be recognized that you were going to be in an operetta...that was quite a thing.
- Many memories of the Unique Theater. "You could go there for 10 cents but that was the first six rows. They were reserved for the kids so they could keep them in control or something. But if you had a girl friend and you wanted to go there it was embarrassing to sit in the first rows. I was just mortified. You had a date and you came walking in there like you owned the place and then the usherette said, "now you will have to sit in the".... And she would take you down there. And you were just humiliated." The back seats were 25 cents for adults.
- Before going to the Unique, everyone would stop for penny candy at Axel Johnson's Candy Store. The little tables had marble or oak tops with wire legs. The penny candy was two for a penny, three for a penny, or four for a penny. Axel had the patience of Job to let us kids all decide which one we wanted. He was also open on Sunday afternoons.

### *Roy Ekbohm*

- Remembers the line to get into the Unique Theater was a block and a half long.

- Remembers being 7 or 8 (1922 or 1923) and going to see westerns at the Unique Theater. Hardy Brunson played the piano. Not at the Hollywood, only at the Unique.

*Marcella Weber Kelly*

- You always had to sit in the first six rows at the Unique Theater. They would just walk in front and say “Shhh!” And if there was any talking or anything everybody “Shhhed-up.” Hardy Brounson was the piano player and he could make the piano talk. And it was such fun, because there wasn’t talkies, it was all printed but when there was horses galloping the music was like real wild and furious.
- When the Schnees built the Hollywood Theater we just thought it was the in thing. It was the nicest theater around.

*Leleand Olson*

- I remember the Unique Theater and having to sit in the first six rows. That’s where the kids sat. The Schnees ran both theaters and had quite a reputation for cleanliness. They didn’t allow popcorn until later years. The Hollywood had an electric eye on the water fountain so when you bent down to drink, the water just came on. It also had a crying room that was soundproof for parents to take their youngsters if they were upset and crying. That was something.

*David Mickey Shoultz*

- Hardy Bronson played the piano and when the cowboys went fast the piano had to be loud, and of course right in the middle of the good part the film would break. Then we would all make an awful lot of noise until they got it taped together again. You usually had three or four breaks to a movie.
- I can remember the first talkies. Of course half the time the horse would be talking when it was supposed to be the people talking. Then some guy would be standing there talking when it was supposed to be the guy over there talking.
- Before the movie started we had a time scraping up the dime for one guy to get in. Then his job was to go and open that back door in the theater. Then we would sneak in to our seats.

*Iva Scarp Pearson*

- I remember when the first talkie came. It was with Al Jolson. The whole town was excited. Everybody had to go you know. They were going to charge 50 cents for it.

March 4, 1929 Local theater owner Mr. C.F. Schnee, proprietor of the Unique Theater, appeared before the Village Council with a petition, signed by 151 citizens, requesting that the Council put before the voters a decision to conduct moving picture shows on Sundays. He requested this be put to a vote at the village election April 1, 1929. The voters approved this 611 to 392. Mr. Schnee then requested a permit to conduct moving picture shows on Sundays in June of 1929. But the saga was not over! (Source: Council minutes and Independent

## IN THE PARK

### *Carl Gustafson*

- Ran the popcorn wagon by the park. States he made \$1400 in one season, mostly on nights when the band played in the park.
- There was a woman bootlegger in town during prohibition. They would fine her \$100 a year and she would go before the judge and pay her fine. Then she would go right back home and sell another bottle. That was really her license. They would fine her once a year and then they wouldn't bother her again for another year.

### *Donald Larson*

- I can remember as a kid in high school (LHS 1938) that the band would play in the park on Saturday nights until 9 or 9:30 and the stores were all open and people started shopping after the music was over. Those stores stayed open until 11 or 11:30.

### *David Mickey Shoultz*

- Band concerts in the park on Saturday nights were a nickel.

### *Esther Ross*

- On Saturday nights you parked your car along the edge (of the grass ) and when the piece was over everybody leaned on their horn and honked.

## DANCES

### *Marcella Weber Kelly*

- I remember back in 1939 or 1940, I was Chairman of the Meeker County March of Dimes and they had their annual March of Dimes Ball at the community building. And oh it was ever so fancy with a grand march and long dresses. It was held on President Roosevelt's birthday every year January 28.

1950s (late 1940s also) Saturday night dances were held there. The balcony was fully intact and "just beautiful." The charge was 50 cents for top bands like "Whopee John" played. There was "no better dance floor in the area" when the Community building was all waxed and ready for a dance. (Source: personal memories Lavern Rosenow Fischer, Helen Anderson, Kenneth Ness)

Fall 1960 The city started to have weekly teen dances at the Litchfield Community Building. These sock hops were called "Hop Stop" after a contest was held to name the event. Terry Shaw won the contest! The dances were well supervised by parents and only about 5 dances were held. Mike Shaw's band also played at the Litchfield Community Building. The ISD 465 School Board approved a policy for these dances at the request of the Meeker County Ministerial Association. (Source: Terry Tales by Terry Shaw, ISD 465 School Board Minutes)

## SPORTS, NOT RELATED TO SCHOOL

*Stan Ross*

- One time we had 3000 people here to see a baseball game. It was when we played Willmar

November 27 and 28, 1901 Back by popular demand, Uncle Tom's Cabin! The production boasted flying posters, two Pullman cars, 40 people, a uniformed band, and blood hounds. This was the most financially successful production ever put on and people came from as far away as 10 miles to see it. (Sources: Litchfield Independent Review and Scott Brummond paper)

1916 About this time 5 year old Louise Tostenrud remembers going to the opera house to see plays. She remembers that beautiful raised panel balcony the with rectangular panels. It was about 2 1/2 feet high. On top of that another 12 inches was a shiny brass railing that had a maroon velvet curtain on hooks. "That was so the men on the other side of the balcony could not see up our dresses, but we all wore long dresses just in case." The back drops were spectacular. Louise remembers a street scene, a garden scene with a fountain, and one that was all trees. Her favorite was a scene under an apple tree with a man dressed in a Napoleon-style uniform and leaning back in a chair. He had one leg crossed over his knee. The soldier was wearing a black coat, ruffled white shirt, red tricot (?), and blue pants. He had a sword in the scabbard and over-the-knee shiny black boots. The lady next to him was dressed in a white Josephine-style dress with a low neckline. The back drops pulled down like a window shade. The curtains also pulled down like a shade and were the deep garnet or maroon shade with gold fringes. The plays were very popular and well attended! "Ole Olson" plays were performed and these were always some of the most popular. The lead male, Ole, was a Scandanavia, with an accent. In the early scenes he appeared to be a dunce but as the play progressed he always caught the villain and married the prettiest girl!( Source: personal memories, Louise Tostenrud)

March 15 and 16, 1929 The Litchfield Opera House presented "Aunt Lucia" in cooperation with the Litchfield Golf Club. The play was about some 1920's era fraternity men and their escapades. Local men played the parts of the fraternity brothers and scenes included a female impersonator, a flapper chorus comprised of prominent businessmen, and a glee club. The businessmen were dressed to represent every character from Cleopatra to a spinster. ( Source: Litchfield Independent Review)

January 7, 1935 Bert Thulin submitted a plan to the Litchfield City Council to remodel the Litchfield Opera House. A motion was made and passed provided Mr. Thulin could find enough relief labor for the work with the City furnishing the materials.

## LITCHFIELD ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Joe Paddock et al

### AGRICULTURE

*Bill (and Edith) Olson*

- M.L. Halverson was the actual starter of the shipping association. That is when they shipped by rail. And that was one of the first shipping associations in Minnesota, I am sure.

*Wendell Nelson*

- Louis Roberg was a Meeker County farmer. He owned a lot of land. He was a very successful dairy farmer. When he died his estate was 1 million dollars. He set up a program with eight participating schools for scholarships for students. He died in 1978 and in the first ten year period we have given away \$700,000 to students. We still have \$1,250,000 for students.

*Stan Ross*

- In 1884 a cyclone went through the east part of town on over Lake Ripley. My grandfather was going to build a barn for his cattle and had the lumber stacked up. The cyclone blew the lumber away. The boards were stuck in the ground nad some he had to pull out.

*Kenneth Evenson*

- The extension service would have help during the harvest. They would go to the extension service and there would be a whole row of man sitting there. You would just go down there and pick out two or three and take them home.

Andy Quinn (father of current A.C. Quinn) The Quinn family has had an Andrew Quinn on the family farm since 1865. One generation is Andy and the next is A.C., or Ace. The current residents are a father Ace and his son Andy.

- My father, A.C. Quinn, won a medal for the “Best Wheat in the World” at the Chicago Columbian Exposition, World’s Fair, in 1893.
- In the mid-1930s there was a meeting at the old opera house. It had just been remodeled to the community building. Investors were coming to the federal land bank and buying up farm land. All the farmers in Meeker County came. They could not fit in the building. About 100 were standing outside. I suppose I was about 27 and they elected me chair of the committee to write letters to Washington. I was hardly dry behind the ears at that time but I was president of the Farmer’s Holiday Association. A Senator Fraizer from North Dakota helped sponsor the bill. (personal memories of son the current Ace Quinn was that farmers came to the meeting with baseball bats and if a businessman bid on property a man with a bat came next to him and demanded the bid be withdrawn.)
- The Dairyman’s Holiday movement was an effort to shut down all the creameries in the mid-1930s. I was president There was another big meeting with over 500 farmers and they wanted to talk to Alfred Anderson, who owned two creameries. My brother, a Bolin, and I went over to Alfred and sort of stood around him to protect him from the crowd.



## LITCHFIELD ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Joe Paddock et al

### INDUSTRY

*Ray Nelson, Barber*

- I bought the business in 1934 and the dust bowl years were so bad we had to line the windows with paper, like '34, '35, '36 those days it was terrible. There were six barber shops in Litchfield at that time. We all were in basements because it was low rent.

*Wendell Nelson, Attorney*

- In the depression years, Mrs. Ernest Campbell, from the Weyerhauer family, was a very wealthy woman and contributed much to Litchfield. She was reported to have saved the Bank of Litchfield and the story is she put \$150,000 in and saved the bank.

*Ed Kopplin, Economy Gas*

- I eventually ended up being the president of our national association and took a year off and traveled around the United States, my wife and I did. That is the National Propane Gas Association that represents 10,000 businesses like Economy gas.

*Helen Evenson, Telephone Operator*

- I started in 1930 and I earned \$10 a week, that's a 54 hour week with no overtime. No overtime. Then after 2 years I got a week vacation.

*Carl Gustafson, Bartender*

- The golf course guys had to tend bar themselves and take turns. Well one night it was Stuie Nelson's turn and he did not want to. So he hired me to. He said, "I will give you \$15 to work for me tonight. I took in about \$150 on \$475 worth of drinks so after that they hired me. Yes, I was the first bartender there."

### HPC EDUCATION

ORAL HISTORY, 1990

*Iva Scarp Pearson (born 1920)*

- I remember the day we opened the new school—it was October—and we had a teacher, Miss Hare, She had us pick up all our little books and pencils and everything and we marched out of there and right up to the new school. The whole class. Our room was in the southwest corner of the new school and that is where we settled. That was quite a day.

*Genevive Lenhard (born 1915)*

- When the school burnt we went to classes all over town. Different buildings all over. We went to classes in the basement of the bakery. We always had a donut or something that we could eat between classes. We would walk all through town.

I suppose it was 15 minutes between classes or something like that so we could walk. We had our home economics down under Ed Olson's. I learned to make a white sauce there. I learned to do my sewing there too. Our teacher was Mrs. Hughes. I made pajamas with a flat felt seam in that basement.

- When I graduated in 1933 I had two dresses and they cost \$2 each. These were good dresses.
- I came to town for high school. We stayed at Mrs. Quinn Angier's and we paid \$12 a month for room and board. There were 7 of us. We had four girls in one room and three in the other. Then we stayed with Minnie Schultz on East Second Street. There were nine of us in the upstairs of that house. We saw our family on week-ends. We had city heat and I remember one time it was so cold we took the rugs off the floor and covered with them. She would turn the heat off at night you see. And those light bulbs! She would put in a 25 watt bulb and we would put in a 50 watt. Often we went down to the bathroom to study because it was warm and light in there. Imagine, nine of us studying in one bathroom.

*Marcella Weber Kelly (born 1919)*

- I was happy as could be when the school burnt. I thought I would not have to go to school.
- No one had money in the depression. I had one skirt, two pair of pants, two pair of stockings, and a couple shirts and that was the extent of my wardrobe during high school in the 1930s. I graduated in 1937.

*David Mickey Shoultz (born in 1917)*

- Well, you always had your bath on Saturday night, then you had your clothes. Of course, you were always going to die if you did not go to school with clean underwear. If you didn't have clean underwear on....well, "what if you would get hurt and you would die and your underwear is dirty" mom would say. So she had to see that we had clean underwear on. Everybody had to wear clean underwear so you didn't die.
- And the shoes, of course, you had to have plenty of cardboard for the holes in the shoes. Going to school it was a chore because your feet froze before you got there.

Carl Gustafson born 1914 on prohibition "either you drank or you didn't and most people drank" And who did it stop from drinking?

*Elaine Lindell*

- I went to school in a show room and a garage for a while. I went to classes in Watson Hall. It is upstairs over Coast-To-Coast. There was a big hall up there. The only thing was that the room wasn't very big and we were allotted seats. There were two rows of seats pushed together and so my girlfriend and I kind of maneuvered around so that we got to sit together. And when we got our report card that time, we both got D- in conduct. And I can tell you we changed our seats in a hurry.

*Esther Ross (the Lenhardt Hotel put on extra waitresses for the paving crew)*

- Depression quote..."You know as I reflect on it as I lived it you know, it was just a matter of fact. You did the very best with everything you had.

- I was the first class to graduate out of the new school. Prior to that I was running around town like all the rest of them when the school burnt down. I think I had a perpetual sore throat for two years. One of the most comfortable places was the Methodist Church (located on the 400 block of North Marshall). Their dining hall that was attached to the church was more comfortable than a lot of places.

*Wally Stubeda*

- I remember years ago when the referendum failed and they had this big drive all over town to preserve extracurricular. I know the faculty wondered, do you think the town or the community in general values extracurricular over the academics?

*Stan Roeser*

- I think the media reacted (to no extracurricular) I don't know what would have happened if we hadn't had sports for a couple years. We would have been the center of attention.

*Donald C. Larson*

- Going back to the Longfellow School, oh the fun there was watching them put coal in the basement so they could fire the furnace. That was all brought over by horse drawn conveyance. And you would feel so sorry for this fellow on a real cold day pitching the coal down into this hopper. He would be black with coal dust and all he had on his mind was probably that there was another carload of coal on the other side that he would have to unload.
- I remember Bonnie brother, Bruce Anderson, running 97 yards for a touchdown on that old field. Beat Appleton. We just had that one field for everything; no lights so all our games were after school.
- Every spring we would have a play at the opera house. When I was in the second grade I was in an operetta. Our mothers had to buy long cotton underwear and dye them green. Then we had wings with gold dots and we were some sort of bug. Then we had a chorus line and had to dance.

*Andy C. Quinn Sr. (born 1905)*

- Well for the workman, like when they built the school in Litchfield, the workmen were expected to put in 19 hour days, six days a week. That meant 60 hours a week. That was a standard.. There was no Saturday afternoons off.
- Jim McCusker was a cousin of mine. I went to see him and Bernie Bierman play. Jim was the quarterback and Bierman was the end and between the two of them, they developed the forward pass. That was the early years of the pass. I think the success of those teams was due to Dr. Roberston, he played at the University of Minnesota and he was the coach.. The football was different too. It was rounded and you couldn't get your hand around it.

*Lavern Constant Schultz (born 1916)*

- Back when I started teaching in country school in 1935, I got \$50 a month. Then I paid \$12 a month for room and board. I quit to get married in 1939 and I was making \$75 a month. When I returned, there was a shortage of teachers and I got \$400 a month. This was just before the country schools closed in the mid-1960s.

- Actually, we would go to one of the school board members and say we need some books or we need this or that. The school board would meet and give us permission. We would put in an order once a year at St. Paul Book and Stationery. Later on, Walberg's became our headquarters for school equipment.
- In order to get extra library books, the rural teachers could come in every so often and pick out any number of books, like two or three dozen. And then the kids could pick those out and read them. This was because our school library was not adequate at all. We made use of the Litchfield Public Library.

*Karna Agren (born 1914)*

- I never did learn typing and shorthand because it was under the bakery. Well Mr. Woodward, he would have to teach another class at the courthouse so he would give us an assignment and away he would go. Well you know nobody studied. We would go up to the bakery and get things to eat. Then Mr. Woodward was lawyer and when he had a case he would give us the assignment and go to the courthouse. Well, we graduated anyway.
- I think there was quite a controversy over where the school was going to be built., If I remember right, I think the thing that was dreaded most was that all those homes were going to be uprooted.

*Stan Ross*

- I must say this, I think something was lost when the rural schools closed. That was the nucleus of the area, That was the hub.

## **APPENDIX B, HISTORIC HOME INFORMATION, DONNA BROWN AND CHARLIE NELSON**

<b>Photo #</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Style</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1	411 East 5th St	Prairie School	This is the only one of this style in town
2	329 East 4th	Circa 1869	Originally a grainery moved from Forest City later a boarding house.
3	515 North Armstrong	Victorian	
4	510 N Holcombe	Victorian	?? half round half square turret moved from Sibley
5	811 N Holcombe	1857	Log cabin moved from Forest City in 1869
6	811 N Holcombe	Same as above	
7	715 N Holcombe	Victorian	
8	327 N Holcombe	Late 1890s brick	

<b>Photo #</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Style</b>	<b>Notes</b>
9	315 N Holcombe	Victorian	Dr. Chapmans house
10	104 W 4th St.	English Cottage	Original Parsonage for Trinity Episcopal Church
11	519 N Ramsey	Circa 1857	1st Meeker County Court-house moved from Forest City
12	815 N Sibley	1869	Stanton Store moved from Forest City
13	603 S Sibley	Colonial Revival	
14	603 S Sibley	Same as above	
15	512 N Swift	4 Square	
16	502 S Swift	Victorian	
17	502 S Swift	Same as above	
18	528 S Donnelly	1930's Shanty	Shanty but has been updated with siding
19	519 S Yale	1930 shanty	Shanty but has been updated
20	503 N Holcombe	Painted Lady	Originally the Morrison House
21	518 N Holcombe	Victorian late 1880s	August Lenhardt home
22	502 N Holcombe	1908 Victorian	Virtually unchanged inside and out with distinctive porch
23	413 N Armstrong	Victorian 1905	Peter E Hanson wedding gift to Nellie March ballroom on 3rd floor, oak woodwork, servants staircase, beautiful dining room with 10 foot ceilings
24	405 N Armstrong	1904	Peter E Hanson Minnesota State Senator 1895-1898 and Secretary of State 1901-1907 Tile roof same as tile roof on Minnesota State Capitol, 5 fireplaces, grand staircase, oak dining room and cherry woodwork, quadruple brick construction for insulation.
25	326 N Armstrong	Victorian 1910	Distinctive porch
26	406 N Armstrong	1888 Victorian	John T Mullen home Virtually unchanged inside and out built by Mr Hanson



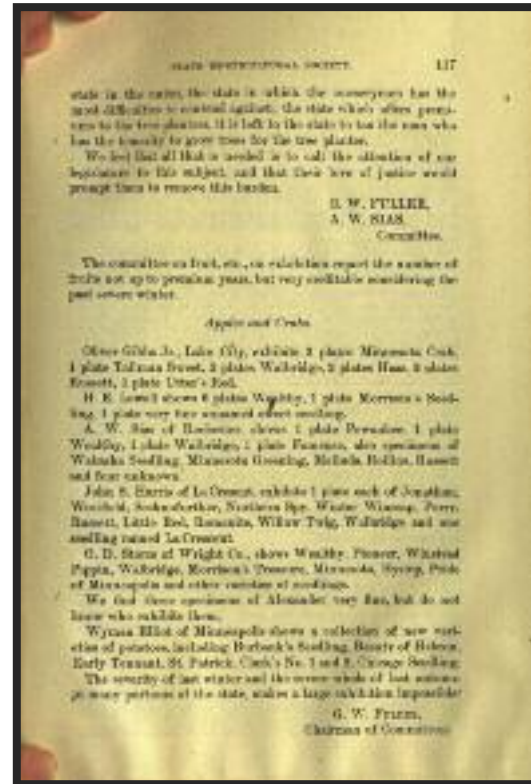
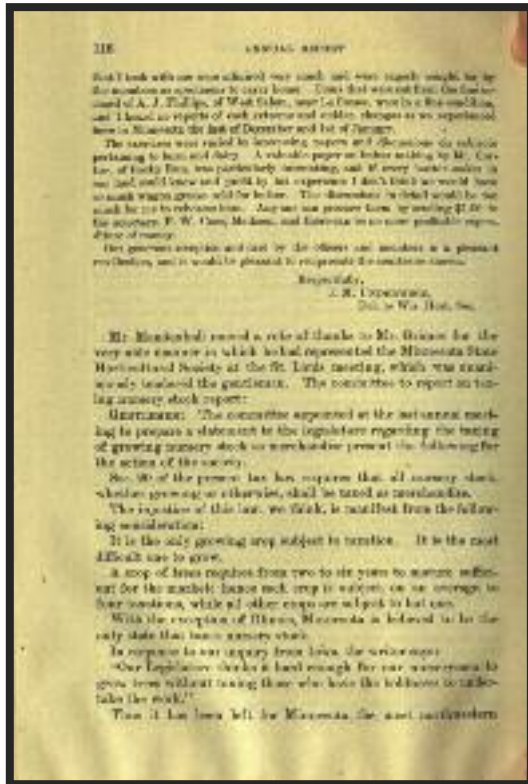
<b>Photo #</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Style</b>	<b>Notes</b>
27	320 N Armstrong	1910 – 1915 Victorian	Tharalson House and Fred Richter former Litchfield mayor distinctive turret wrap around veranda. Now apartments
28	307 N Holcombe	1895 Fortress style Victorian	O. H. Campbell banker, 1920 Nuns Conservatory, distinctive yellow brick, and multiple turrets
29	307 N Holcombe	Same as above	
30	206 S Sibley	1865 Gingerbread	Originally built in 1865 in Forest City moved to Litchfield 1869
31	210 S Sibley	1894 Painted Lady Victorian	Fred Kopplin lumbar yard owner last house on south to receive city heat and even the garage was heated, Extensively restored. Is now a boarding house
32	210 S Sibley	Same as above	
33	326 S Donnelly	1893 Victorian	Moved at some point Home of Gale Sondergaard Academy Award Actress and Bernie Bierman Gopher foot ball coach. Distinctive lattice work.
34	700 S Sibley	1920's Craftsman	
35	910 S Sibley	Late 1800's Victorian	Mr. Sweetman house First house to have running water, has windmill that pumped the water to storage tank in the attic.
36	310 S Sibley	1899 Victorian	Mostly original inside and out. Very distinctive fireplace with copper inlay in dinning room, 5 ornate windows and maple mosaic entryway floor.
37	304 S Sibley	Late 1880's	Two story red brick Lenhardt home. Historically sensitive addition now an office building.

<b>Photo #</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Style</b>	<b>Notes</b>
38	215 S Sibley	1890 Eastlake Cottage with Queen Anne porch	Mr. McClure, local bankers home. Has changed owners only once. Close to original condition including original oil cloth wallpaper in dining room, tin ceilings in kitchen and bath.
39	206 N Marshall	1869	1st proper house built in the city. Truls Nelson house
40	425 N Marshall	1920s Art Deco	
41	508 N Armstrong	Circa 1870	Wandok house Was 1st US Land Office then 1st Litchfield School, later furnature store and cigar factory. Was moved in 1870 from Greenleaf to Litchfield
42	325 N Miller	1869	Home built in city the first year.
43	425 E 1st St.	Circa 1870	Dr. Bacon Civil War artist with Custer in Texas, Dentist, 1879 Photographer, Justice of the Peace in 1870, founding member Frank Daggett Post 35
44	425 E 1st St.	Same as above	
45	807 S Armstrong	1880's Mansard Roof	
46	328 E 5th St.	1920's	Stucco with enclosed porches
47	328 E 5th St.	Same as above	
48	725 N Crescent Lane	1970's Split level	
49	725 N Crescent Lane	Same as above	
50	608 E Third St.	GI Bill "Little Box"	1 of 30 in third street built by George O. Nelson

Approximately 205 were built in the city limits from 1948 to 1960.

## APPENDIX C MN HORTICULTURE SOCIETY, MN LANDSCAPE ARBORETUM ANDERSON LIBRARY

Page 116 and 117 Legislative Issues about taxing fruit trees, Annual Report – 1876



## APPENDIX D RESOURCES FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

### LOCAL

- Litchfield's Historic Ordinance, No. 735
- Meeker County Historical Society

### STATE

- MN Historical Society, St. Paul
- Preservation Alliance of MN, St. Paul

### FEDERAL

- National Park Service
- National Historic Trust

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# Photo Index



No. 106 News Ledger Office, 1917



Cover – Central Park 1874, Meeker County Historical Society, trees were planted  
1872

1. Litchfield Fire Department, unknown date, unknown firemen
2. Brightwood Beach Resort, 1889, Meeker County Historical Society
3. 1889 GAR Encampment, Litchfield, Meeker County Historical Society
4. Wheeler's Barbershop, between 1908 and 1915, Basement 201 North Sibley, Meeker County Historical Society, Nels Ringdahl and Luther Nelson seated in chairs waiting for haircuts.
5. Ames Brickyard, Meeker County Historical Society
6. Litchfield, Sibley Avenue 1875 Meeker County Historical Society
7. City Grocery between 1892 and 1896, 241 Sibley Avenue North, Meeker County Historical Society, MN Historical Society, MM5.9 LT3.1 r1
8. Sibley Avenue, 1870 Meeker County Historical Society
9. Brown Building 1880's, Meeker County Historical Society
10. North Sibley Avenue, west side of 200 block, about 1890 Meeker County Historical Society
11. North Sibley Avenue, east side, December 21, 1889
12. Wells Building fire, November 11, 1908, Meeker County Historical Society
13. 100 Block Sibley Avenue, December 21, 1889, currently DeeAnn's County Village, Meeker County Historical Society
14. 200 Block Sibley Avenue, west side, December 21, 1889, Carincross Building, Meeker County Historical Society
15. Sibley Avenue, east side 200 block, 1930s, Meeker County Historical Society
16. Litchfield Telephone Exchange, East Depot Street, 1940s, Grace Miller ( front), Dorothy Palmer (middle), Helen Evenson ( back), Meeker County Historical Society
- 16 A Sibley Avenue, about 1950
17. Christmas photo, 1964, Independent Review collection
18. Lenhardt Hotel coming down December 1978, Meeker County Historical Society
19. Pizza Ranch, partial demolition January 1984, Meeker County Historical Society
20. Litchfield Glove Factory, 1904, 127 Sibley Avenue, upstairs, Meeker County Historical Society
21. Litchfield Woolen Mills, 1909, Meeker County Historical Society
22. Anderson Chemical timeline, photo
22. A Anderson Chemical Timeline, website
23. Litchfield Hatchery, 1940s, Meeker County Historical Society, Terry Shaw research

24. Cargill, 1940s, Cargill collection
- 24 A Litchfield Produce, date unknown, Meeker County Historical Society, Terry Shaw research
25. Cozy Cab, Lavon Grotto, Custom Products 1966
26. Hand car photo, date unknown, Meeker County Historical Society
27. Albert Van Spence, barbeque 1886, Meeker County Historical Society
28. Albert Van Spence, Civil War photo, Meeker County Historical Society
29. Brightwood Beach Resort bus, Meeker County Historical Society
30. Johnson Brothers road grater, horse drawn, 1930. Meeker County Historical Society
- 30A. Johnson Brothers WPA project; Hwy 4, Grove City. 1932. Meeker County Historical Society
- 30B. Johnson Brothers Alkan Highway. 1943. Meeker County Historical Society
31. Deb Thomas Trucking. 1974. Left to right; 1963 Hendrickson, 1967 Hendrickson, 1969 Hendrickson, 1970 Hendrickson, 1964 GMC, 1966 International, 1969 Hendrickson, 1973 Greightliner, 1974 Freightliner, 1976 Freightliner. Pictured are 10 of 11 in fleet. Gene Thomas collection
32. Waiting at the elevator, 1893, Meeker County Historical Society
33. Meeker County Fairground map, 1897, current Litchfield Golf Course, Meeker County Historical Society, Meeker County Plat Map
34. Litchfield Shipping Yards, 1910, MN Historical Society, MM5.9 LT9 r4, note cattle that have been herded and the bull in the pen
35. Land 'O Lakes Advertisement, Meeker County Historical Society
36. National Dairyman's Holiday, Litchfield 1933, Mayor Alfred Anderson and Vic Sederstrom on the wagon, Bonnie Anderson Dille Collection, Meeker County Historical Society
37. Meeker County Power and Light, 1936, Community Building,
38. Litchfield Aerial Photo Minneapolis Tribune paper, 1901, Meeker County Historical Society, taken from a hot air balloon by a photographer from the Tribune
39. 206 Marshall Avenue North, Litchfield's First House built by George B. Waller, Sr. Meeker County Historical Society, Charlie Nelson and Donna Brown Home Tour
40. Senator Hanson's Home on North Marshall Avenue with his daughter's home to the right, Meeker County Historical Society
41. Rosemary Home, Sibley Avenue South, Meeker County Historical Society
42. East Third Street post WWII homes 2009 photo
43. Gloria Dei Apartments, Augustana Lutheran Homes, Inc., 1967

44. Robertson Hospital, Meeker County Historical Society
45. Litchfield Hospital, 1910, North Holcombe Avenue, Meeker County Historical Society, MN Historical Society, MM5.9 LT7.1 r4
46. Meeker County Memorial Hospital, 1952, Meeker County Historical Society, MN Historical Society, MM5.9 LT7.1 r2
47. Meeker Memorial Hospital, 2009
48. Litchfield Junior Class, 1909, Meeker County Historical Society
49. Washington School, 1880 to 1929, Meeker County Historical Society, MN Historical Society, MM5.9 LT5.2 r 10
- 49 A. Litchfield High School Faculty, 1882, Meeker County Historical Society
50. Garfield School, 1886 to 1915, Meeker County Historical Society, MN Historical Society, W.O. Olson, MM5.9 LT5.2 r9
51. Lincoln School, 1891 to 1953, Meeker County Historical Society, MN Historical Society, MM5.9 LT5.2 r8
52. Longfellow School, 1901 to 1985, Meeker County Historical Society, Terry Shaw research
53. Washington School burning, March 11, 1929 Litchfield Fire Department, Gene Thomas Collection
54. Map of possible sites, Independent Review, May 1929
55. Washington High School, 1931, Meeker County Historical Society, MN Historical Society, MM5.9 LT5.2 r6
56. Wagner School, 1953 Meeker County Historical Society
57. St. Philip's School, 1953, Meeker County Historical Society, Terry Shaw research
58. LHS 1965 Annual, the first class to graduate from the "new" high school
59. Ripley Elementary School, 1969, Meeker County historical Society
60. Middle School Addition, 1994, Meeker County Historical Society
61. Trinity Church, 1872 National Register of Historic Places, Meeker County Historical Society
62. Litchfield Presbyterian Church, 1870
63. Bishop Herbert Chilstrom, Litchfield native and first bishop of the Evengelical Lutheran Church in America, 1987
64. Carnegie Library, 1904 Meeker County Historical Society
65. Litchfield Public Library, North Sibley Location, 1978 to 2000
66. Litchfield Public Library, 2001, Library Collection
67. Central Park at Christmas, P.J. Casey Collection, Meeker County Historical Society
68. Central Park and gazebo, Meeker County Historical Society, Terry Shaw research

69. Anderson Gardens, Anderson Gardens Steering Committee
70. Litchfield Opera House, August 1, 1908 MN Historical Society The crowd is going to see the first Edison one reeler movie.
71. Litchfield Township Hall, 1890 interior
72. Professor O. A. "Music" Olson, Meeker County Historical Society
73. 1894 High Diver, Meeker County Historical Society
74. Litchfield City Band, 1906 at the Litchfield Opera House, Meeker County Historical Society
75. Gale Sondergaard, Meeker County Historical Society
76. Mary Angell, Meeker County Historical Society
77. Litchfield City Band, 1935 at the newly remodeled Litchfield Community Building
78. Hollywood Theater, 1935 Opening Night Program, Meeker County Historical Society
79. Floyd Warta as Santa for Artic Cat, Meeker County Historical Society
80. Pan American Celebration, 1942, Adolph Escen Collection
- 80 A. Pan American Celebration, 1942, Adolph Escen Collection
81. Wedding reception in the basement of the community building, 1948 Waitresses for the double wedding of Marilyn Gunderson to Wilbur Judd and Marcelyn Gunderson to Donald Raduenz, Burleigh Photography
82. Litchfield Area Male Chorus, 2009, Litchfield Area Male Chorus files
83. LHS Band, June 1994 Pie-in-the-Park, Schaefer Photography
84. Keith Johnson, LHS Band Director
85. Feeding hungry teenagers, Washington D.C. band trip, summer 1994 Schaefer Photography, used with permission, Lois Gustafson mother of 9 year old Michael
86. Litchfield Power Plant, 1949
87. 2005 City Hall
88. 1923 Litchfield Power Plant. 3rd Street & North Miller. Taken down in 1993
89. Missouri River Hydroelectric plant
90. Old Fire Hall, 1889, on West Second Street, used until 1963 when the current building on Ramsey Avenue was built
91. Fire Chief Herm Kruger recognizing four firefighters with 193 years of service. Litchfield Fire Department, June 1952
92. Red dispatch light at the hotel corner, Meeker County Historical Society
93. Harriett Wagner grave, uncared for Lake Ripley Cemetery

- 94. Albert Van Spence grave, cared for by a member of the community
- 94 A. Advertisement, 1871 newspaper for Meeker County Nurseries
- 95. Litchfield Golf Clubhouse, note field stone fire place, Meeker County Historical Society
- 96. Litchfield Girls Golf Club bridge tally, 1940, Meeker County Historical Society
- 97. Litchfield Post Office, motorized bike for mail delivery, 1908 Bert Angier
- 98. 1959 Christmas lights, Bonnie Dille collection, Meeker County Historical Society
- 99. World War I parade, Meeker County Historical Society
- 99 A. Litchfield Centennial, July 1969, Meeker County Historical Society
- 100. GAR Hall, 1887, Meeker County Historical Society
- 101. GAR Hall interior, 1951 Meeker County Historical Society
- 102. Fire at the GAR Hall, February 1964, Meeker County Historical Society
- 102 A. Main Room GAR Hall, Meeker County Historical Society
- 103. Litchfield Wood Market, East Second Street, 1906, Meeker County Historical Society, MN Historical Society, MM5.9 LT9 r3
- 104. Kellman Machine Shop, Meeker County Historical Society
- 105. Hot Air Balloon, 1899
- 106. News Ledger Office, 1917, Meeker County Historical Society
- 107. Floyd Warta as Santa, 1972, Meeker County Historical Society

