

A DECADE OF CHANGE: MURRAY COUNTY IN THE 1920S

This slideshow contains only a fraction of the information highlighted in the MCHS's new exhibit of the same name. If you enjoy this presentation be sure to come into the museum to see the rest of the exhibit!



The Exhibit

The information in this PowerPoint has been pulled from the exhibit "A Decade of Change: Murray County in the 1920s."

This exhibit opened at the Murray County Museum on September 10, 2020 after two years of hard work putting it together.

The exhibit was put together in two phases: research and exhibit implementation. Both phases were funded through Minnesota Legacy Amendment grants applied for by Museums Director Janet Timmerman. Anita Talsma Gaul was hired to complete the research in phase one. Anita stayed on volunteering her time to help Janet with phase two—creating 26 interpretive posters between the two of them!

With the help of other staff members and several amazing volunteers the exhibit now fills the entire temporary exhibit area and will be available for viewing at least throughout 2021.



Janet Timmerman (Left)
Anita Talsma Gaul (right)

Introduction

A decade of economic depression in farm country.

A time of social change as women exercise their newly-won right to vote and young women assert more independence and autonomy.

A decade of social experimentation as Prohibition goes into effect and the nation struggles to change its drinking habits and social customs and law enforcement struggles to enforce the law.

A time of changing technology as traditional modes of labor, travel, and communication are replaced by new modes such as the tractor, automobile, and radio.

An era of political conservatism as anxiety about the changing social and cultural landscape, combined with the disillusionment resulting from World War I, prompt a desire for a “return to normalcy.”

When the fear of change and economic hardship exacerbate underlying racial and religious tensions, fueling the rise of xenophobia, white supremacy, anti-Semitism, and Nativism.

This is the 1920s in Murray County.



Highways and Byways: The Babcock Roads



Early road grading in Lowville Township

In 1920, Minnesotans approve a constitutional amendment—popularly known as the “Babcock Amendment”—after the state’s first Highway Commissioner Charles M. Babcock—allowing for the creation of a state highway system. Subsequent legislation in 1921 implemented the measure and established funding sources for this new highway system, including a tax on all registered motor vehicles. Prior to this, road maintenance was the responsibility of individual cities, counties, and townships.

Highways and Byways: The Babcock Roads



John Price Gravel Company, 1927.



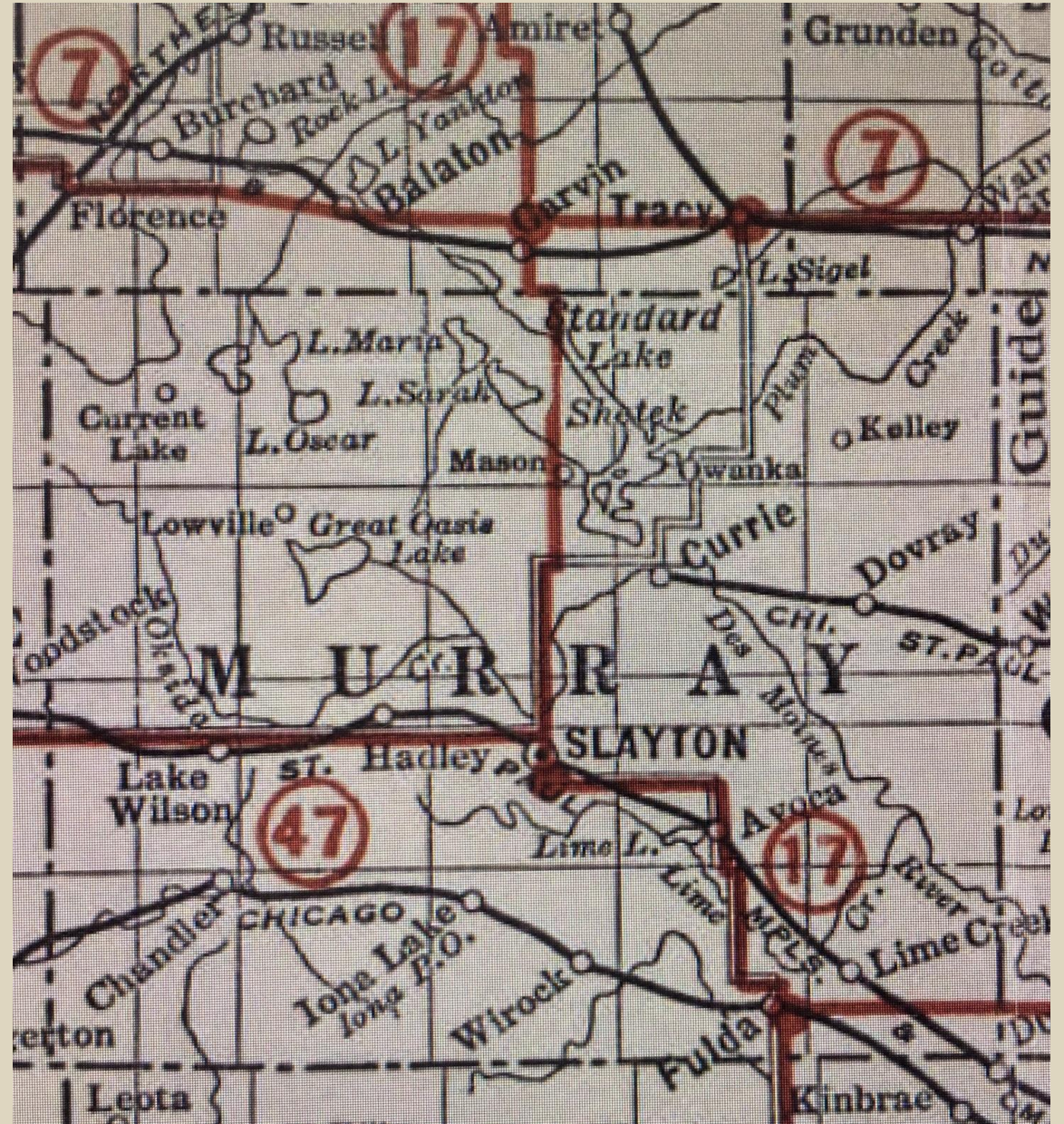
John Price Gravel Company, 1927.

Although Murray County residents voted against this amendment by a 53% - 47% margin, they nevertheless experienced immediate benefits from the new state highway system. By mid-1921, the state had taken over 56 miles of roads in the county and made them part of the State Truck Highway System (nicknamed "Babcock Highways").

This included the Fulda-Avoca-Slayton road and the Slayton-Garvin road (then Highway 16/17, now part of Highway 59), and the Woodstock-Lake Wilson-Slayton road (then Highway 47, now part of Highway 30. These new state highways were graded and graveled by the end of 1921; they were turned to hard surface roads in the 1930s.

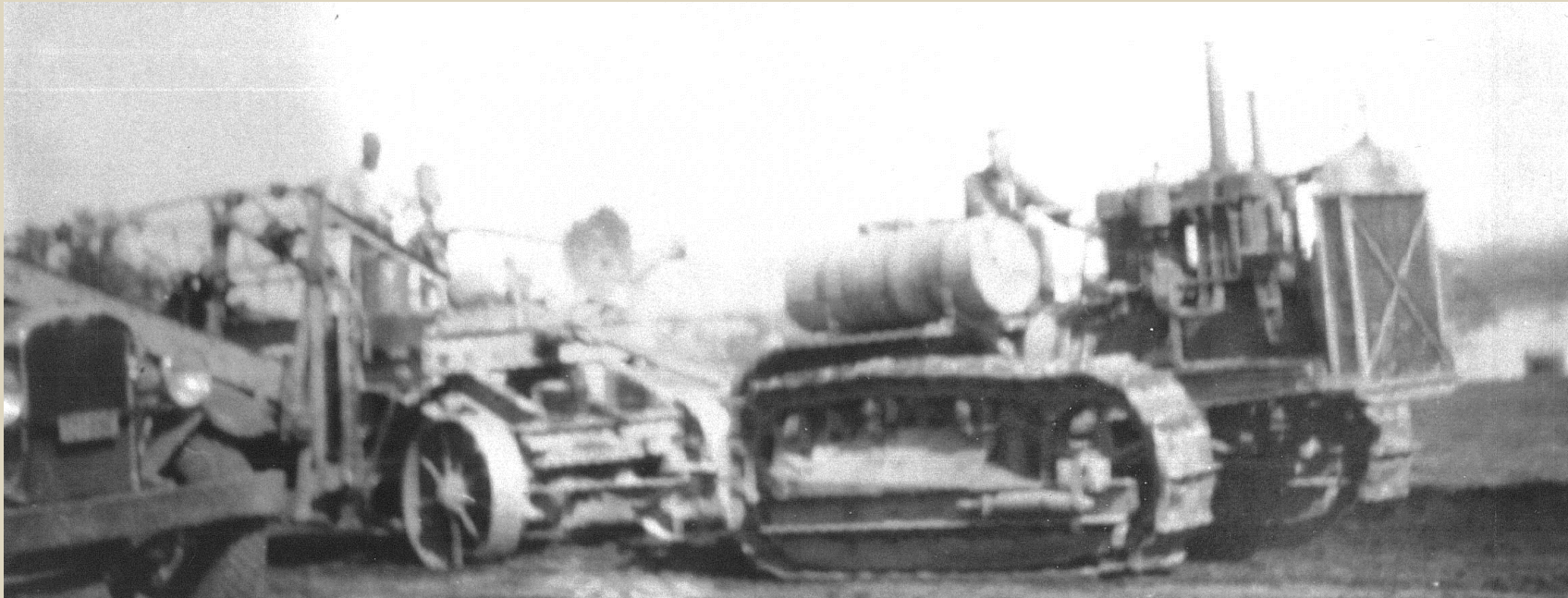
Highways and Byways: The Babcock Roads

Designated State Highways taken
over from the County.



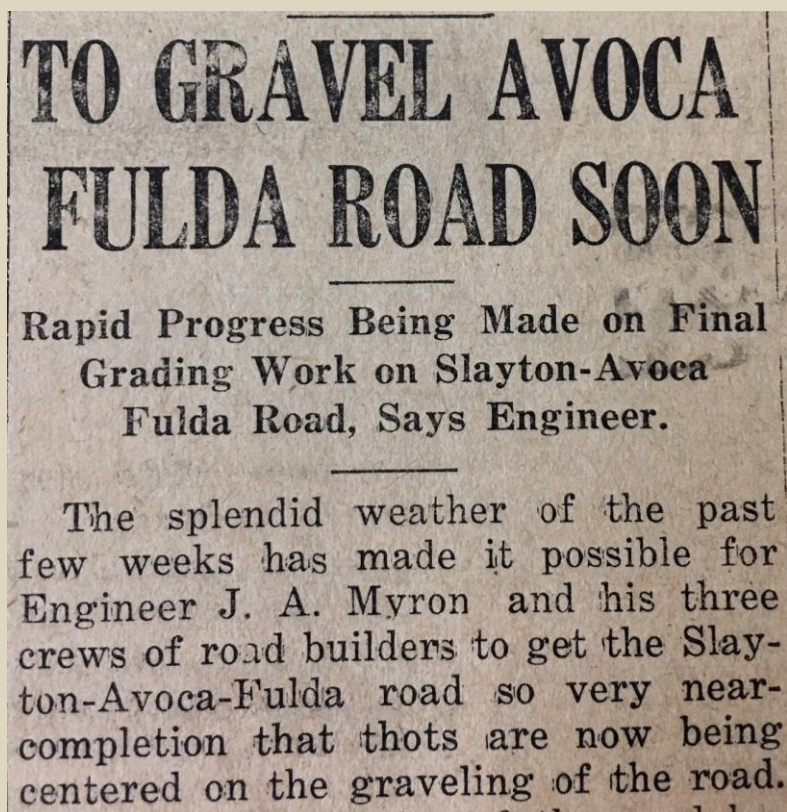
Highways and Byways: The Babcock Roads

The grading and paving of roads led not only to a better transportation system, it also created business opportunities for local residents. For example, John R. Price, of Slayton, ran a profitable gravel company. Others, such as John Wilkinson of Lake Wilson, became expert road graders and purchased the equipment necessary for a growing roadwork operation.



Wilkinson Cat 60 and grading equipment, 1920s.

Highways and Byways: The Babcock Roads



Murray County Herald, 1923.

There was opposition to these improvements, however. Local residents formed a Taxpayers Service League in the early 1920s to protest what they viewed as excessive county expenditures on ditch and road construction. Four hundred people showed up at the Murray County Courthouse in February 1921 to protest these expenditures and demand an audit of the county's financial records. Another protest at the courthouse in October 1923 drew a crowd of 1,000 farmers. The League continued to meet throughout the early 1920s to advocate for lower taxes and reduce spending. Still the county continues to improve the roads.

Temperance in Minnesota

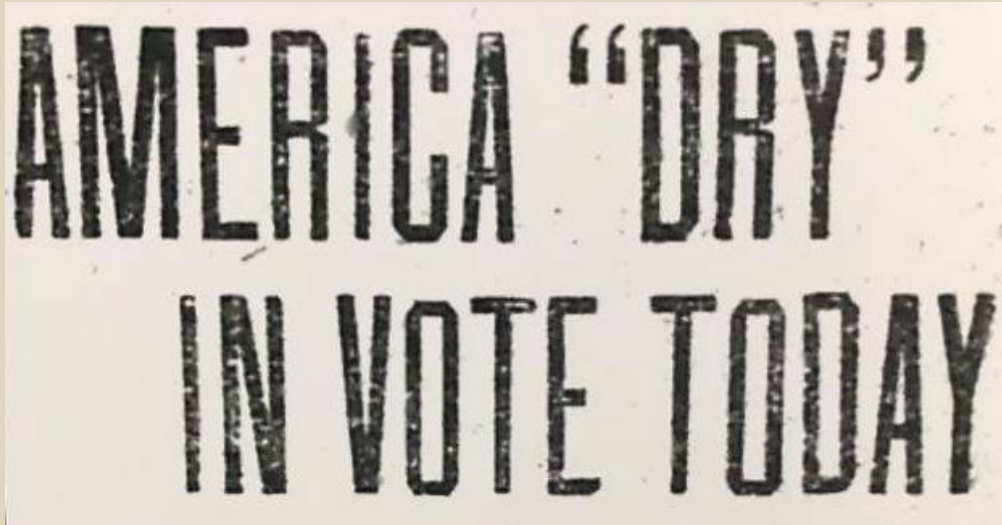


James McCormick's Bar, Currie.

Temperance – the effort to limit the sale and consumption of alcohol – began in the late 19th century. The Catholic Total Abstinence League (CTAL) was founded in 1869 and the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was founded in 1875. Locally, the first chapter of the CTAL organized in Avoca in 1882, followed by a chapter of the WCTU in Slayton in 1887.

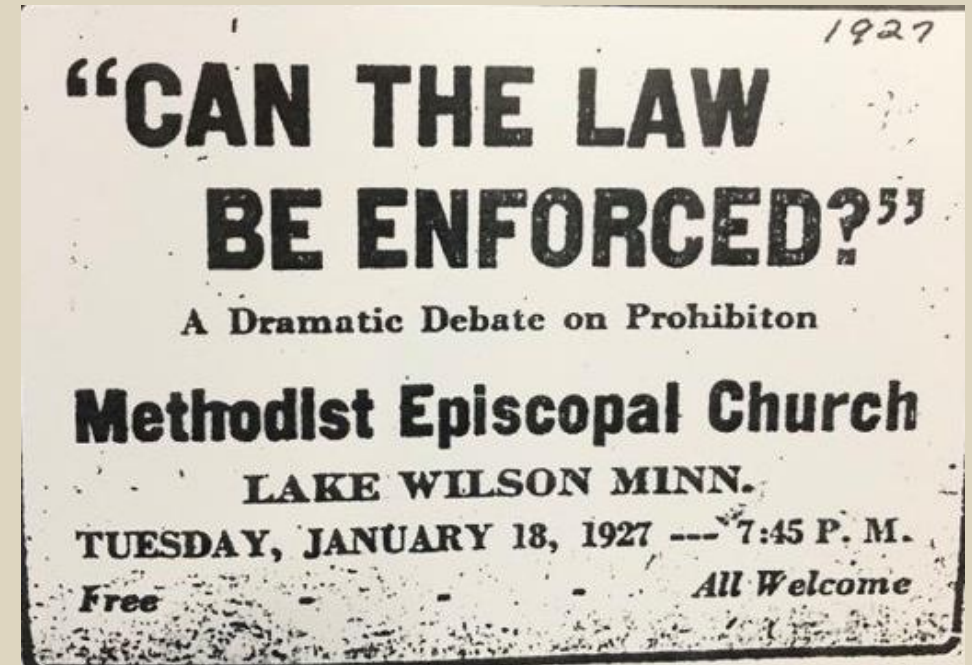
Temperance in Minnesota

The temperance movement achieved its first victory in Minnesota with the passage of the High License Law of 1887. The law set high liquor license fees of \$1,000 annual in large cities, \$500 annually in small towns (\$27,700 and \$13,900 in current value). It also prohibited liquor sales on Sundays and selling to minors.



AMERICA "DRY"
IN VOTE TODAY

Lake Wilson Pilot, January 23, 1919.



1927
**"CAN THE LAW
BE ENFORCED?"**
A Dramatic Debate on Prohibition
Methodist Episcopal Church
LAKE WILSON MINN.
TUESDAY, JANUARY 18, 1927 --- 7:45 P. M.
Free All Welcome

Lake Wilson Pilot, January 1927.

Temperance in Minnesota



Currie Pool Hall.

In 1915, Minnesota passes the County Option Law. Under this law, the choice to be “wet” (permit liquor sales) or “dry” (ban liquor sales) would be determined by voters in each county. On June 5, 1915 – dubbed “Blue Monday” – Murray County residents voted in favor of going “dry” by a vote of 1,239 to 1,015. According to the law, all saloons had to close in 6 months. On December 7, 1915, Murray County went dry.

By the time the 18th Amendment to the US Constitution prohibiting the “manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors” in the United States went into effect on January 17, 1920, Murray County had already been dry for four years.

Fashion and Popular Culture



Young people enjoyed new forms of entertainment in the 1920s. Young women in particular challenged traditional gender expectations and social norms by adopting new fashions and behaviors, prompting disapproval—even outrage—from social conservatives.

Young women wore new fashions during this era. They were called “flappers.” The flapper style featured loose-fitting dresses with shorter hem lines and exposed arms and ankles. Women cut their hair short and the bob became a popular hair style. Local beauty shops advertised 25-cent bobs, although one Fulda hairstylist conscientiously objected to the new style and refused to cut women’s hair short.

Fulda Free Press, November 28, 1929.

Fashion and Popular Culture



**Silk and
Wool
Dresses**

\$19.50

\$22.50

\$29.50



Advertisement from PJ Nelson
Department Store. Murray County
Herald, September 2, 1926.

**Fulda Barber Has
No Time for Bobs**

Fulda Free Press,
November 3, 1927.

Fashion and Popular Culture



Rex Theater, Currie. Image provided by
End-o-Line Railroad Park & Museum.

Movies became an especially popular form of entertainment. There were movie theatres in Currie, Fulda, Iona, Lake Wilson, and Slayton. Initially movies were silent but talking pictures ("talkies") arrived at the end of the decade. Slayton's Murray Theatre was the first to feature a talkie, "The Rainbow Man" in October 1929, followed by "Follies of 1929" at Fulda's Crystal Theatre on Thanksgiving Day 1929.

Fashion and Popular Culture

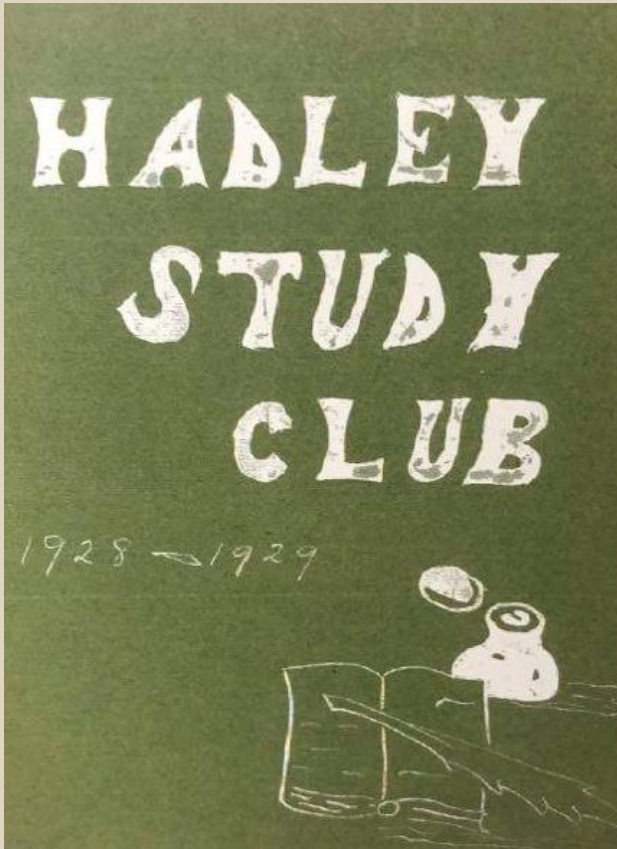
DANCE MARATHON AT TEPEEOTAH SOON

**Manager Jack O'Brien Announ-
ces Sensational Feature; Ap-
plication Already Received**

Murray County Herald, August 28. 1928.

Dance marathons became a national fad. The first one in Murray County occurred at Tepeeotah in 1928. After the weekly Friday dance ended, the dance floor was cleared for the five couples registered and the marathon began at 2:00 A.M. on Saturday, August 11. Five days later, the Murray County Herald reported that four couples remained, still going strong after 124 consecutive hours of dancing. John McKenny of New Prague and Ruth Yeaman of Tracy ultimately won the contest and the \$300 cash prize by dancing 222 total hours or just over 9 days.

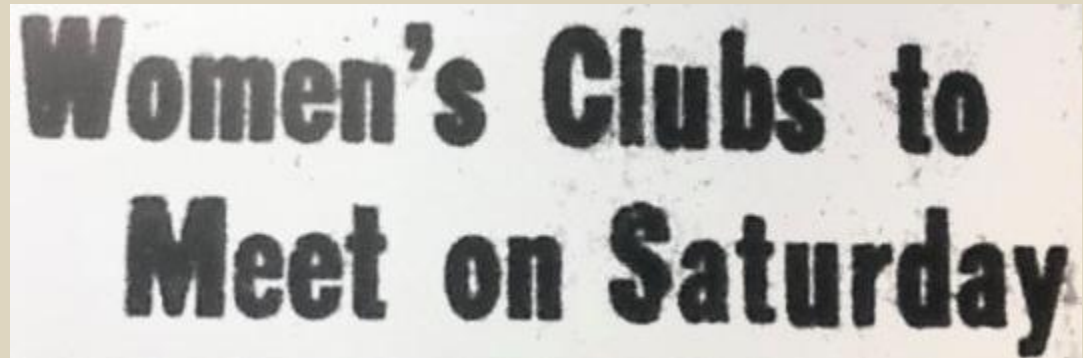
Women's Clubs



Hadley Study Club Program Cover,
1928-1929.

In the 1920s, the women of Murray County became more politically engaged and socially active. Women formed new clubs and organizations, participated in sports, and engaged in new forms of entertainment.

One of the most active women's organizations was the National Federation of Women's Clubs. Several county clubs belonged to the Federation including the Hadley Study Club, Lake Wilson Progressive Club, Fulda Reading Club, Avoca Reading Club, and the Slayton Monday Study Club.



Fulda Free Press, May 9, 1929.

Women's Clubs



Some of the first members of the "Mothers Club", about 1927, which later became the "This and That Club". Left to right: Mary Dahl, Ruth Cook, Jessie Barnard, Ada Rice, Elsie Powell, and Ida Kravig.

Chandler Mothers Club.

The clubs held monthly meetings, but they also met in a County Federation meeting twice per year. Each unit took its turn hosting. The Lake Wilson club hosted the spring Federation meeting in May 1929, where attendees were treated to a day-long programs including musical numbers, a theatrical performance, a lecture on "The Efficient Woman and the Efficient Club," and the Flower Drill conducted by students of the Lake Wilson school, as reported by the Fulda Free Press.

Women's Clubs



Fulda Reading Club.

The purpose of these clubs was to increase women's awareness of important issues and improve their communities. The Hadley Study Club, organized in 1922, as the Hadley Political Study Club, usually debated current legislation and often wrote their local representatives to inform them of their opinions. In contrast, the Slayton Monday Study Club usually chose non-political topics. For example, "Music" was the subject of study in 1924.

Women's Clubs

The Monday Study Club also performed community service projects such as maintaining an outdoor ice-skating rink in the winter months, sending gifts of books and mittens to the students at the Pipestone Indian School, and sponsoring essay contests for local school children. The club founded Slayton's first public library in 1935.

The Monday Study Club still exists today, one of the longest-running clubs in the county. It celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2016.



2016 Monday Study Club. Image provided by Judy Horn.

Artifacts Included in the Exhibit



Maytag Gas Washing Machine.
Donated by R. Vandervoort.
Circa 1922.

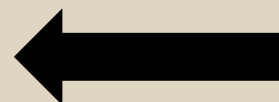


Inside View.



Twin Tub "Easy" Washing Machine with
vacuum cup technology. Syracuse Washing
Machine Company. Donated by the Walt
Benton Estate. Circa 1920-1932.

Artifacts Included in the Exhibit



Radio Speaker.
Atwood Kent Type E3.
Donated by Mae Wilson.
Circa 1927.



Neutrowound Radio "Super - Six" Model.
Donated by Melvin Johnson. 1926.

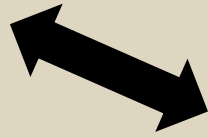
Artifacts Included in the Exhibit



Open



Closed



Opening/Closing



Turn signal indicator made by the Furan Manufacturing Company of Thief River Falls. Lars Furan, one of the founders, was born in Lake Sarah Township on June 23, 1889 to John and Beret (Knutson) Furan. Donated by Wallace Sagmoen. Circa 1920s.

Artifacts Included in the Exhibit



Marcel Wave Iron. Donated
by Jess Hungerford.
1920.



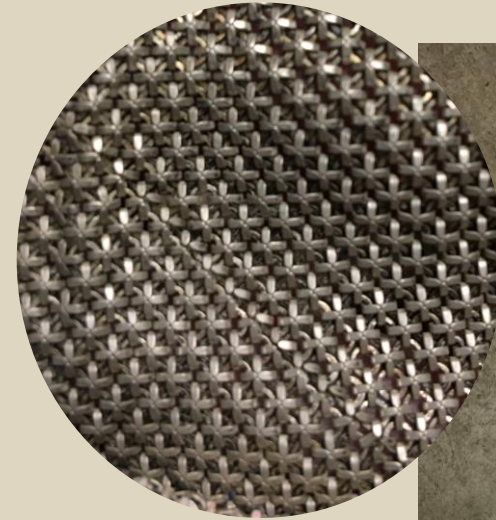
A young woman with
marcel waves in her hair.
1920s scrapbook, MCHS
Collection.



Artifacts Included in the Exhibit



Steel Cut Bead Bag. Made in France. Donated by Kathy DeBoer. Owned by Eleanor Warren. Circa 1920s.



Mandalian Enamel Mesh Bag. Donated by Harry Liabe. Belonged to a member of the Hyslop family. Circa 1915 – 1920s.



Artifacts Included in the Exhibit



Wedding Outfit. Worn by Julia Moffatt on her March 18, 1920 wedding day to John Van de Braak. Donated by Harriet Braun. 1920.

These are both wedding dresses worn by Murray County women in the 1920s. Notice the change in style from 1920 to 1927.

Wedding Dress and Hat. Worn by Hattie Risting on her September 1, 1927 wedding day to Miles Godfrey. Donated by JoAnn Klingbile. 1927.

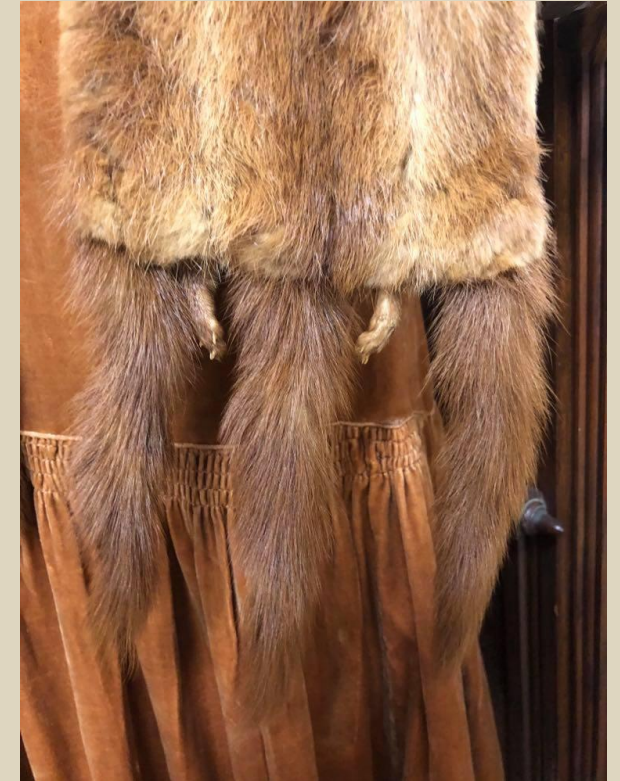
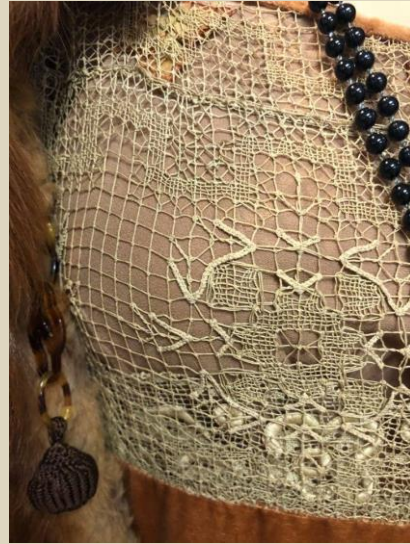


Artifacts Included in the Exhibit



Velvet and lace dress with a crepe bralette slip. Circa 1920s.

Mink stole made by the O. Tatkin Fur Company of Saint Paul.
Donated by B. O. Clauson Estate.



The mink stole is adorned with mink tails and feet!

So Much More To See!

We are now open to the public by appointment!

Call us at 507-836-6533 to schedule an appointment Tue. – Fri., 10am – 5pm to see

A Decade of Change: Murray County in the 1920s!

Other topics in the exhibit include:

Changes on the Farm
The Farm Bureau
Murray County 4-H
The Co-operative Movement

Transforming Transportation
Changes with Electricity
The KKK in Murray County
Cow Pasture Pool (Golf)

Women's Suffrage
Women's Sports
Anna Sheerin Lowe
Ada B. Wise

The Brake Farm Bust
Making Moonshine