

OVERLOOK

Cook County Historical Society • Biannual Newsletter • December 2021

Ground Observer Corps and Operation Skywatch



Skywatch observer in Grand Marais Harbor c1957

International Dark Sky Sanctuary



Aurora Borealis in Cook County. Photo credit, Travis Novitsky

The skies above Cook County have been observed for thousands of years – but not always for the same reasons

The North Shore played an important role in the preparation to defend the U.S. during the Cold War, which started over 70 years ago. As early as 1946, the Permanent Joint Board on Defense, a U.S.-Canadian organization, was planning what would become the Pine Tree Line. In 1949, Congress put money toward the project after the Soviet Union’s successful atomic bomb test. The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), a binational organization of both the U.S. and Royal Canadian Air Forces, ran the Cold War detection program. Running right through Cook County, the Pine Tree Line was one of the first coordinated systems for

(Continued on page 8)

For thousands of years, the beautiful and expansive night skies above Cook County have been studied and celebrated. In 2020, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW), which spans Cook, Lake and St. Louis counties, became a designated Dark Sky Sanctuary by the International Dark-Sky Association. One of only 13 in the world, it is the largest to date. The U.S. Forest Service had been working towards gaining this status for the BWCAW since 2008.

An International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) Dark Sky Sanctuary is “public or private land that has an exceptional or distinguished quality of starry nights and

“Conservation and preservation laws, policy and guidance all lead to the protection of the night skies for scientific, natural, educational, cultural, and public enjoyment values, which are all part of protecting wilderness character”

- BWCAW Program Manager Ann Schwaller

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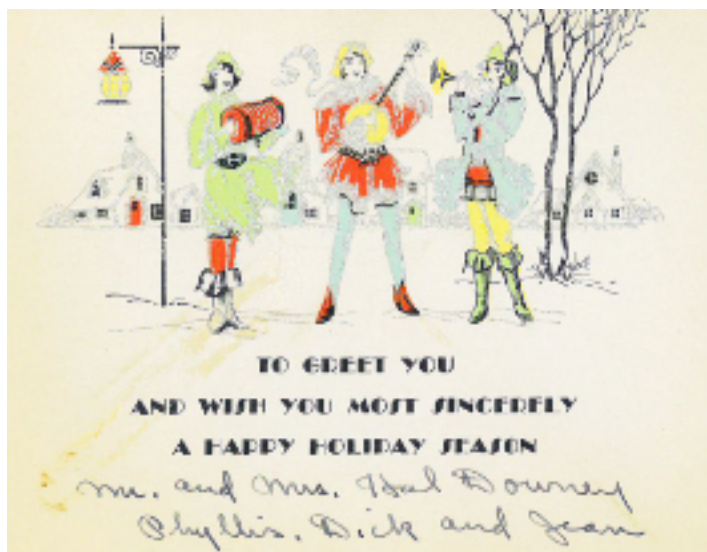
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Thank you to our Business Members!

- Blue Water Cafe
- Cook County Whole Foods Coop
- Croftville Road Cottages
- Edward Jones
- George Humphrey Contracting
- Hungry Jack Outfitters
- Mangy Moose Motel
- Minnesota Children's Press
- Nina Works!
- North Shore Waste
- Red Pine Realty
- Smith Law, PLLC
- The Mayhew Inn
- Tofte Construction
- Tuscarora Lodge & Canoe Outfitters
- Wise (Women's Initiative for Service and Education)

Lifetime Membership (Business)

- Cook County Council on Aging
- DeLonais Foundation
- Edwin E. Thoreson, Inc.
- Johnson's Foods
- Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation
- Lions Club
- North Shore Federal Credit Union



Greeting card sent from the Downey family in Minneapolis to Dr. and Mrs. Frank Hicks in Grand Marais in 1933



Mission

The purpose of the Historical Society shall be the collection, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge about the history of Cook County and to relate it to the history of the State of Minnesota.

Board of Directors

- Marja Erickson, President
- Myron Bursheim, Vice President
- Claire Smith, Treasurer
- Barb Backlund (Ex-officio)
- Brian Tofte
- Dean Farnum
- Doug Bruce
- Edward Hedstrom
- John Jacobsen
- Laurie Spry

Ann Sullivan, County Representative

Staff

- David Kinworthy, Director of Development
- Katie Clark, Director of Operations
- Dennis Waldrop, Museum Manager & Archives Specialist
- Aliya Marxen, JHP Art Gallery Manager
- Doug Andrus, Facility Caretaker



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PRESIDENT'S REPORT



Photo credit Renee Kinworthy

Greetings!

At Thanksgiving, I read an article about how the hardest thing for people is when things change. It can be very dramatic for some people to go from a home cooked meal to eating out instead - or eating something other than the traditional turkey dinner. Over our dinner conversation we wondered, just when did green bean casserole become a staple of the Thanksgiving meal? It is interesting to search out the oldest person in your family and ask them how their Thanksgivings have changed over the years. The same is true for Christmas. There are still many people alive that used to light their trees with candles instead of the multicolored twinkle lights we have now. I wonder what we will be eating 40 years from now for our traditional Thanksgiving? How will we be decorating our trees? Will we even have trees?

I hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving and has a wonderful Christmas full of tradition and new experiences. Thank you again for all your support for the Historical Society - we are ever so grateful for each and every one of you.

Marja Erickson



Bus at Lutsen Resort c 1951



Trout Derby picnic and snow wall c1959. Photo by MJ Humphrey, from Rhonda Silence/News-Herald



Child with ski pole near Lutheran Church in Grand Marais. Matt Johnson Family Album.





Director of Operations

This last year brought a return to open facilities and renewed activities. We added Bally Blacksmith Shop to our programming and opened the buildings to the public throughout the summer. We are so very appreciative of all our volunteers who continue to help keep all our sites open and our programming possible.

As we move into the quieter season we are tackling projects that will improve our facilities and programming. The History Museum is working towards making the exhibits accessible to all, catching up on accessioning new items, adding collection items to our online searchable database, and updating the collections policy. Further funding for Chippewa City Church infrastructure work is being sought and the metal shop at Ballys will be set up in order to accommodate the *Nee-Gee* fishing tug restoration project.

Log restoration work will continue with preservative and stain being applied. An exhibition of permanent artworks in our collection will kick off the year and will also introduce a modular historical artwork exhibition being shown year-round in the Anna C. Johnson Gallery.

Thank you for all of your support and interest - please continue to tune in and join us as you are able!

Katie Clark



Director of Development

As 2021 comes to an end there is much to look forward to as we press on to a new year. This next year is shaping up to be a busy one for us in development. We have priorities laid clearly out from the board and we are in pursuit to see them accomplished. We are moving forward with the restoration of the *Nee-Gee* fishing tug and passing down the traditions of wooden boat building. The components of this undertaking are coming together right on time. My mother always reminded me, "preparation is the doorway to opportunity," and we are preparing the next steps for the archival storage facility as well. We are hoping to break ground with site preparation in the summer of 2022. One of our board members said it best, "we owe it to anyone who has ever donated a piece of history to our organization since 1924 to care and preserve it properly." I am very excited to see the archival storage plans realized in the near future! If any of these projects pull at your heart strings and you want to partner with the ongoing preservation of Cook County history, please reach out.

Wishing you and your family all the best in 2022!

David Kinworthy

Tune into our social media to see more news, updates, and stories!

www.cookcountyhistory.org
www.facebook.com/CookCountyHistoricalSociety
www.facebook.com/JohnsonHeritagePostArtGallery

www.instagram.com/jhpartgallery
www.instagram.com/historiccookcounty
YouTube—Historic Cook County (MN)

GRAB A FRIEND OR LOVED ONE FOR A COZY EVENING OF FUN AND CULTURE!

This event is free, though all donations go toward supporting the Cook County Historical Society and our mission.

The Cook County Historical Society Presents
Date Night
Start At
Cook County History Museum
8 Broadway Ave
Or
Johnson Heritage Post Art Gallery
115 Wisconsin Street

Complete an event card by visiting both locations and receive a free beverage at **The Gunflint Tavern**



Start at either the Cook County History Museum (8 Broadway Ave) or Johnson Heritage Post Art Gallery (115 W Wisconsin Street) to begin your evening and pick up an event card. Each site will provide you with a sticker to place on your card, and a completed card can be exchanged for a free glass of beer, wine, or non-alcoholic beverage at The Gunflint Tavern, located at 111 W Wisconsin Street. Completed event cards are only valid for the evening they are handed out, so don't miss your chance to take advantage of this fun filled culture tour!

Date Night is held from 5pm-7pm the last Friday of every art exhibition at JHP Art Gallery. The first few dates are 12/31, 1/28, 2/25, 3/25, 4/22, and 5/20. Tune into our events page at www.cookcountyhistory.org for more updates.

RENT THE JOHNSON HERITAGE POST FOR YOUR NEXT



EVENT

The Johnson Heritage Post Art Gallery is available for private event rentals with the option to rent one room or the whole facility. The facility offers a full kitchen and a spectacular view of the Grand Marais Harbor. This beautiful log structure is a perfect place for holiday parties, weddings, baby showers or most any event you can think of!



Stop by the Gallery to receive an application for rental or find it online at www.cookcountyhistory.org/rental-information. We are currently booking for 2022 events!

For more information, please email jhp@boreal.org or call 218-387-2314.



Blue Lake, Karen Nease



Glass Quilt by Mary Bebie, Sharon Frykman, Lissa Grover, Jeri Person, Bob Pranis, Tony Rau, Lee Ross, Nancy Hemstad Seaton, and Veronica Weadock

JHP



Art Gallery

DATES **ARTISTS/GROUP/EVENT**

November 12 - December 5

The Far and Near, Karen Owsley Nease

December 10 - January 2

The Glass Show, Grand Marais Glass Group

2022 JHP Art Gallery Exhibit Schedule

Jan 7 - Jan 30: Permanent Collection Feature
 Feb 4 - Feb 28: Krystal Brown, Plein Air '21 Grand Prize Winner
 Mar 4 - Mar 27: Winter Plein Air
 April 1 - April 24: North Shore Artists League
 April 29 - May 22: Metalworks Collective
 May 27 - June 19: Dick and Debbie Cooter
 June 24 - July 17: North Woods Fiber Guild
 July 22 - Aug 14: Lake Superior Watercolor Society
 Aug 19 - Sep 11: Alexa Carson
 Sep 9 - Sep 16: Plein Air 2022 Competition
 Sep 16 - Oct 9: Plein Air 2022 Exhibition
 Oct 14 - Nov 6: Books, Mueller, Christiansen
 Nov 11 - Dec 4: North House Folk School
 Dec 9 - Jan 1: Cook County Potters

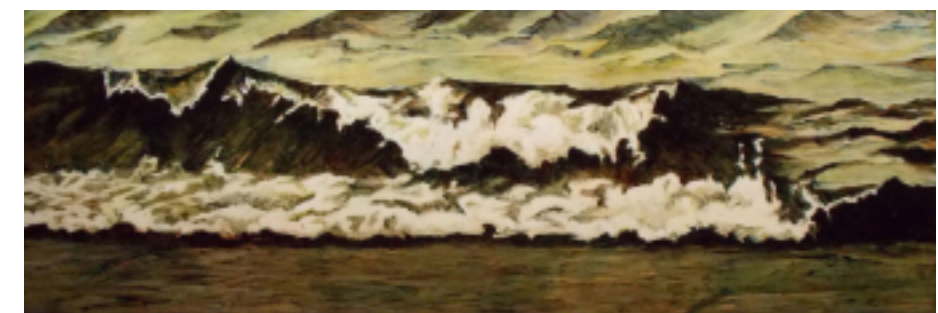
Johnson Heritage Post Art Gallery
 115 W. Wisconsin St. Grand Marais MN 55604

Johnson Heritage Post has had a busy fall leading into an exciting winter! Last month we celebrated the opening of Karen Owsley Nease's show, *The Far and Near*. Her collection celebrates the spirit of Lake Superior through two separate approaches, pairing them together with stunning success.

This December we will close out the 2021 season with an exhibition titled *The Glass Show*. Nine artists have come together to collectively share works made from glass. Full of elegance and color, you won't want to miss their December 10th opening.

Of course, with 2021 wrapping up we are delighted to announce the line-up for our 2022 season. This year will celebrate 13 diverse exhibitions, and we hope you'll get the chance to check them all out.

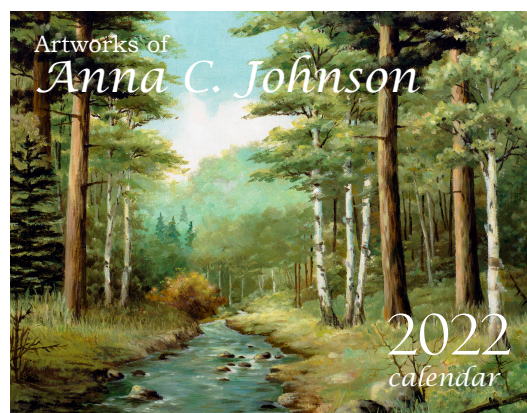
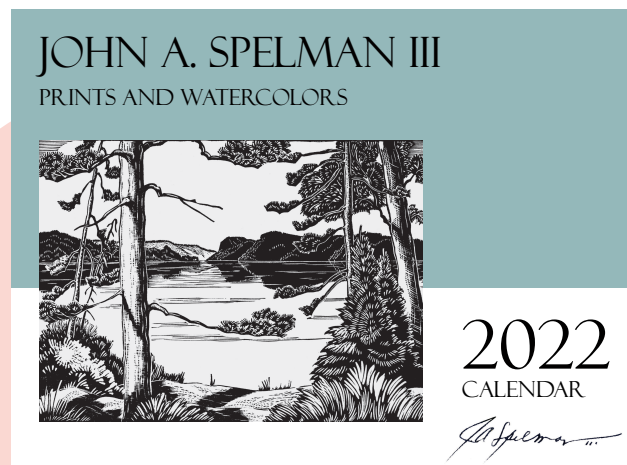
To begin the year, JHP is excited to be curating an exhibition from our permanent collection, celebrating the history of commercial fishing in Cook County. Available for purchase will be several books highlighting stories from the adventurous days of wild lake fishing.



Emerald Waters, Karen Nease

2022 Calendars

The works of Anna C Johnson and John A Spelman III are featured in this year's seasonal calendars. A mixture of paintings, sketches, and block printing make up the offerings from these two prolific artists. Both calendars are available in the JHP Art Gallery gift shop as well as online at www.cookcountyhistory.org.



Lester River, oil painting



The JHP Art Gallery receives much needed log work!
 After discovering multiple old layers of finishes had trapped in moisture and caused logs to rot, earlier this year JHP recruited Isaak Beran of Beran's Handcrafted Log Homes to expertly repair the effected portions. Now, environmentally friendly corn cob blasting is removing those layers of finish. Fine Finish is hard at work and doing an incredible job stripping away the old so we can start fresh! A borate preservative will be applied after blasting to protect the logs through the winter, and a new breathable stain and sealer will be applied in the spring.



early detection of a Soviet bomber attack on North America. The Distant Early Warning (DEW) line was north of the Arctic Circle and the Mid-Canada was located at approximately the 55th parallel. The Pine Tree Line mostly followed the U.S.-Canadian border.

Finland Air Force Base began as a Lashup-permanent radar site with the 756th Aircraft and Warning Squadron on Nov 30, 1951. Its role was to guide interceptor aircraft towards unidentified intruders picked up on radar scope. It was one of 28 radar sites created for the Pine Tree Line. About 350 men were stationed at Finland. Radar development was at an early stage with limited usefulness. The system used a classic pulsed mode of radar which was unable to detect targets close to the ground, therefore "Ground Observer" or "Sky Watch" posts were built. Cook County people did their part acting as volunteer ground observers. In Grand Marais, in a small white building on the harbor, volunteers operated 24 hours a day to supplement the Pine Tree Line. They were the Ground Observer Corps, later called Operation Skywatch. The program also operated, but to a lesser degree, in Hovland and Grand Portage.

The Ground Observer Corps concept was created during WWI in England. During WWII, it was used in the U.S. where 1.5 million volunteers operated 14,000 posts, mostly on the coasts. The declining threat of German or Japanese planes led to the end of the GOC in 1944. In 1950, however, with a Russian threat and the Korean conflict, the concern was the inability of radar detecting low flying aircraft. In response, the Ground Observer Corp was re-established. The GOC became Operation Skywatch on July 14, 1952 and continued until January 31, 1959.

Skywatch in Grand Marais was staffed by volunteers starting May 17, 1952. Carl Bumgardner was head of the GOC under Mayor Val Dalbec, and was later succeeded by Lila Hall when she became the Operation Skywatch Manager. Grand Marais identification, "Quebec, Charlie, 3, 4, Black," was used at each two hour shift when the routine call-in was made to the 2nd ground Observation Squadron filter center on Lake Street in Minneapolis.



Young Wendy Thoreson in front of the Grand Marais observation building where her mother served as a volunteer

Skywatch depended upon its volunteers - most of whom served at the little white building next to the Standard Station in Grand Marais. But some, like Mildred Anderson of Maple Hill, simply watched for airplanes from their own home. By 1956 a total of 531 volunteers were being utilized including students, housewives, business men and political leaders. Their names appeared in the *Cook County News-Herald*. Volunteers who worked more than 100 hours received Skywatch merit pins at special ceremonies.

By 1956 both Hovland and Grand Portage also had observers. Hovland observers served from their homes for a half day period. Rather than call in, they relayed their information to Supervisor Alice Sundquist who then called the Minneapolis filter center. The second telephone to be used was that of Chief Spotter Harold Schuppel at the Forestry Office. Hovland had a watch tower in an old CCC garage building but it was not usable without telephone service.

Grand Portage's spotters were students at school under the supervision of their teachers Everett and Goldie Johnson. During school hours, 44 students were observers, day captains, and recorders. "This joint participation helps the children realize the need for Air Defense, proper organization, and team work," said Mr. Johnson.

The Skywatch program ended in Cook County on January 1, 1958.



Ground Observer Corps members receiving their Observer merit pins for serving a certain number of hours (minimum 50)

a nocturnal environment that is protected for its scientific, natural, or educational value, its cultural heritage and/or public enjoyment."

Ann Schwaller, BWCA program manager for the Superior National Forest, intent on helping to preserve the wilderness character and largely unspoiled night sky, spent several days over the past two years traveling into the wilderness during new moons, and measuring the darkness with a sky quality meter. Over several months during 2019 and 2020, Schwaller and others took different readings - a practice that will have to be performed annually in order to renew the certification.

In order to preserve its primitive character, the BWCAW area was set aside and later made part of the National Wilderness Preservation System in 1964, followed by BWCA Wilderness Act legislation in 1978. The BWCAW is a federally designated wilderness management area whose boundaries contain over 2,000 designated campsites, 1,200 miles of canoe routes, 12 hiking trails, and an astounding view of the night sky. A visitor distribution system manages visitor travel via mandatory entry quota and entry points. With the Sanctuary designation, the dark night skies will be considered another essential aspect of the Boundary Waters' wilderness quality and will help promote its long-term conservation.



*"We are excited to receive the Dark Skies Sanctuary designation for the BWCAW and are committed to preserving dark sky opportunities for future generations."
- Superior National Forest Supervisor Connie Cummins*

VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED!

Would you like to help collect, preserve, and share the history and art of Cook County?
We always have opportunities during the slower months at the History Museum and the JHP Art Gallery - whether greeting visitors, tackling a project, diving into research, or assisting with the collections - we would love to have you join us! We even have projects you can do at home...

For more detail on volunteer opportunities:

- Visit www.cookcountyhistory.org and click on the Join Us and Volunteer tabs
- Email us at history@boreal.org
- Call us at 218-387-2883 (Museum) or 218-387-2314 (JHP Art Gallery)

Canoe building
in Grand Portage
c 1939



FOR 97 YEARS, COOK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
HAS BEEN COLLECTING, PRESERVING, AND SHARING
OUR MATERIAL, CULTURAL, AND ARTISTIC HERITAGE.

As you consider the many worthy causes to donate to at the end of 2021, please keep in mind two very important historic sites where we are beginning restoration projects. The 1935 fishing tug the *Nee-Gee* will be restored next to the Bally metal workshop. An apprenticeship will guide the passing of decades of North Shore wooden boat building knowledge. Also, next spring we will be painting and shoring up the 1895 St. Francis Xavier Church at Chippewa City while we work towards securing funding to complete the necessary infrastructure work needed to preserve this historic structure and the story of the once vibrant Chippewa City community.

**BECOME A SUSTAINING MEMBER AND
HELP TO SUPPORT OUR MISSION!**

*By becoming a sustaining member, you are helping
to provide reliable support for our historic sites,
programming, and collections!*

Visit our website at
www.cookcountyhistory.org and
click on Membership!

Winter Hours

History Museum:
Thursdays - Saturdays 10 - 4 pm

JHP Art Gallery:
Monday, Thursday - Saturday 10-4
(closed Tuesdays & Wednesdays)
Sundays 1-4

DONATE

You can easily donate online at www.cookcountyhistory.org/donate

Please accept my tax deductible donation of \$ _____
to be put towards the general operating fund of the Cook County Historical Society
in order to support programs and services to the community.

Name: _____ Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Mail this form and your payment to: Cook County Historical Society, P.O. Box 1293, Grand Marais, MN 55604

To pay by phone please call 218-387-2883

MEMBERSHIP

Renewing or new memberships can be done online at www.cookcountyhistory.org/become-a-member

I would like to RENEW my membership Individual \$25 Family \$30 Friend \$50 Patron \$100

I would like to become a NEW MEMBER Business \$200 Advocate \$300 Lifetime \$1000

Please EMAIL my Overlook newsletter to me Please send my Overlook newsletter by MAIL

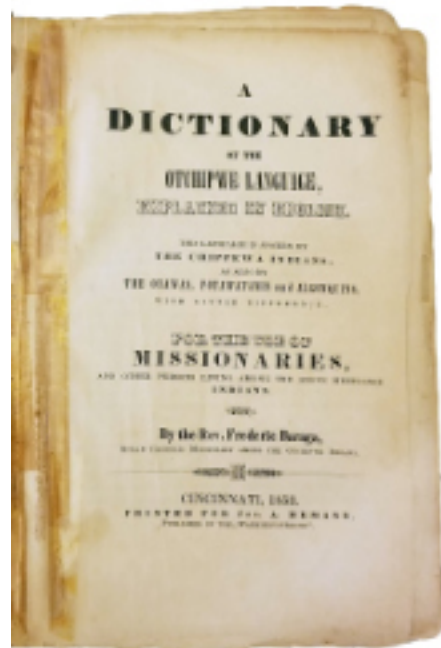
Name: _____ Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Mail this form and your payment to: Cook County Historical Society, P.O. Box 1293, Grand Marais, MN 55604

To pay by phone please call 218-387-2883

renew Collections



A Dictionary of the Otchibwe Language, explained in English. Written by Father Baraga and published in 1853. Belonged to Henry Mayhew and is dated 1867.



Circle Tour map
circa 1950s



Complete set of Lake Superior Magazine (originally Lake Superior Port Cities) from 1979 to the present - donated by Larry Sommer



COOK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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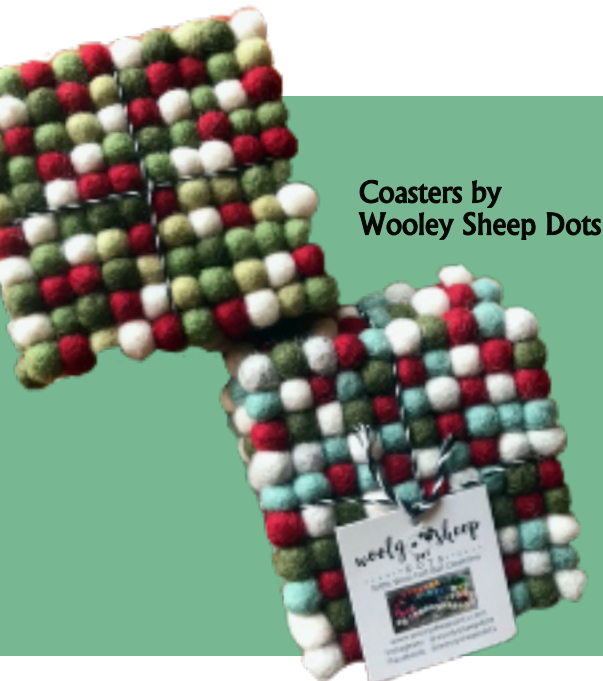
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 Grand Marais, MN
 Permit #19

A friendly reminder — your next membership payment is due by the date to the right of your name on the address label.

If you are a lifetime member — no payment is due, but please consider an additional donation!

Thank you!

Still have shopping to do?



Coasters by
 Wooley Sheep Dots



Knit Hats by
 Philis Anderson



Tomte Figure
 by Christine Erickson

Stop by our gift shops at the
 History Museum or the JHP Art Gallery -
 or visit us online at www.cookcountyhistory.org